

We Who Work the West: Class, Labor, and Space in Western American Literature, 1885-1992

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Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Department of English

***WE WHO WORK THE WEST:
CLASS, LABOR, AND SPACE IN WESTERN AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1885-1992***

a dissertation

By

KIARA LEIGH KHARPERTIAN

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ABSTRACT

Title: We Who Work the West: Class, Labor, and Space in Western American Literature, 1885-1992

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This dissertation studies representations of class, labor, and space in Western American literature from 1885-1992. I argue that class is a function of labor in space and that, by zooming in on literary accounts of individuals living out this equation, we can gain a more diverse, more pluralistic vision of a developing Western and more broadly American identity. Moreover, I argue that examining the effects of working practices, class limits and mobility, and spatial shifts on characters in Western literature unveils the crucial roles loss and uncertainty played in shaping the tone, metaphors, and episodes of Western American literature. With a foothold in the political and socioeconomic concerns of this project, I catalogue and close read the less tangible or measurable components of this literature to render individual lives legible against backgrounds of shared histories. Reading those common literary tropes alongside one another suggests that, ultimately, this shared history is an American one that draws from a number of historical moments and has deep roots and routes in the West itself.

Chapter One argues that Frank Norris' *McTeague* depicts class and socioeconomic identity as products of the kinds of labor that evolve in the ecological and social spaces of San Francisco at the turn of the 20th century. Chapter Two explores class dispossession, masked as ethnic dispossession, in Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* and argues that national affiliations that grant capital security hold more sway in late

19th century Chicano-Californio ranching society than do claims of cultural belonging. Chapter Three focuses on literature that grew out of the twinned national crises of the 1930s, the Depression and the Dust Bowl, and argues that Sanora Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown*, John Fante's *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *Ask the Dust*, and Frank Waters' *Below Grass Roots* each document the instability, vulnerability, frustration, and constriction that these watershed historical moments brought to individuals and families. Chapter Four close reads historical accounts of cowboy work alongside depictions of ranching work in Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*, Elmer Kelton's *The Time it Never Rained*, and Larry McMurtry's *Horseman, Pass By*. Finally, Chapter Five looks at a handful of American Indian novels that interrogate the role of labor, class, and space in post-indigenous reservation life in the American West. Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* is the central novel of this chapter, while Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and Stephen Graham Jones' *The Bird is Gone* provide supplementary texts.

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INTRODUCTION

I'm going to tell you two stories.

My father is a union man. But he's not a typical union man, he's an academic union man – a role which, as I found out during my time as a graduate student, was rare, if it existed at all. In 1985, PhD and energetic new baby in hand (there exists a photograph of him holding me on the day of his graduation), my father returned to his near-native Jersey City (North Bergen was home) and, along with a handful of other recent doctoral graduates, laid the foundation for Hudson County Community College, a school that aimed to bring education to one of the most politically corrupt, economically downtrodden, and socially disenfranchised cities in the state. What this return signified was that, despite an Ivy League undergraduate and a pedigreed PhD, he still belonged to the two family house at the end of 78th street my brother and I had visited every Sunday as we grew up. On the second floor of that house, his parents – his mother a legal secretary, his father a welder, neither in possession of a high school diploma, but both deeply committed to his education – raised him singlehandedly. My father grew up watching the world from a unique, multidimensional perspective shaped by working class northern Jersey, the city looming on the near horizon, through the quietly tumultuous 1950s and the loudly rebellious 1960s. He developed an insatiable respect for and pursuit of knowledge that guides him to this day.

In addition to designing curricula, departments, and administrative strategies, my father was union president for a significant chunk of my childhood.

I grew up learning that unions were good, and necessary – that they offered those who wielded them properly the protection of their *work*. I learned that my father's greatest challenges were often not the students who alternated class with jail, or had 3 children by age 18, or spent 60 hours a week making minimum wage to bring the rest of their family to a new home only slightly less dangerous than their old. His greatest challenge was often higher administration – those my father and his colleagues had to fight for a living wage (his starting salary in '85 was \$13,000), for reasonable class sizes to best teach their students, and for working schedules that left time for family. The union made those fights not only possible but also winnable. The union was our friend.

So you can imagine my shock when, as a second year Master's student at New York University, I received looks of bewildered disgust from my fellow students and professor when I suggested that the union step in as the undergraduates and adjuncts battled the administration for more fair wages. It was the first time I realized that academia was divided by a line of thin, deadly razor wire, even if I couldn't (and still can't) quite identify who stands on what side. And it was the first time I recognized that razor wire as part of the insidious, dangerous, and complicated class warfare that haunts the ivory tower. And suddenly, it struck me that growing up in a family balanced between working and middle class had given me a fairly unique perspective on how important class identity is in everyday life. And so, albeit slowly, this dissertation's focus began to emerge: how class is a function of labor in place, and how these three elements can

create unique individual identities that nonetheless find common ground in broader, shared communities.

The second story doesn't so easily predict or intersect with my academic interests. This second story, in fact, begins twice: once near midnight on March 26th, 2013, when my attending doctor in the ER told me that my cancer had returned and metastasized to my lymph nodes, bones, lungs, and liver, and in early October 2010, when I was first diagnosed stage iii. Back in 2010, I cried in panic. But the second time, in 2013, I felt nothing. The fear, anxiety, panic, depression, grief, irritation, agitation, and everything else would come later, and repeatedly, as treatments failed, as my case got more complicated, as my health and mobility shook and faltered. To this day, the mountain of medications I take cannot fully shield me from those feelings. They come and go no matter what I do.

In the midst of all that chaos, my interests in class, labor, and space took root in a part of America that has fascinated me ever since I stood, at age 15, on a campground in Ozona, Texas at night with my father and he gestured toward the expanse of stars and told me, "So this is what they call the big sky." Encircling me, that expanse reminds me of a time shortly after my first diagnosis, when I take my Minor Exam on mobility in contemporary Western American literature. Near the end of the exam, I stare at my hands. When I was a baby, I would wake my parents at 3, 4 in the morning to play with my fingers and toes. They tell me I would spend hours intertwining them, studying their movements and the patterns they could make on the walls. I realize that when I used to write poetry hands and toes

featured prominently: a sense of touch, an interaction with the world that stood on the gravity of its own existence, settled deep in my bones and refused to move. I imagine how things *feel* – I diagram space with my body, a biogramming that senses pressures, tangible and intangible, that intermingle just below our skin. Even now, the West is still tactile to me; through its literature I feel its weight and grain on my hands. I imagine that I'm texture mapping the regions I read through the imaginative landscapes these authors create, sketching a coarse terrain that will unveil the interwoven tapestry that tracks the way individual lives grappled with the consequences of place on labor patterns and class stratification. Literature can show me how these elements nestle in and create America through the West. A layered West, thick with the skin of history, unfolding through the pages of its literature. I step out of the room.

In four and a half minutes my examiners will pull me in to tell me I've completed the exam with distinction, but now the anticipation of that moment is displaced by my image in the glass of the double doors I stand beside. I run my hand over my head, slick in spots and rough in others. During my exam, I had forgotten I had no hair. I had imagined myself with bangs and a ponytail: summer; chin length and asymmetrical: before I shaved it in the face of an illness that suffocated me. Strands falling in front of my eyes. Words are enough to displace sickness. The West through its literature distracts in its rapid and unexpected representations of strange lands, strange maps, strange lives lived on those lands, in those maps. The West is a gift.

(I)

At the heart of this project are three interrelated intuitions: first, that the West is the seat of much of America's cultural identity; second, that Western iterations of class, labor, and space have *shaped* American identity in ways that respond to American Western history; and third, that Western American literature is the medium through which we can best track and analyze those shifting identities. What these three intuitions point to is the primary role history plays in our national literature. That is, interwoven depictions of bodies at labor, the political and economic contexts that class those bodies, and the classed spaces within which those bodies live all tell intimate, individual stories that then become metonymic for broader, national narratives. Class, labor, and space are particularly good touchstones for national identity because they are inescapable yet flexible; the degree to which one or the other exists in a text often reveals the larger, cultural pressures from which a community is suffering. Lack of labor means a lack of work, but where did this lack originate, and how does that loss affect how those who once did that work? Obsessions with capital gain often cover over weaknesses within other, more personal structures of our identities, but how does labor contribute to or interact with capital, and vice versa? Labor, class, and space may seem abstract concepts, but together they manipulate individuals' everyday lives. And literature manages to unveil other cultural and social imbalances that may be lurking within them.

Overall, I argue that class is a function of labor in a particular time and space; in other words, Western class identities and divisions grow out of certain forms of labor that arise on specific Western environmental, political, and socioeconomic landscapes, expressive of particular eras. Those identities were thus not merely Western, but also American – during the first wave of Anglo intrusion into the West (which I will discuss shortly), the West acted as a staging ground for the terms of a *sui generis* Americanism that would inform future notions of American culture and identity. And literature, I maintain, can best showcase these identities and the circumstances that carved them because it can simultaneously converse with, mimic, and disengage from that history. This mutable relationship lends literature the creative flexibility to imaginatively recreate and zoom in on individual lives, families, and communities that suffered the consequences of historical changes to labor, class, and space. In other words, Western American literature uniquely interrogates how the West's watershed historical moments affected *American* individuals, their senses of identity, their relationships to class and capital, to the spaces in which they lived, and to the work they did.

Broadly, this book navigates the space of the American West in times of massive political and historical change by way of the literary patterns of labor and class that emerge in those times. If the West has historically been a a stage for what William Cronon calls “flux [and] fixity” (23), then Western stories must be read against, rather than in support of, historical myths that homogenize Western American social history and lived experience. Literature that attends to the details

of labor — one of these practices — and the classes created by that labor in particular spaces resists the reductive narrative nostalgia that often accompanies one-dimensional stories of Manifest Destiny, industrial expansion, and land ownership. Closely reading these stories for the social, economic, cultural, and political eccentricities experienced by their characters best reveals how these historical contexts crafted American identities. Such an approach also uncovers the work behind the scenes of these major political maneuvers. Moreover, depictions of those doing that work and suffering its personal costs accentuate the anxieties common to more popular stories and so foreground the role of the individual in constructing broad habits of American culture. For example, what defenses did families and communities craft to bar the anxiety of getting food on the table during The Dust Bowl? Or what maneuvers did the San Francisco upper class take to protect themselves from outlandish fears of the city's encroaching lower working class in the Gilded Age, especially when these two classes intersected? By focusing on these and other actions of individuals in Western literary spaces, I uncover the crucial role of the West in defining American notions of nationalism, class, work, space, culture, and selfhood.

Mapping, thus, plays a crucial role in this study: along the way, I've constructed maps of the West that charted repeated literary episodes and metaphors that emerged in particular periods to develop my own theories about how to read historically coded space in literature. The biogramming I began at a younger age dovetailed with the concepts from Physics passed onto me by my

husband – gearboxes and superlattices, in particular, informed my theoretical approach to literature. As best I can represent them, gearboxes and superlattices are both scientific ways of combining materials to observe their effect on each other. Gearboxes test directional forces to produce a specified outcome – for example, grinding a sheet of aluminum or shaping a cog – while superlattices are layers of elements that, when tilted, reveal different conditions or charges to the overall structure of such materials. These rudimentary understandings helped me identify the different “elements” of my own literary study and integrate them with the larger, foundational aims of this project. For example, the different socioeconomic patterns and labor practices represented by a given text became gears that the central (often tilting) mechanism of space shifted and altered. And specific historical, national, political, and environmental landscapes became the layers of superlattices that, when oriented differently, or placed under other materials, unveiled a vast array of personal narratives. In all, these scientific concepts helped me grapple with the myriad nuanced, highly individual issues of a given novel. And because they could be imagined and rendered as physical objects, they reminded me of the mapping metaphors of my own theoretical interests. In other words, my conceptions of the novels in total became maps that guided me through the primary terms – class, labor, space, culture, nation, identity – that further articulated my historical argument.

This project is thus a close, extended examination of those terms at different points of American Western history with two primary goals. First, to

showcase the magnitude of the socioeconomic fixtures of class, labor, and space on personal and communal senses of being and second, to demonstrate how those senses of being contribute to a more diverse representation of moments crucial to American Western and more broadly American cultural development. And it is no coincidence that all of the novels I have chosen for this study represent those who did not “win the West,” as I talk about in my conclusion, but those who worked on the West, worked with its eccentricities of environment, legality, politics, and history, faltered, fell, failed – those who, in the end, didn’t do so well. I wonder, and this project is a testament to that wonder, if belonging does not always *belong* to the winners of history but can also belong to those who lost as well. Or who were lost. It then becomes our responsibility as scholars to find them. They, as this series of literary recollections reveal, had quite a hand in shaping contemporary constructs of Western and American identity.

Naturally, some will interpret me as saying that this history is more “authentically” Western. And Western literature, of course, has long been fascinated with the authenticity of experience. Yet in fact I mean to revise what we mean by “authenticity” itself. As William R Handley and Nathaniel Lewis remind us in *True West: Authenticity and the American West* (2004), in representations of the American West, and the deep and complex history of conquest in the West, what “authentic” means – its connections to truth, authority, and originality – often merely grants authenticity to some groups and not to others. Such an approach complicates not only spatial determinations of the West (is this part of the West?

what makes that region Western?) but what constitutes Western identity writ large. In regard to national belonging, I follow the lead of Handley and Lewis, who note that the authentic is, always, just out of reach: “approaching but never meeting the limit it nears” (7). Authenticity, thus, often serves to invest or divest certain kinds of political, national, cultural, socioeconomic, or ethnic power – it is, as Handley and Lewis suggest, a construct that reinforces its own power yet, in doing so, also reveals its own limits. Yet as I will try to show here, that does mean its power fades over time. My work is, on the contrary, an answer to the puzzle of “the authentic West” and its continuing persistence.

To start, I argue that claims of Western authenticity often revolve around claims of belonging. But belonging can be hard to claim and often comes up against arguments of ethnic ties to land, national sovereignty, legal status, and histories of genocide and extermination. In the past 15 years, Western literary and historical theory has worked especially hard to rescue the stories of those who may have lost, or may have been lost, and not in vain. Because of this work, a whole new West emerges – often a conquered West, and yet also a pluralistic West that can encompass the atrocities and scars of its past, the cultures and ethnicities that created the spaces of its present, and the new technological and inventive directions of its futures. Those future enterprises hold the most promise for remembering all pasts, actively, in ways that grant the endlessly broad array of communities and networks that compose the West a foothold in belonging. Advances in technology should be embraced to catalogue and cherish individual

stories, which contribute individual brushstrokes to broader portraits of Western experience. In this framework, the false barometer of authenticity seems trite – if history is just the description of a particular camera angle shot through a particular lens at a particular moment, then shouldn't we as scholars seek out as many photographs as we can collect? And if the photograph exists, or can be drawn out, or remembered, shouldn't we be excited about the new intrusion of color? No mosaic can ever be completed, but we can identify corners thus far left undisturbed that might reveal surprising results. Hence why I settled on class, labor, and space in American Western literature – it was a corner that hadn't been checked in a long time. And the grainy, embodied representations of work, family life, community, capital, individual, and place, when dusted off, had some pretty bright colors. These colors were neglected, but not inauthentic – they were just waiting to be found. Especially in *this* West, a region ravaged by the deep scars of repeated and lasting displacements, deterritorializations, and dispossessions, I ask, how does one find or claim belonging? My fierce belief is that belonging can become a force available to all of us, and such a force lies in the seat of literature.

(II)

The history behind this project demands some unpacking. By the mid 19th century, the North American West straddled a material and imaginative divide between, on the one hand, national and industrial expansion and, on the other, untamed and endless wilderness. In public policy, literature, and everyday practice, those inhabiting the West experienced and reflected what Cronon has aptly termed a frontier flexibly “shift[ing] from relative newness to relative oldness or from flux to fixity.” Even when Frederick Jackson Turner declared that frontier closed much earlier at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, he too remarked that “the frontier is the outer edge of the wave — the meeting point between savagery and civilization.” This tension, which Cronon, Turner, and others have argued, registers not only the national stakes that hinged on the so called “successful” development of the Western frontier, but also the impossibility of a clean transition from a misunderstood and misrepresented stage one to a vague and messy stage two. Though the West was hardly devoid of social and civic networks prior to the wave of Anglo exploration and settlement spearheaded by Lewis and Clark’s 1805 expedition, the terms “open” and “closed” were and still are in critical rotation to mark Western expansion. What, in part, this book intends to prove is that the structures of class, labor, and space that developed during the West’s post Anglo history disrupt the notion of an open versus a closed frontier. Indeed, the West reflected in the literature I read here is one that is always in the process of

opening its multiple, rhizomatic layers to adapt to new historical conditions and national climates.

But before I delve more into the specific sections of my project, I must acknowledge the strands of recent scholarly work that have shaped my own. Primarily, rising trends in Western American literary and historical studies, especially those in critical regionalism and New Western History, have firmly shaped this project. In addition, a number of case studies on capital, labor, and space mark the reading habits I now call my own. I draw heavily on the seminal work of Richard Slotkin; his contention to read the West as a formative space of American identity, composed of repeated Western episodes, formed the first backdrop of this project. Patricia Nelson Limerick's *Legacy of Conquest* (1987) also had a strong early influence on my thinking: in that work, she casts the West as historically a fluid zone of cultural contact and refutes earlier notions that the West was a static, empty space. Instead, Limerick argues that the West has always been an embattled ground where cultures, ethnicities, civilizations, traditions, and individuals met and fought to claim rights over land and sovereignty. Moreover, she insists that we must pay close attention to the stories of the conquered to weave a fuller narrative of Western identity and history. Other "New Western History" scholars, like Forrest Robinson, Donald Worster, Richard White, and William Cronon embark on similar historical projects that dissect the way empire and conquest shaped, and is still shaping, the West, while a significant cohort of historians turn to the future and how we can best rescue or remedy the broken

bits. *Remedies for a New West*, edited by Limerick, Andrew Cowell, and Sharon K Collinge (2009), best exemplifies this recent interest.

To supplement this historical background, I chose several case studies on class, labor, and space that helped me hone in on the particular terms and keywords that would be at the forefront of my theoretical discussion. Mark Seltzer's *Bodies and Machines* (1992) first introduced me to the idea of bodies as work complexes that challenge strict divisions between "modes of production and modes of reproduction" in biological and technological settings (3). Seltzer's literary study of the body-machine and "statistical persons" allowed me to question how literature represents these working bodies as classed objects with labor output and value. Moreover, Seltzer's readings made me curious about the class of literature as work. If bodies produced work, and if literature is work, then what opportunities for class identity, representation, and mobility did pulp or popular fiction offer? From this vantage, many of the novels for this project were selected, for their representation of a particular public or the interactions among publics in classed settings. Though traditional proletarian literature has never been my forte, Michael Denning's *Mechanic Accents* (1987) and Christopher Wilson's *White Collar Fictions* (1992) then pressed me to consider the implications of the classed identities of audiences and authors. Both Denning and Wilson take seriously popular and pulp literature, which encouraged me to do so as well and to also take seriously the real life counterparts of these publics, the work their bodies

produced, and how their class identities influenced their mobility, class and otherwise, in an ever-changing West.

Denning's and Wilson's interests in popular fiction and its class implications thus led me to Timothy Cresswell's *On the Move* (2006) and Erik Schocket's *Vanishing Moments* (2006). Cresswell's sociological text insists that we must study mobility because it is "everywhere....It plays a central role in discussions of the body and society. It courses through contemporary theorizations of the city. Culture, we are told, no longer sits in places, but is hybrid" (1). Moreover, mobility produces meaning in time and space on particular bodies and social contexts – its chaos is a binding force in our lives, Cresswell argues. A city highway, he notes, becomes a blood vessel to the city, yoking health and urban space through a shared lifeline of movement. That metaphor carries with it connotations of classed spaces and the individuals that inhabit them, as Schocket studies in his work, wherein he calls class "totalizing" but also "unstable," questioning both representations of class in American literature and the historically contingent contexts that created those representations. Ultimately, reading Cresswell and Schocket alongside one another focuses attention on the bodies that are classed themselves; that in turn encouraged me to consider how these bodies moving through space identified themselves through the labor of their movements. Here, Carlo Rotella's *Good with Their Hands* (2002) and Janet Zandy's *Hands* (2004), both cultural studies on the meaning of handwork to individuals and their larger communities, made personal and specific the value of

good work, especially in academic studies. As Rotella claims, being “good with your hands” is far more nuanced than it sounds; it carries with it degrees of “skill, character, way of life” that determine individual, familial, and communal well-being and pride (2). With that axiom in mind, I pay close attention to the individual bodies and hands doing work in my novels.

The scaffolding for my focus on working bodies and their classed movements was space, for which I must mention three texts that helped me understand the stakes of that relationship. Neil Smith’s *Uneven Development* (1984) gave me a firm grip on the intersection of Marxism and geographical development; his close focus on the lived consequences of capital distribution across geopolitical space threw the types of historical maneuvers I studied under a bright light that helped particularize the political and cultural ramifications of individuals and space in the West. At the same time, his global focus reminded me of the broader theoretical implications of this project: if I was talking about the West, I was probably also talking about the nation. Alongside Smith, Hsuan L Hsu’s *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth Century American Literature* (2010) and Tom Lutz’s *Cosmopolitan Vistas* (2004), both seminal texts on the value of regionalism in literature, anchored my study in distinct places at distinct times. In these two texts, not only did I find the seeds of a critical Western regionalism, but I also found the theoretical apparatus that clarified why space seemed so pivotal to all these other issues I was pursuing. Hsu not only discusses how different scales of literature create different notions of national, regional, and

subregional belongings, but also how scale has “attracted considerable attention” from a number of other fields – sociological, technological, economic, geopolitical – that ultimately enrich the literary study of space.

Finally, the seminal works of critical regionalism on the West galvanized my interest in space. Neil Campbell’s *The Rhizomatic West* (2008), Krista Comer’s *Landscapes of the New West* (1999), as well as Comer’s 2011 “Exceptionalism, Other Wests, Critical Regionalism” in *American Literary History* all argue convincingly that the literature of Western critical regionalism and its critical work disrupts totalizing narratives of the West and opens up discussions of more pluralistic rhizomes, or roots, that contributed to Western literary history. Comer especially focuses on Western literature’s indebtedness to modernism and postmodernism. By both borrowing from and subverting the postmodern in Western regional literatures, Comer displaces the notion of a Western or regionalist center – a disruption that dovetails with Campbell’s insistence that the West is a place of multiple possibilities, “at once gridded, rooted, and territorialized ... while simultaneously ungridded, routed, and deterritorializing, with a capacity for ‘lines of flight’ as well as mythic closure and stasis” (21). Reading these texts with Nathaniel Lewis’ *Unsettling the Literary West* (2003) and the essays of Susan Kollin’s excellent compilation, *Postwestern Cultures: Literature, Theory, Space* (2007), suggested that critical regionalism’s theoretical architexture offered a flexible yet grounded scaffolding for my inquiries.

(III)

As my first case study, Chapter One argues that Frank Norris' *McTeague* depicts class and socioeconomic identity as products of the kinds of labor that evolve in the specific Western ecological and social spaces of San Francisco at the turn of the 20th century. Inasmuch as *McTeague's* work responds to the Western environment while demanding particular forms of infrastructure therein, the novel's primary mechanism of the process of constructing space is labor. Thus, *McTeague's* work as a dentist and a miner determine both his class situation (as a producer and consumer) and his spatial mobility. Norris uses images of the human body, its physical work, and its socioeconomic mobility to populate — and thus create class in — the novel's San Francisco and Death Valley. Depictions of the (largely immigrant) body as grotesque and brutish coincide with discussions of labor and spatial movement, indicating a reciprocally deterministic relationship between what a body can do and where that body can go. Ultimately, Norris' metaphors about the human body and its [in]capabilities articulate the way class and labor mark the self and the novel's regions, especially in the context of the public discourses surrounding class and labor in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Chapter Two explores class dispossession, masked as ethnic dispossession, in Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* and argues that national affiliations that grant capital security hold more sway in late 19th century Chicano-Californio ranching society than do claims of cultural belonging. Overall,

the novel's political contradictions, which puzzle most critics, reveal the fragility of Spano-American legal identity when it comes in contact with the challenges posed by enterprising American squatters who enact exploitative land laws to unfairly claim land rights. The novel's recreations of the lived ramifications and politics of California land policies passed at this time manifests in personal losses to the novel's central ranching family's stability and working identity, which ultimately ushers in a broad (even overwrought) loss of culture. I pair this work with Raymond Barrio's *The Plum Plum Pickers*, which takes place in the same region about one hundred years later, to draw attention to the legacy of class politics and manual labor that continue to influence Chicano identity. Reading the two alongside one another allows me to craft an alternate approach to Chicano ethos that productively works with, rather than shies away from, national belonging.

Chapter Three focuses on literature that grew out of the twinned national crises of the 1930s: the Depression and the Dust Bowl. Particularly, I focus on literature that largely goes unnoticed because it adds in rich ways to the literary history of these events. I argue that Sanora Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown*, John Fante's *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *Ask the Dust*, and Frank Waters' *Below Grass Roots* each document the instability, vulnerability, frustration, and constriction that these watershed historical moments brought to individuals and families. All four novels focus on the highly damaging, individual costs of broader national disasters, a focus that offers important contrast to the national story of struggle that leads to perseverance that we generally associate with these crises. In

addition, I argue that these novels give careful attention to the stabilizing force of community under dire circumstances; those communities become the ties that bind when families routinely encounter and indeed mimic the lasting divisions of environmental and economic upheaval.

In Chapter Four, I take seriously a familiar Western icon – the cowboy – and put him under historical and narrative scrutiny. Close reading historical accounts of cowboy work alongside Cormac McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses*, Elmer Kelton’s *The Time it Never Rained* and Larry McMurtry’s *Horseman, Pass By*, this chapter argues that daily cowboy life rested not only on types of labor that defined cowboy identity, but also on class systems that dictated ranch life and a close, intimate attention to ecological patterns. Moreover, by zooming in on these grainy and nuanced details of cowboy life among the other identities I study, I hope to deny cowboys the legendary center that the mythos of the Wild West usually endows them. By contrast, I treat these cowboys as just another player on the Western front, which encourages a more careful look at figures that are usually reduced to cardboard cutouts. All three novels take place in the years after World War II and during the Long Texas Drought of the 1950s, which places in the background specific, historical events that brought massive industrialization to the novels’ regions. Ultimately, I argue that these cowboys’ ways of living and constructing their lives – under the rubrics of class, labor, and space – shifted drastically under the mechanization to the period and so these novels reflect a way of life that is both idealized and realized at once. That tension reveals a more subtle and

nuanced cowboy narrative that effaces typical melodramatic narratives of cowboys winning the West, riding off into the sunset.

Finally, I end with a close look at a handful of American Indian novels that interrogate the role of labor, class, and space in post-indigenous reservation life in the American West. Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* is the central novel of this chapter, while D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkin's *Life Among the Piutes*, Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and Stephen Graham Jones' *The Bird is Gone* provide supplementary texts. Overall, I use these novels to take to task the interrelated narrative techniques of Gerald Vizenor's "survivance" and Chadwick Allen's the "blood/land/memory complex." Through these novels' reflections on traditional culture and modernization in American Indian life, I interrogate what constitutes maneuvers can enact a remembrance of the horrors of the past without barring productive engagement with and participation in the future. Ultimately, I argue that tradition and modernization must exist alongside one another for American Indian culture to thrive; otherwise, modernization becomes harmful – especially legally and socioeconomically – and tradition becomes too static to leave room for effective new labor strategies and land rights. This last chapter also allows me to ruminate on the way stories of failure in the American West – all of which these novels include – help cobble together a more pluralistic West that enriches our common American history.

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CHAPTER ONE

NATURALISM'S HANDIWORK: LABOR, CLASS, AND SPACE IN *McTEAGUE: A STORY OF SAN FRANCISCO*

1. A STORY OF SAN FRANCISCO

When Frank Norris published his 1899 novel *McTeague*, he didn't name the text *McTeague: A Story of a Dentist* or *McTeague: A Story of a Brute*—two titles that would have described the novel perfectly—but instead titled it *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*. What does it mean to identify a novel, largely about a man of Irish heritage and his descent into destitution, by the American city in which it takes place? If, as the title suggests, *McTeague* is a gateway to a broader portrait of the city, then what story is Norris telling about San Francisco? An early insight comes in the first pages of the novel, when Norris draws on spatial politics to sketch class in the city:¹

Polk Street rubbed elbows with the “avenue” one block above. There were certain limits which its dwellers could not overstep; but unfortunately for them, these limits were poorly defined. They could never be sure of themselves. At an unguarded moment they might be taken for “toughs,” so they generally erred in the other direction, and were absurdly formal. No people have a keener eye for the amenities than those whose social position is not assured. (55)

¹ For a discussion of the novel's historical context, see Lundy.

This moment calls attention to Norris's social construction of *McTeague's* spaces. As many Western literary critics have argued, and as Neil Campbell articulates, "One cannot think of the West as rural or urban space without visualizing the powerful checkerboard symmetries of the meshlike grid as it arrests and orders space" (9).² Here, Campbell refers to the repeated pattern of intersecting perpendicular streets—a horizontal grid—common in Western cities, including San Francisco and *McTeague's* neighborhood. The novel's grid is not just spatial, however; Polk Street's "limits [that] were poorly defined" are also social boundaries that reflect flows of capital, inhabitation, and mobility, creating a vertical socioeconomic grid intertwined with the horizontal urban grid. Specifically, in Norris's tableau, how characters interact, work, and move create a landscape that registers class in geographic terms; not only did Polk Street "rub elbows" with a nearby upper class avenue, but its dwellers recognized this class difference and so acted "absurdly formal." Thus, Norris's geosocial casting frames—materially and imaginatively—how bodies' movements and labors mark both identities and the grid they come to occupy. Mapping the novel's working bodies thus unveils a reciprocal relationship between what a body can do and where that body can go. In a broader sense, the social interactions dramatized in these moments indicate what social lines people can and cannot cross. However, because class in the novel is not just money and nice things, but rather a fairly fixed composition of working identity, inhabitation, and habit, attempts at class mobility are temporary and an

² See Comer, Kollin, and Campbell for more detailed discussions of "the gridded West."

illusion. In *McTeague*, this superficial class crossing amounts to class transgression, which is ultimately punished by spatial and social exile. Class therefore becomes an inflexible function of embodied, historically contingent labor in specific space, and Norris's story is about that equation in Gilded Age San Francisco.

McTeague's portraits of San Francisco and the Death Valley region are thus socially constructed landscapes defined, in part, by images of the human body, its physical work, and its socioeconomic [im]mobility. Because *McTeague's* historical lens depicts labor as culturally *and* environmentally influenced, space becomes the horizontal platform for the novel's profile of nineteenth-century vertical class stratification. Specifically, Norris's representations of classed spaces and labor done by hand enter into a dialogue whereby work creates class and space becomes the ever changing stage on which both are performed. Ultimately, *McTeague's* representations of physical labor and spatial class calcify each other, unveiling that the novel's class mobility is a falsehood: though McTeague can play at middle class domesticity for a while, his origin as a working class miner is inescapable. The consequences of indulging this illusion are the exiles and murders that crowd the second half of the novel; when lower class characters aspire to upper class wealth, they lose personal, socioeconomic, and spatial security and violence ensues.

Of late, critical responses to Norris's work have reflected the ongoing reimagining of American literary naturalism. Rather than viewing naturalism as an extension of realism, it is being sounded for its antecedents in romantic, gothic,

and sentimental literatures, an early perspective of both Norris and critics from the 1950s. It is thus unsurprising that two prominent books on Norris and naturalism in roughly the last ten years cite Norris's essay "Zola as a Romantic Writer" in their titles: Eric Carl Link's *The Vast and Terrible Drama* (2004) and editor Mary Papke's collection *Twisted from the Ordinary* (2003). The impulse here has not been simply to recuperate naturalism's literary history, but also to isolate what Papke identifies as the idiom's "journey into the liminal, the transgressive, the pornographically violent, and the morally bankrupt" (Preface xi). Yoked to Norris's thesis that, in naturalism, "Everything is extraordinary, imaginative, grotesque even, with a vague note of terror quivering throughout it" ("Zola" 274), these critical frames point to the novel's treatment of the fear of decay and collapse that lurked behind the social, economic, and spatial conditions of the Gilded Age.³

Thus, this article extends these conversations about transgression in naturalism via representations of class and labor in *McTeague* to argue that the novel portrays the Gilded Age as a "great, terrible drama[]" that occurs "among the lower—almost the lowest—classes; those who have been thrust or wrenched from the ranks, who are falling by the roadway" (Norris, "Zola" 274). In *McTeague*, Norris stages the dangers posed by those who are stripped of labor and class identity and are thereby reduced to social unpredictability, economic depravity,

³ The Gilded Age offered great technological advance coupled with upward social mobility in an expanding American landscape. However, the potential that these opportunities could extend to the lower classes brought with it the anxiety that the lower classes would then bring destitution on their climb up the social ladder. June Howard's discussion of proletarianization is helpful here: she argues that one common fear was that the criminally inclined lower classes would rebel and cause chaos to the bourgeoisie.

and fatal violence. McTeague's socioeconomic and personal failure thus reflects the fear behind this drama: that the era's socioeconomic success was not only unsustainable but would also collapse American culture when it failed.

II. A STORY OF A SKILLED HAND

As bodies in *McTeague* do various kinds of work, they are granted certain kinds of social mobility while being denied others. McTeague's apprenticeship with the "charlatan" dentist from the mining camp coupled with his inheritance from his mother, for instance, provides the launching pad necessary to "set him up in business . . . cut loose from the charlatan and . . . [open] his 'Dental Parlors' on Polk Street" (6). Yet his move out of the mining camp and into the city is a one-dimensional class mobility, evident in his social identity: "Polk Street called him the 'Doctor' *and* spoke of his enormous strength" (6; my emphasis). Here, the novel's collapse of nature and culture, the signature naturalist mode, determines how bodies are situated on the social map. McTeague possesses some social and financial strength, but he is also identified by a physical strength that enables him to "Often . . . [dispense] with forceps and [extract] a refractory tooth with his thumb and forefinger" (6). Being a dentist might mean that McTeague has knowledge of dentistry, but his occupation also means that he has the brute force necessary for rudimentary, physical dental work.

And though that strength enables his work, it is also predictably paired with an inability to understand the period's broader political and socioeconomic labor

issues. For instance, when Marcus Schouler raises “the labor question” and gives voice to a host of labor-related buzzwords, McTeague can neither parse through nor contextualize the conversation: “These rolled off [Marcus’s] tongue with incredible emphasis, appearing at every turn of his conversation—‘Outraged constituencies,’ ‘cause of labor,’ ‘wage earners,’ ‘opinions biased by personal interests,’ ‘eyes blinded by party prejudice.’ McTeague listened to him, awe-struck” (12).⁴ Here and elsewhere, McTeague’s ignorance (and Marcus’s as well) of “the labor question” bars a more nuanced treatment of late nineteenth-century labor politics, which ironically suggests that McTeague is the dumb brute that naturalist critics reads him as. On the other hand, however, his ignorance allows for a focus on the individual working body, which zeros in on the process of using a body’s physical labor as a vehicle for class mobility.

Hands in *McTeague* are figured as the body’s primary means of work and thus *good* hands are the first step to social mobility. Not only does McTeague rely on his hands and their handiwork to be a successful dentist, but Trina’s hands are her physical tools as well when she carves wooden animals. This link, between hands and the objects they produce, resonates with what Mark Seltzer calls the “radical and intimate *coupling* of bodies and machines” in literary naturalism (13). In *McTeague*, what hands can produce determines a person’s social and economic worth, thereby weaving together biological and material production. As a result,

⁴ The labor question, as Burke argues, “included the issues of strikes and labor radicalism, the social effects of economic development and depression, and the growth of an apparently permanent laboring or working class” in the latter half of the nineteenth-century (133). Norris was undoubtedly aware of this conversation.

physical labor becomes yoked to a kind of dynamic, socioeconomic traction in the novel. When both Trina and McTeague lose their ability to do dexterous handiwork—carving animals and working in dentistry—they are forced to undertake less skilled, grotesquely coded labor that traps them socioeconomically and spatially. Norris writes that Trina “became a scrub-woman”—cleaning up after the mess of others, specifically the children of the bourgeoisie—when she discovers that “One can hold a scrubbing brush with two good fingers and the stumps of two others even if both joints of the thumb are gone.” She subsequently moves into the kindergarten she cleans, “lost in the lowest eddies of the great city’s tide” (193). And McTeague becomes a piano handler and store watchman, regularly fighting with his coworkers and living behind the music store in “a box of a place that reeked with odors of stale tobacco smoke” (201). These portraits collapse the space of labor and the space of living, each reciprocally marred by the undercurrents of filth and social depravity of the other.

It’s thus easy to see that, in many ways, McTeague is naturalism’s dumb brute. Donald Pizer calls “the source of [the novel’s] violence beneath the surface placidity of life the presence in all men of animal qualities which have played a major role in man’s evolutionary development but which are now frequently atavistic and destructive” (“Late Nineteenth” 14). Here, eugenics and Social Darwinism become explanatory literary mechanisms that neatly file McTeague’s behavior as unavoidable and outdated evolutionary brutality. However, this emphasis on determinism ironically divorces the novel’s bodies from their

physicality. By identifying an inner animalistic instinct as the source of behavior, this criticism renders bodies in *McTeague* passive recipients of their fates, distracting from the work they do to make those fates. A tighter focus on the novel's treatment of labor calls that line of thinking into question. What happens when we read *McTeague* through his work as a dentist and a miner alongside his behavior?

Traditionally, that is, we tend to argue that *McTeague* cannot curb his physical impulses, for instance, when he “kissed [Trina], grossly, full on the mouth” after rendering her unconscious to work on her dead tooth. However, in the moment immediately following, *McTeague* “threw himself once more into his work with desperate energy. By the time he was fastening the sheet of rubber upon the tooth, he had himself once more in hand” (22). Here, *McTeague*'s labor as a dentist diverts his degenerate, sexual impulses. His shift in focus not only engages his mind in a new task, but it also minimizes the scope of his actions and recruits his hands to do his work, rather than his body to indulge his desire. And, consequently, his work displaces his body's grotesque “labor” of assault. Such a move challenges the all encompassing, uncontrollable force that brings the brute to the surface and invites a more nuanced reading of the novel's laboring bodies and the identities they form.

And then there's that tricky phrase, “he had himself once more in hand.” Inasmuch as *McTeague* uses his work to get himself “in hand,” he redefines the nature of his labor. His dentistry, especially when compared to his earlier brutish

burst of energy, is a kind of refined labor that demands physical delicacy—a quality the novel associates with focus, precision, and control, rather than savagery and force.⁵ Here, McTeague’s work helps him focus—get himself “in hand”—on something other than his desire, undermining his brutishness. Read in this context, Norris’s attention to McTeague’s dental work reveals handiwork as a miniature, highly agile form of focused labor:

He told himself that he should have to use the “mats” in the filling. He made some dozen of these “mats” from his tape of non-cohesive gold, cutting it transversely into small pieces that could be inserted edgewise between the teeth and consolidated by packing. . . . He worked slowly, mechanically, turning the foil between his fingers with the manual dexterity that one sometimes sees in stupid persons. His head was quite empty of all thought, and he did not whistle over his work as another man might have done. (14)

Crucial to this passage is the way McTeague works “slowly [and] mechanically” with “manual dexterity.” Like Seltzer’s mechanical bodies, McTeague embodies the “double discourse of the natural and the technological that, in short, makes up the American body-machine complex” (Seltzer 4). In *McTeague*, that complex evokes the precision of machinery and inscribes McTeague’s hands as the

⁵ This association comes to light in another moment and accentuates McTeague’s focus on his work. When McTeague, Trina, and her family attend the Orpheum, McTeague watches the acrobats with admiration; they “left him breathless. They were dazzling young men . . . continually making graceful gestures to the audience” (60). Here, the acrobats embody an agility McTeague admires because it both opposes his inner brutality and mimics the adroitness he needs for dentistry.

mechanism of that machine. Specifically, his fingers command his body's energy and so identify him as a dentist rather than as a brute. His mechanical precision also nurtures a productive career that McTeague's animalistic traits do not. If, as Seltzer suggests, "the hand" can also be synecdochic for production, then focusing on McTeague's hands as functional tools further complicates the reader's conception of McTeague as a one-dimensional monster or machine. As Carlo Rotella puts it, the work one does with one's hands carries surprising force: "Being good with your hands is a deceptively unsimple virtue. It involves technical skill and finesse, craft mated with strength—in handling tools or machinery or raw materials or bodies in motion, in making or fixing or disassembling things, in labor or art or self-defense—but it implies much more" (2). McTeague is, to borrow Rotella's words, "good with his hands": he is a productive worker who makes his own tools; he has a regular "clientele of butcher boys, shop girls, drug clerks, and car conductors"; and his business is "fairly good" (Norris 6, 77). And he is physically capable of the minuscule dexterity dentistry requires—labor that is multidimensional on an impressively small scale. His hands thus produce his successful career.

At the same time, however, the mechanics of McTeague's work are devoid of affect. He works as "stupid persons" do and does not whistle, "as another man might have" (14). Here, Norris dehumanizes McTeague's labor, suggesting that his efforts are robotic and thus replaceable. His hands, like the working-class hands at the center of Janet Zandy's *Hands: Physical Labor, Class, and Cultural Work*, come

to stand as a synecdotal machine for the human who wields them. In this light, the work of McTeague's hands is so "learned" as to have become instinctual. Labor in the novel is thus a double-edged sword: it requires skill, but it also reduces the identity of those who labor to the work itself. Identity is thus a fragile dialogue that hinges on labor: how a body works determines how that body is classified. Again, we are reminded of McTeague's momentary sexual impass with Trina. Whether we call him a brute or a dentist, his manual labor recalls his biological instinct. Handiwork requires a talent that is non-evolutionary; to be "good with his hands" is not, in Norris's world, to be good enough. Pitting the dexterity of labor and excessive, blunt force against one another, Norris thus uses McTeague's slippage between these two abilities to showcase the instability of class identity and how it relies on the body.

When Trina reads the letter that forces McTeague's retirement from dentistry because he lacks credentials, McTeague's reaction demonstrates the consequences of the body losing its labor. Initially, McTeague cannot even comprehend Trina's basic questions about his educational background, responding to her repeated query, "*didn't* you ever go to a dental college" with a repeated "Huh? What? What?" (145, 149). Here, Norris indicates that McTeague's skilled, bodily labor is useless without formal education and documentation, both unavailable to him in a lower class mining town and on the road as a dental apprentice. Norris anticipates this problem when describing McTeague's early dentistry: "He had learnt it after a fashion, mostly by watching the charlatan operate. He had read many of the

necessary books, but he was too hopelessly stupid to get much benefit from them” (6). When forced to stop his labor by threat of imprisonment, McTeague “tidied [his Dental Parlors] with the greatest care” and “sat in his operating chair, looking stupidly out of the windows, across the roofs opposite, with an unseeing gaze, his red hands lying idly in his lap” (150). After his final task as a dentist—cleaning his instruments—McTeague is little more than a propped up body. Immediately following, the McTeagues rent their new home, “a tiny room at the back of the flat and on its very top floor.” Trina explains, “We’ve looked Polk Street over and this is the only thing we can afford” (151). Without labor, McTeague loses his purpose; without a purpose, he has no way to turn his skills into a career—as Trina one snaps day when she grows tired of his prolonged unemployment: “Do you know what I’m doing, McTeague? I’m supporting you” (152). Without a career, the McTeagues must move to poorer quarters and McTeague loses his individuality and stability.

Norris fleshes out this manual and financial failure with McTeague’s first post-dental job, which capitalizes on both his ability to work with his hands and his familiarity with dental tools: “he had by the greatest luck secured a position with a manufacturer of surgical instruments, where his manual dexterity in the making of excavators, pluggers, and other dental contrivances stood him in fairly good stead” (159). Here, McTeague’s “manual dexterity” becomes a marketable skill: his capacity for basic implement engineering is more important than his knowledge of dentistry, which has become irrelevant. As his labor becomes less

precise, his body loses precision as well; while at his new job, he also “slipped back into the old habits . . . spent the afternoon lying full length upon the bed, crop-full, stupid, warm, smoking his huge pipe, drinking his steam beer, and playing his six mournful tunes upon his concertina, dozing off to sleep toward four o’clock” (159). The essence of his work also has changed. He no longer uses the objects he builds but produces them for the use of others, further widening the novel’s gap between those who produce and those who consume.⁶ Here, McTeague’s lower class identity is the composite of his body’s labor, his daily habits, and his inhabitation—and all descend into grotesque excess together.

Thus moored in the realm of production without consumption, McTeague experiences a decline in both personal and professional value. Sara Quay similarly argues that McTeague’s and Trina’s Marxian alienation from their identities manifests in the repetition with which Norris describes their manual work. However, while Quay focuses on the way this sameness reflects a kind of Americanizing that immigrants faced during late nineteenth-century American imperialism, the quality of their labors also indicates the loss of stable class identity. As McTeague’s work becomes more reproducible, the breakdown of his domestic life mirrors his socioeconomic decline. In this context, these declines

⁶ Both Marx in *Capital* and Montgomery investigate this divide and its repercussions for worker identity. Such a divide manifests in McTeague’s golden tooth, a material object that becomes an albatross of failed consumerism. Because McTeague makes a permanent transition from consumer to producer, the relics of his more affluent lifestyle become useless objects that he covets as echoes of socioeconomic success. If, also, as David McGlynn has noted, McTeague’s class imprisonment is due to his simultaneous desire for material objects and fear of the loss of those objects, then the golden tooth and his obsession with it register the axis of production and consumption and the impossibility of one person participating in both.

both cause and reflect McTeague's distance from his self-worth, Trina, and his social identity as a dentist. These losses reduce him to what Marx calls "the condition of a machine," which creates a devastating dependence on labor for both capital and identity (24). And indeed, as the McTeagues "sink rapidly lower and lower," they rely more and more on the meager sums of money their increasingly dehumanized, hand oriented labors can bring them, a reliance which drives both to decay (184).

It is unsurprising, then, that as the narrative progresses, Norris disparages much of the novel's handiwork and portrays McTeague's labor as increasingly simplistic. When McTeague abandons his dental practice and returns to mining, he finds it easy to meet the qualifications. Now, he only has to answer a couple of simple questions to get a job—"Know how to hendle pick'n shov'le?" and "How long sence you mine?"—and "Show [his] hends" (211). Again, McTeague's hands become his primary source of employment. But this labor is lower class, manual labor: dirty, physically challenging, dangerous, and undesirable. In a bit of sardonic humor Norris has him reflect,

Once it even occurred to him that there was a resemblance between his present work and the profession he had been forced to abandon. In the Burly drill he saw a queer counterpart of his old-time dental engine; and what were drills and chucks but enormous hoe excavators, hard bits, and burrs? It was the same work he had so

often performed in his “Parlors,” only magnified, made monstrous, distorted, and grotesqued, the caricature of dentistry. (213)

If dentistry is here compared to mining—an immense yet incomplete imitation of dentistry—then this grotesque caricature satirizes McTeague’s identity as a dentist and calls attention to the loss of identity that he suffered in losing his profession. At the same time, this moment shines a more negative light on dentistry. Now chained to mining’s hand-oriented labor, McTeague’s dental skill looks to be little more than a chance outgrowth of his working class, manual mining. Early in the novel, mining was cast as a lower class vocation when McTeague remembers its toll on his family: McTeague himself worked “trundling the heavy cars of ore in and out of the tunnel. . . . For thirteen days of each fortnight his father was a steady, hard-working shift-boss of the mine. Every other Sunday he became an irresponsible animal, a beast, a brute, crazy with alcohol . . . his mother, too, who, with the help of the Chinaman, cooked for forty miners. She was an overworked drudge” (5). The family lives and works with the mining company and all are overworked, in both time and effort. McTeague’s return to mining subverts his past class status and suggests that his dentistry only borrowed—unsuccessfully—from the social rank of those he serviced. He can fix the teeth of the middle class, but never again can he cross into the bourgeoisie.

Consequently, McTeague’s labors mark him with both dexterity and brutality, hovering between the lower and middle classes—though, as his social regression into grotesque behavior, spaces, and labor demonstrates, Norris unveils

him as truly a member of the lower working class. Trina's handiwork also tethers her to class immobility. She whittles, by hand, Noah's Ark figurines for the children of the upper class in a rhetoric that resonates with the language of McTeague's dental and mining work. Like McTeague's dentistry, Trina's whittling not only spotlights her hands as a source of productive labor but also amplifies the small scope of her work. When Trina "turned the little figures in her fingers with a wonderful lightness and deftness," Norris treats the precision of her work as an accomplishment itself, lending her whittling an air of successful professionalization (160). But when that whittling becomes impossible because McTeague's biting of her fingers and her "non-poisonous paint" cause blood poisoning, Trina is told by the doctor that she must "have those fingers amputated, beyond a doubt, or lose the entire hand"—a fate which makes her cry, "And my work!" (193). And lose her work she does, simultaneously losing her identity as a producer of her own goods. Her next job as "a scrub woman" for a kindergarten thus resembles McTeague's slip from dentist to piano mover. Now, Trina can only clean up the excess waste of the consuming class with what remains of her hands—"two good fingers and the stumps of two others"—and move to a street "Like Polk Street . . . but running through a much poorer and more sordid quarter." Like McTeague living in room behind the piano shop, Trina's "home" complements her disfigured right hand and new work although it is much worse—financially, physically, and spatially—than it used to be. Her final transformation

thus reinforces the novel's common denigration of manual labor and its class fixity.⁷

Stepping back from a close reading of Trina's handiwork and its results surveys the broader late nineteenth-century discourse surrounding the consequences of physical labor. Marcus's shallow awareness of those contemporary labor politics stands in stark contrast to McTeague's total ignorance; at the same time, their conversations contextualize the novel in a broader social history, which was concerned with the effect of work on the self. However, while this discourse held sway in Gilded Age labor culture, Marcus's repetition of it is empty and thus merely a reaction to a political landscape he senses but does not understand. His "fearful political and social discussions . . . carried on, as was his custom, at the top of his voice, gesticulating fiercely, banging the table with his fist . . . exciting himself with his own clamor" and he "continually [made] use of the stock phrases of the professional politician . . . 'Outraged constituencies,' 'cause of labor,' 'wage-earners,' 'opinions biased by personal interest,' 'eyes blinded by party prejudice'" (81). But these words amount to isolated, unclear phrases—they are "clamor" and "noise." Marcus's interjections, composed of meaningless vocabulary and empty gesticulations, thus build a rhetoric to which neither McTeague nor, by association, the reader has access. Labor politics are thus represented as just words. And Marcus's fierce gesticulations and bangs on the table contrast with

⁷ Common, but not constant: Old Grannis and his binding machine represent profitable, enjoyable labor that does not degrade him—though whether or not that work qualifies as manual is open for debate. Nonetheless, Old Grannis gives up his work: without the machine between them, he must speak to Miss Baker when she enters. Selling the machine also gives the Old Folks their first topic of conversation, which eases them into each other's company (180).

McTeague's work with his hands and so draw attention to the fact that McTeague's handiwork is actually productive. Simultaneously, however, this breach between embodied labor and its ideology registers a larger loss in the novel: the exchange of class consciousness for a poorly defined façade of labor identity.

Inasmuch as Marcus' dialogue is thus politically ambiguous, it supports Martin Burke's analysis that the omnipresence of the labor question in this era paradoxically generated a poorly defined vocabulary about changing labor and class patterns (135). That vocabulary, which superficially dovetailed with yet in truth obscured a rising working class consciousness, in turn paved the way for a "conceptual confusion" (135) about the specific roles workers were to play in larger political arenas. Rather than encouraging a collaborative labor project, what Burke identifies as the "misapplication of language" (135) of social scientists and intellectuals—like Marcus's empty rhetoric, picked up from "the professional politician" (135)—alienated workers from both one another and their labor, as Marcus's words alienate McTeague. McTeague here thus suffers a double ignorance: an unawareness of broader politics germane to the labor movement and an unawareness of his own labor's connection to these politics. This ignorance comes to light especially when he loses his dental license: McTeague possesses neither diploma nor knowledge of what one is and in his confusion can only ask Trina, repeatedly, "Ain't I a dentist?" (146-47). Yoked together, McTeague's twinned ignorances foreshadow his inability to truly cross the class line from producer to consumer. Moreover, without insight into the politics of class and

labor, McTeague suffers the consequences of work disconnected from broader social spheres. Those consequences—loss of capital, social order, and financial security—are mapped onto McTeague’s working body. The grotesque details of his loss of a working identity and subsequent descent into poverty thus communicate a deeper fear of the Gilded Age’s aristocrats: as Norris puts it in his “A Plea for Romantic Fiction,” they feared the contagious decay of the underclass, “the rags and wretchedness, the drift and despair” (279).

III. A STORY OF THE CLASS GRID

Yet McTeague avoids that “drift and despair” for a short time, when he is first married to Trina and her class aspirations superficially elevate their lifestyle. Prior, his own class aspirations are like his labor: uninformed and limited. He doesn’t long to be a part of the bourgeoisie, and “But for one thing [was] perfectly contented” to be a member of the working class: “It was his ambition, his dream, to have projecting from that corner window a huge gilded tooth, a molar with enormous prongs, gorgeous and attractive” (7). Here, the tooth does not represent a higher class status but rather a prize to exhibit. Instead of using money to achieve class mobility, as Trina does when she wins the \$5000 and begins buying fashionable décor for the house, McTeague only wants money for the tooth: “Trina and the five thousand dollars could not make him forget this one unsatisfied longing” (77). Even his jealousy of the affluent Other Dentist—“that poser, that rider of bicycles, that courser of greyhounds”—is satiated when Trina does

purchase the tooth: “No doubt [the Other Dentist] would suffer veritable convulsions of envy; would be positively sick with jealousy” (86). Here, McTeague doesn't want class status to one-up the Other Dentist; he merely wants a shiny toy to make him envious. Moreover, the prospect of saving and investing their fortune strikes McTeague as odd:

The old-time miner's idea of wealth easily gained and quickly spent persisted in his mind. But when Trina begun to talk of investments and interests and per cents, he was troubled and not a little disappointed. The lump sum of five thousand dollars was one thing, a miserable little twenty or twenty-five a month was quite another, and then someone else had the money. (77)

Linking his “ambition” to spend the money “in some lavish fashion” to the “old-time miner's idea of wealth” does not indicate middle class aspirations. Instead, McTeague longs to act as lower class miners did on payday—consume quickly and save nothing.

But Trina also misuses her money (or, as Walter Benn Michaels has explored, she doesn't use it as money but hoards it as an object [140-154]): she uses “their tidy little income” to flirt with middle class spending habits and ostensibly position the McTeagues in that class (Norris 77). She buys “Just things and things . . . some dotted veiling . . . and a box of writing paper, and a roll of crepe paper to make a lamp shade for the front parlor; and . . . a pair of Nottingham lace curtains”; later, they adorn their house with another array of domestic niceties that mark their

“charming” class status (90-91). Here enchanted by the excitement of materialism, Trina participates in what Thorstein Veblen, in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, calls “conspicuous consumption”: a self-aware purchasing of material goods to display social rank. However, because this consumption is merely a material gesture toward the middle class, the McTeagues quickly return to the lower class when they lose financial stability. In other words, Trina only purchases things, literally objectifying her class aspirations—aspirations that vanish when McTeague’s labor vanishes and takes their income along with it.

The spending and saving habits of *McTeague*’s characters, both in and out of work, unveils another fear of the Gilded Age: that the period’s industrious progress is, in large part, motivated by a stubborn desire for individual capital and the belief that that capital gives life meaning. Trina, McTeague, and Marcus all suffer from this delusion and, as Don Graham has pointed out in “Art in *McTeague*,” come to their ends because their desire for money overwhelms their sense of humanity. Trina and McTeague especially succumb to the poison of capital when the labor that furnishes it is taken away. Minor characters, like Old Grannis and Uncle Oelbermann, who find financial success but do not let greed drive them to grotesque actions, nonetheless suffer similar losses. Old Grannis sells his binding machine and receives only a check: “It was large enough, to be sure, but when all was over, he returned to his room and sat there sad and unoccupied” (178). Until he realizes his love for Miss Baker, Old Grannis out of work is like McTeague out of work: without identity, without motivation, without purpose.

And Uncle Oelbermann is more bank than human, acting with a “machine like regularity” in his financial dealings and without “much to say”—as Marcus observes, he “never opens his face” (97). When he does speak, it is about money, except for his parting cliché at the wedding—“You have not lost a daughter, but have gained a son”—a statement that proves to be disastrously out of touch (100). Thus, when identity relies on money, as many identities in the novel do, it is a class-based façade woven from an unending yet unfulfilling quest for capital.

Polk Street, the site of McTeague’s Dental Parlors, also reflects the economic status of its inhabitants: it is “one of those cross streets peculiar to Western cities, situated in the heart of the residence quarter, but occupied by small tradespeople who lived in the rooms above their shops” (7).⁸ This “cross street” imagery evokes the city’s grid, and Norris yokes that grid imagery to those who occupy it. Class defines that population: Polk Street is “in the heart of the residence quarter, but [is itself] occupied by small tradespeople” (7). The juxtaposition Norris’s implies here is clear: some people live elsewhere, but others—those “small tradespeople”—live and work in the same space. Norris’s description of McTeague’s Parlors as his home is relegated to one line: “McTeague made it do for a bedroom as well, sleeping on the big bed-lounge against the wall” (6). This description conveys less luxury and more close quartered bare necessity, especially when compared to his extensive array of dental instruments—“a washstand . . . where he manufactured

⁸ Interesting to note here is the rhetorical similarity of Norris’s passage to Marx and Engels description of the lower middle class in the 1888 English version of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. They write, “The lower strata of the middle class” includes “the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants” (24).

his moulds . . . his operating chair, his dental engine, and the movable rack on which he laid out his instruments.” Moreover, “The whole place exhaled a mingled odor of bedding, creosote, and ether”—a grotesque scent that hardly suggests a comfortable home (7). These descriptions identify the space more as a dental office than a home and so marginalize McTeague’s comfort to make room for his work.

McTeague’s one room Dental Parlors and living quarters are thus a place of fuzzy class lines. The room recalls what Herbert Gutman identifies as the lived continuity of this time period’s lower class workers who “surrounded their way of work with a way of life” that made work more accessible (35). However, that continuity collapsed labor and leisure and made it nearly impossible for those workers to structure identities outside their work (45). A collapsed space, such as McTeague’s, that so closely chains a sense of self to labor was—and still is—often a marker of the working class; McTeague’s living situation is not a choice but a result of financial limitation, as “[his mother] had left him some money—not much, but enough to set him up in business” (6). Even though McTeague “felt that his life was a success, that he could hope for nothing better,” his simple contentment does not preclude consequences. We see these consequences when McTeague becomes destitute after losing his working identity. When coupled with the fact that Norris figures McTeague’s dentistry as a kind of crude labor that paradoxically requires agile handiwork, McTeague’s Dental Parlors become a skilled-worker space that nonetheless reflects the challenges posed to the lower class.

But while the Dental Parlors exemplify a kind of working class home, Polk Street exemplifies a more layered class neighborhood that deepens the tension between work and rest. Those who traverse Polk Street reflect this tension and register the way early Western spaces were gridded by bodies' classes and labors, as those who frequent Polk Street span a variety of classes. These distinct classes have distinct times when they appear on the street, starting early at seven in the morning at the bottom of the class pyramid. When presented in tandem, this order symbolizes a class parade that suggests that the wealthier you are, the later and more leisurely your commute can be. First on Polk Street are the newsboys (who appear out of necessity—to deliver the paper) and the day laborers, who are depicted as “trudging past in a straggling file” and marked by filth: “overalls soiled with yellow clay . . . spotted with lime from head to foot” (7, 8). Next are the “clerks and shop girls,” the “cheap smartness” of their attire indicating that they occupy a more refined working class than the day laborers, yet are still not well off. When the newsboys and day laborers pass through, they do so on foot, “tramping steadily in one direction;” the shop girls similarly are “always in a hurry.” Both these lower classes must transport themselves to work with a haste that attends to their unvarying work schedules. In contrast, their more upper class employers have the means to ride trains, using their downtime to “[read] the morning papers with great gravity.” This group has “huge stomachs” and “flowers in their buttonholes,” connoting a group well fed and well dressed with decorative accessories. Last, the upper class ladies “from the great avenue” are “handsome

women, beautifully dressed” who stroll with leisure and often stop, as “Meetings took place here and there; a conversation was begun; others arrived; groups were formed” (8).⁹ Polk Street thus becomes not the residence of class difference but where class, coded by attire and time, is performed.

In the passage quoted above, each class’s mannerisms are set to a specific tempo, which follows the rhythms of work and leisure, responsibility and enjoyment. A speed that manifests physically identifies the lower classes, while a leisure that leaves time for talking and reading characterizes the upper. Those latter activities occupy the mind more than the body, especially when compared to the lower classes’ quickness. Different kinds of movement thus indicate the boundaries of class membership rather than fluidity across them. This socioeconomic parade reduces humans to their labor and so uses people as representations of class in space. As an urban center, Polk Street thus exhibits the multiple, static qualities of class that construct the novel’s gridded spaces.

Furthermore, though *McTeague*’s San Francisco is a reflection of urban spatial and class patterns in the early West—still largely unsettled—it is also uneven and still developing. As Neil Smith remarks, “capitalist development was a continual transformation of natural space—inherited absolute space—into a produced relative space” (87). This collapse of culture and nature proceeded fitfully, even spasmodically; Norris’s San Francisco is thus a transitional space that both impinges upon and is impinged on by *McTeague*’s open, natural spaces.

⁹ Pizer notes that this avenue is “Van Ness Avenue, one of the fashionable residence streets of San Francisco during the 1880s and 1890s” (8n8).

When Trina and McTeague visit the B Street station on the bay, this reciprocal push and pull of nature and culture is evident:

B Street station was nothing more than a little shed. There was no ticket office, nothing but a couple of whittled and carven benches. It was built close to the railroad tracks, just across which was the dirty, muddy shore of San Francisco Bay. About a quarter mile back from the station was the edge of the town of Oakland. Between the station and the first houses of the town lay immense salt flats, here and there broken by streams of black water. They were covered with a growth of wiry grass, strangely discolored in places by enormous stains of orange-yellow. (48)

B Street station typifies the West's uneven transformation from flux to fixity: Norris depicts a space that is in the process of becoming relative to the city, by way of the train system, yet it is still encircled by untamed, unproduced nature. This imagery sets the stage for the novel's Death Valley region, which critics often read as a straightforward representation of untamed, brutal nature.¹⁰ However, keeping this image of the station and its implications for urban development in mind shines a different light on the novel's desert mining region. Rather than offering an escape from the rigid, gridded class map of San Francisco, Death Valley's surrounding region assumes the city's qualities of socioeconomic stasis. At the end of *McTeague*, the "untamed" West is not the empty space of possibility or the

¹⁰ See Feldman, Walcutt, and Pizer,, "Frank Norris's *McTeague*."

brute's origin; rather, it is a space of natural danger that evokes the social problems of the city.

When McTeague returns to the Death Valley region at the end of the novel, the dentist-as-extractor returns to the world of mining. Though Norris initially claims that "The entire region was untamed . . . a vast, unconquered brute of the Pliocene epoch, savage, sullen, and magnificently indifferent to man," he almost immediately modifies that wild space: "But there were men in these mountains, like lice on mammoths' hides, fighting them stubbornly, now with hydraulic 'monitors,' now with drill and dynamite, boring into the vitals of them, or tearing away great yellow gravelly scars in the flanks of them, sucking their blood, extracting gold" (208-09). Similarly, when McTeague arrives at the headquarters of the district mines, he arrives at a place that was once "the summit of a mountain, but [now has] long since been 'hydraulicked' away." Though the rough country surrounding Death Valley may seem, at first, "unconquered," below the surface and in isolated areas men are tearing away at nature's foundations with machines, building makeshift towns, and producing natural-made goods. McTeague is even able to string familiar outposts together to construct a mental map and find his way through the desert: "He knew exactly where the look for these trails" and "He recognized familiar points at once," such as houses, unlicensed liquor "stores," and mine headquarters (210).

These landmarks are similar to the city's structures, as they give McTeague a sense of place and recall his survey of familiar sites on Polk Street: "There were

corner drug stores with huge jars of red, yellow, and green liquids in their windows . . . stationers' stores . . . barber shops" (7). Moreover, these "lice on mammoths' hides" are not fighting the desert with Pliocene era tools. They use "hydraulic 'monitors,'" "drill and dynamite," "the stamp mill," and build mining towns with administrative buildings and headgears (209). The structures that populate the Death Valley mining regions impose both early mapping and urban systems onto the landscape. This region is thus in the process of being constructed through the natural resources that the environment provides, complicating the familiar "man versus nature" dichotomy associated with naturalism. In other words, the environment makes mining work possible and profitable, while also influencing the construction of the places those who live and work in the region build.

Moreover, because this region is mined for gold, quartz, and other minerals that are sold, it is inherently linked to the class system of the city. The products of mining fund commerce in the city; those who take part in that enterprise participate in the ground level of this system and replicate class stratification in the desert. For instance, the shift bosses have houses while shift workers sleep communally "in the bunk house" (212). As a shift worker, McTeague does not control his own schedule: "At half-past five . . . sounded a prolonged alarm" that called him to supper and then to his shift; "At six in the morning his shift was taken off," and "Every other week the shifts were changed" (212-14). Now, McTeague—moving and working in a pattern as part of a larger group—resembles more the day laborers on Polk Street than the dentist who made his own schedule.

And his new schedule is a busy one that only leaves time for sleeping and eating: “All day long he slept . . . the dreamless sleep of exhaustion, crushed and overpowered with the work,” which chains McTeague the worker to an all-consuming labor pattern that leaves little energy for anything beyond work. Indeed, McTeague does not once play his concertina while mining. Even in the desert, tempo marks inflexible class lines.

Yet there are opportunities for class mobility here—or so it would seem. Prospectors can strike it rich and use the desert’s goods to launch themselves upward socioeconomically, though the novel never witnesses this good fortune. After he leaves the mining camp to hide from the law, McTeague meets Cribbens and the two prospect for gold. When they hit a quartz vein and take some back to their camp to search through, Cribbens has McTeague “[take] the horn spoon and [rock] it gently in his huge hands” as his own hands shake too much for the job (224). McTeague’s handiwork pays off when he finds gold: in Cribbens’s words, “the richest kind of pay” (225). When McTeague finds gold, it’s easy to read in that discovery the potential for social mobility. However, men can only strike it rich in the desert if they go far off the grid, even beyond the mining camps, and leave behind the class system that constitutes civilization’s safety net. Without that safety net, as McTeague and Marcus soon discover, wealth is far more insecure. Moreover, because Gilded Age class status is a tricky composite of performativity and long-term financial stability in the city, class mobility is always temporary and threatened by the space of working identity. Finding gold in the desert is thus like

finding fool's gold: McTeague will always be a miner from the desert and so his discovery is a false one that only mocks the impossibility of class mobility.

Thus, when McTeague and Marcus enter the seemingly desolate Death Valley, they do not wholly leave the world of mining, capital, or class. Nature is not separate from the social landscape but interwoven with it. Much like the novel's cityscapes, *McTeague's* desert region is not a one-dimensional deterministic space but an open environment that encourages particular kinds of labor, which develop particular elements of the city's class system. From this vantage, whether or not nature is "magnificently indifferent to man" matters less than what happens to man in nature (209). Read together, Placer County's class systems, McTeague and Marcus's final encounter, and McTeague's murder of Marcus are linked episodes that suggest that the natural landscape is not man's antithesis but instead the place where his actions reveal the gap between class status and class mobility. When McTeague and Marcus encounter one another in Death Valley, the environment evokes labor identity, dialogically, and in this case tragically. When McTeague murders Marcus, the novel decides that the pressures of capital and biology *together* constitute both the force behind and the foil for lived experience, indicating that the Gilded Age bourgeoisie needed class status to be fixed and class mobility an illusion to protect the upper classes from the lower. In *McTeague*, the worst dangers represented by the lower class thus emerge where work and ecology meet—here, in the hostile landscape of Death Valley.

IV. A STORY OF BARREN SPACE

And yet the novel's final mediation on class is possible only because the alkali flats of Death Valley remove labor from *McTeague*. Once in the desert, McTeague finds himself surrounded by "the terrible valley of alkali that barred the way, a horrible vast sink of white sand and salt below even the sea level, the dry bed, no doubt, of some prehistoric lake" (229). Here, nature, rather than fostering productive labor as does the mining region of Placer County, offers no goods for man to harvest: the alkali flats are sand and alkali salts. This scene reveals a new kind of excess, discordant with the industriousness of the time and thus feared by those who profited from the wealth of that industriousness — the empty excess of barren, natural space. As he wanders the "white, naked, inhospitable" desert, McTeague must confront a space that denies any labor identity (230). More importantly, he, and correspondingly the novel, must confront how men react when their familiar labor, class, and spatial infrastructures are missing. If class is a function of labor in space, and labor is impossible in the desert, then in the desert class is uncovered as a function of social control that can only exist where labor identities exist. Death Valley thus stages the fear of what an absence of manual work does to the identities of the members of the working class, the structures that normally organize them, and their interactions with others.

What McTeague and Marcus need in Death Valley and what Death Valley as a space actually offers reveals the fragility of class identity, class mobility, and the dangers of losing both. When the men meet in Death Valley, they are

accustomed to patterns of class, capital, and survival in the city and so act in ways incompatible with the desert. And when the desert responds in ways unlike the city, both men resort to violent survival instincts. At the same time, despite awareness of their dire situation, both still turn to Trina's money as a familiar vessel through which they can direct their anxieties. Consequently, reading *McTeague's* final scene in Death Valley as a counterpoint to the novel's study of labor and class in other spaces reveals that, when stranded in undeveloped space, men resort to violence and a grotesque obsession with capital to distract from the fear of death. Those last distractions are what lies at the heart of naturalism — what Norris calls the “the vast, the monstrous, and the tragic” — the grotesque behavior of which the lower class is capable (274). Thus, the novel's determinism has less to do with what naturalism generally ascribes it to — eugenics, ethnicity, race — and more to do with labor and class identity. Marcus and McTeague have always been lower class citizens; their transgression has always been possible and was only masked by the organizing structures of class in the city. If the Gilded Age bourgeoisie thus feared the social and financial havoc that the lower classes could wreck upon culture, then *McTeague's* ending not only confirms that fear but also exiles the members of the lower class to purge themselves from society at a safe distance.

Marcus ironically begins the process of this removal when he joins the Keeler sheriff and his posse to look for McTeague. When the group discovers that McTeague left Cribbens and headed into Death Valley, Marcus is the only one who

wants to follow him, against the better judgment of the sheriff: “I don’t figure on going into that alkali sink with no eight men and horses. . . . One man can’t carry enough water to take him and his mount across let alone *eight*” (238). Refusing to bring law into the desert marks Death Valley as a place outside of society’s socioeconomic and legal boundaries, a classification reinforced when we learn that “In the haste of the departure from Keeler the sheriff had neglected to swear [Marcus] in.” Moreover, Marcus’s journey into the desert proves disastrous early when the sheriff’s warning comes true: two days in “Marcus’s horse gave out” and that evening, “Marcus, raging with thirst, had drunk his last mouthful of water” (239). Here, Marcus’s transgression is twofold: he disregards the legal decision (by the sheriff) to stay out of the desert, and disregards the biological boundaries of man’s survival by ignoring the desert’s environmental obstacles. As he tells the sheriff when he wants to pursue McTeague, “There was no possibility of their missing the trail — as distinct in the white alkali as snow. They could make a dash into the valley, secure their man, and return long before their water failed them” (238).

But Marcus’s — and indeed McTeague’s — decision to journey into Death Valley is not merely a legal and natural transgression but a socioeconomic one as well. In the novel thus far, gold has been the object to covet because it affirms the holding individual’s wealth as well as offers its own commodity value.¹¹ Earlier in the novel, both Marcus and McTeague understand money as consumers in the

¹¹ See Michaels, specifically his introduction and chapter 5, about greed in naturalist literature.

class context of the city; McTeague “had imagined that [he and Trina] would spend [the \$5000] in some lavish fashion; would buy a house, perhaps, or would furnish their new rooms with overwhelming luxury” while Marcus spends his money to “[dress] with great care . . . a new pair of slate blue trousers, a black ‘cutaway,’ and a white lawn ‘tie’ (for him the symbol of a height of elegance). He also carried his cane, a thin wand of ebony with a gold head” (77, 127). Here, both men think of capital in terms of its purchasing power — it can buy things (a house, furnishings, and clothes) and the illusion of status (the superficial “luxury” and “elegance” that comes with these objects).

But in Death Valley, the \$5000 loses its monetary value, a fact that leaves McTeague and Marcus dumbfounded. When Marcus first holds up McTeague and retrieves the gold, he mutters, with “a gleam of satisfaction,” “Got it at last” (240). But this satisfaction doesn’t last long; immediately after, “[Marcus] was singularly puzzled to know what next to do.” Neither is their final fight motivated by a desire for wealth, but rather by “The old enmity between the two men, their ancient hate” (243). Gold, in these final scenes, acts more as a placeholder for greed and pride than a thing of value. What this lack of value then reveals is that McTeague and Marcus have not only transgressed spatial (San Francisco to Placer County to Death Valley), organizational (Marcus acts on his own accord and McTeague abandons both the mining camp and Cribbens), and social (the stolen money and the murders in this chase) boundaries in this journey, but socioeconomic ones as well. Gold has no purpose in the desert because the potential for class mobility —

which makes the gold desirable — does not exist. In other words, the two men have transgressed, by ill-intentioned means, beyond spatial boundaries that determine where capital has purpose. Labor and its familiar handiwork are also absent. Norris's hand imagery in *Death Valley* is limited to McTeague standing in front of an armed Marcus "with his big hands over his head" and McTeague's ominous realization that "Marcus in that last struggle [before dying] had found strength to handcuff their wrists together" — a moment that only tangentially connects to the novel's hands and, rather than depicting them as productive, limits their productivity (240, 243). Now that the two men have transgressed the multiple boundaries of the city and even the mining community, only the mule and the water exist; indeed, when Marcus and McTeague finally shoot the mule and lose the water, the occasion is marked simply by the words, "There was no water left. . . . There was a pause. . . . There was nothing more" (242). No class, no capital, no labor, only vacant, unproductive space.

This vacant, unproductive space is where Norris has expelled McTeague and Marcus to eliminate themselves and their destructive social, personal, and economic power from society. The final moments of this episode thus pull back the smokescreen of the city and its class and labor to offer a glimpse into the dangerous potential of those trapped by lower class determinism. As McTeague "slipped back into the old habits . . . with an ease that was surprising" when he lost his dental practice (159), once he leaves San Francisco, his regression into the lower class world of mining is seamless:

Straight as a homing pigeon, and following a blind and unreasoned instinct, McTeague had returned to the Big Dipper mine. Within a week's time it seemed to him he had never been away. He picked up his life again exactly where he had left it the day when his mother had sent him away with the travelling dentist, the charlatan who had set up his tent by the bunk house. (212)

The passage then describes McTeague's monotonous, daily mining work and how this work and the life that accompanied it "pleased the dentist beyond words" (213). Here and elsewhere in the novel, the living patterns and labor habits associated with the lower class are familiar and pleasing to McTeague. His comfortable ease here also contrasts with earlier moments when McTeague had to learn new class habits over time. Trina, through teaching McTeague to "dress a little better" and "[relinquish] his Sunday afternoon's nap and beer" finds that "she could make McTeague rise to [her level]": "Gradually," Norris reflects, "the dentist improved under the influence of his little wife" (107, 108).

However, those improvements are temporary. McTeague's effortless reversion indicates that his lower class identity is embedded in his sense of self, unlike the middle class posturing he once learned. Not only do his lower class roots show in his living and working habits, but his last fight with Marcus reveals the persistent greed for money (in this case, for the stolen \$5000) associated with the novel's lower class. Like the "half-dead canary" at the end of the novel, trapped and "chittering in its little guilt prison," McTeague is trapped by the class

determinism that imprisons him socially in the lower class (243). As June Howard notes in her discussion of proletarianization, because the Gilded Age middle class “fear of revolution and chaos, of the mob and the criminal . . . of becoming the outcast through social degradation and psychological disintegration” is a fear yoked to the lower classes, McTeague’s actions therefore become all the more frightening (95). As the final scene of *McTeague* unravels, bourgeoisie fears of the lower class’s ability to commit these transgressions come true and culminate in murder.

The desert is the perfect stage for this unraveling because it offers a contained area far from civilization where Norris can purge the novel of the lower class dangers that McTeague represents.¹² McTeague’s actions in the desert simultaneously confirm and eliminate the period’s bourgeois fears: he fights, viciously, for gold that he obtained by committing one crime and ultimately kills another person with his bare hands, assuring his own death in the process. When McTeague and Marcus meet in Death Valley, their encounter recalls Norris’s description of naturalist stories that occur “among the lower — almost the lowest — classes” who are “flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death” (“Zola” 274). And indeed, this episode is chaotic: when the mule runs away, he “squealed, threw up his head, and galloped to a little distance, rolling his eyes and flattening his ears”

¹² While Marcus is involved in this representation, he acts more as a vehicle for McTeague’s violence. He is not as firmly connected to the lower class during the course of the novel and does not directly commit murder as McTeague is capable of doing. As we recall, he loses the fight in the park and is only capable of “vociferating” political ideals. Physical violence, in other words, is not Marcus’s MO.

and Marcus responds by “danc[ing] with rage, shaking his fists, and sweating horribly.” Norris remarks of the landscape: “Chaotic desolation stretched from them on either hand, flaming and glaring with the afternoon heat” (240, 242). It is brutal and cruel: when they pursue the mule, the two men run “Mile after mile, under the terrible heat of the desert sun, racked with a thirst that grew fiercer every hour,” and when they fight, “Clouds of alkali dust, fine and pungent, enveloped the two fighting men, all but strangling them” (241, 242). And it is, of course, violent: when the question of who owns the gold comes up, McTeague’s hands “knotted themselves into fists, hard as wooden mallets” and “the men grappled, and in another instant were rolling and struggling upon the hot white ground” (243). Now, McTeague’s hands are like “wooden mallets” — a tool, to be sure, but one used for violence and murder, not labor.

This, the novel showcases in these final moments, is what the lower class is like. And like Marcus’s death in the desert, two earlier, similar scenes of grotesque, excessive violence—when Trina finds Maria’s body and when McTeague murders Trina—were spurred by the lower class desire for wealth and class mobility. Trina’s discovery of Maria’s body reveals “a fearful gash in her throat” and “the front of her dress . . . soaked through and through” (174). Zerkow kills Maria after his lust for her family’s legendary gold dinner set reaches its climax; shortly before, Maria told Trina that “He’s gettun regularly sick with it — got a fever every night. . . . Then he’ll whale me with his whip, and shout, ‘You know where it is. Tell me, tell me, you swine, or I’ll do for you.’ . . . He’s just gone plum crazy” (172). In a section

Norris removed from the novel's original version, McTeague's murder of Trina is "abominable": "She was a repulsive sight. Her great mane of swarthy hair was all down and over her face, her dress was torn to ribbons, and the little stream of blood running from the corner of her mouth stained as with ink the whiteness of her bare shoulder and breast" (206n4). McTeague, too, was driven by an insane greed for the \$5000; he warns Trina, "You won't, huh? You won't give me it? For the last time," and when she declares "No, *no*," he "sent his fist into the middle of her face with the suddenness of a relaxed spring" (205). In these cases, as well as in McTeague and Marcus's final fight, the need of one for the capital of another ends in chaotic, violent, lower class murder.

But there is another thing these three scenes have in common. Each takes place in a space of social and economic exclusion. Maria is killed in her home, a "wretched hovel in the alley" that is "dark and damp, and foul with all manner of choking odors," where Zerkow stores his useless junk—"all the detritus that a great city sloughs off," which represents "every class of society" (134, 28). Trina is killed in her "little room over the kindergarten schoolroom," which ran "through a much poorer and more sordid quarter" than Polk Street, where she "saw no one" and is "lost in the lowest eddies of the great city's tide" (193). And Marcus is killed in the desert, a space of "brazen sky and . . . leagues upon leagues of alkali, leper white" where money has no purpose but greed for it still spurs violence. Each of these spaces is marked by its separation from bourgeois society, whether urban or rural. *McTeague's* last scene thus brings us back to my opening question: what does it

mean to title the novel *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*? What *is* this novel about? This novel, it would seem, is about spaces in and around San Francisco where, as Norris sees it, romance (in his eyes, the mother of naturalism) dwells: “slums . . . the squalor of a dive, or the awful degradation of a disorderly house,” spaces where “You, the aristocrats . . . will not follow” (“Plea” 280). This novel, thus, is about deteriorations: socioeconomic exclusion, the decay of identity, the facades of class mobility, the loss of work — and the grotesque transgressions that occur in the spaces left in their wake.

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MEZZANINE ONE: LACKS OF LABOR & WRITING AS WORK

Thus, we see the consequences of the absence of labor's stabilizing force in *McTeague*, the spatial and class insecurities that result from it, and the grotesque outcome Norris connects to his era's historical, political, and literary climate. I chose *McTeague* first for this project because its position in the canon of American literary naturalism is well documented; the familiarity of the text and the critical conversation that commonly surrounds it demonstrate how the novel can offer a zoomed-in portrait of what, in my Introduction, I have called the superlattice that emerges under certain conditions and when its materials have particular tilts. In this case, *McTeague* the novel acts as the laboratory in which Norris can combine materials from his context – Gilded Age class politics, labor stations and identities, emerging structures that controlled work certifications, social conditions and natural environments – with the denser, thicker materials of literary plot and character. The resulting analysis that I produce is thus a superlattice that includes my reading of *McTeague* as an individual who is subject to these twinned social tilts and historical conditions.

Broadly, this is just my way of spelling out what I want an intensive, historical close reading to consist of: close inspections of the words, patterns, and rhythms of literary episodes or scenes common to an individual text, a genre or subgenre, a historical period, or even a critical mode itself. As a teacher, I often hope that this reading helps students focus in on these necessary components of an amplified close reading that, in my view, still constitutes the essence of literary

study. Good research papers often rest one set of materials – in this case, social concerns surrounding labor, class, and space – on another – here, historical dimensions. The descriptive statement of this tapestry is a paper’s solid thesis. Of course, in my experience, students typically run into challenges of many kinds with the thesis: how specific it should be, how much evidence to use, how much outside information to include, what kind of scholarship to cite. I was one of those students, so these mezzanines serve, in large part, as letters I would have liked to have read nestled in the countless critical books I tackled as an undergraduate. How am I supposed to do this, I wanted to ask? Am I supposed to just know? (The answer, of course, was no.)

All of which brings me back to Norris’ *McTeague* and on to Ruiz de Burton’s *The Squatter and the Don*. Upon reading the former, Norris’ text struck me as so fiercely historical that my own reading would have to follow suit. But I didn’t initially realize this was the direction of my thinking. In fact, it was not until my time as a Graduate Fellow at Boston College’s interdisciplinary Clough Center for Constitutional Democracy that I realized my novels had a lot of political history in them that I should look into. This insight helped galvanize what I soon saw as the social interests of this entire project. So the mini-lesson here is: be interdisciplinary! You never know what you might find along the way or how your perspectives will widen. The larger message is that this first chapter then laid the foundation for what is to come. (Not that I wrote my chapters in order!) That is, the early historical-political research into *McTeague* encouraged a similar

historical-political approach to Ruiz de Burton's novel. Such a focus helped me step away, if momentarily, from the strong current of ethnic dispossession at the book's core and find out what piqued my *own* interests about this work.

If Norris' novel is curious about changing socioeconomic and labor patterns of urban and rural space in turn of the century San Francisco, then maybe, I thought, Ruiz de Burton's novel is curious about similarly changing patterns — specifically, what happened when a significant wave of Anglo settlers descended on Southern California's Californio population and their ranches in the late 1800s. Reading the novel in that context helped me untangle the messy political-ethnic- and class-consciousness knot many critics have puzzled over in the novel. My focus, again, began with labor. Just like McTeague's identity rested on his older notions of dentistry work, so too did Don Alamar's identity rest on older visions of ranching in *The Squatter and the Don*. And just like McTeague's struggles with selfhood, empowerment, and control reflected specific historical anxieties of the Gilded Age, so too did the Don's anxieties about family heritage and security reflect early Californio concerns about cultural identity that still shape discussions about Chicano identity. So I found a number of patterns, writ across time and space, that pointed to the development of a Western character and culture that rooted itself in past identities – of work, of belonging, of success – which a novel suddenly revealed. And like these two identities, I intend to show, others developed in the West as well.

CHAPTER TWO

Civic Identity and the Ethos of Belonging in Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* and Raymond Barrio's *The Plum Plum Pickers*

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1992, Arte Publico Press published Rosaura Sanchez and Beatrice Pita's edited version of Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's 1885 *The Squatter and the Don*. Since then, critical work on the novel has exploded. Most prominent is scholarship on the ethnic thrust of the text, which sympathizes with the troubles with land ownership and labor laws that the novel's wealthy, Spanish-Californio Chicano population encounter when railroads and Anglo settlers encroach on their lives.¹ Much of this work, including Sanchez and Pita's introduction, has tackled some version of the question Marcial Gonzalez poses in the beginning of "An Aesthetic Solution to Objective Problems: Liberalism in Ruiz de Burton's *Squatter and the Don*": "Can a novel in which the narrator unabashedly refers to Native Americans and working-class mestizos in a racially derogatory manner be considered politically resistant?" (41). Answers have varied. Some, like Sanchez and Pita, claim it can because the novel "create[s] a narrative space for the counter-history of the sub-altern" (the Californios) (5), while others, like Jose Aranda, posit that calling Ruiz de Burton subaltern is "premature ... because Chicano/a studies has yet to conceptualize adequately the inclusion of writers and texts that uphold racial and colonialist discourses that contradict the ethos of the Chicano Movement" and

¹ In the novel, Californios are ethnically Spanish individuals who moved to California from Spain to claim land who were then later categorized as a Chicano population.

because her desire to “reassume the privileges of a colonialist” further troubles that ethos (553-4).² And still others, like Gonzalez himself, walk a tricky middle line that accounts for both sides: the novel’s contradictions and Ruiz de Burton’s own class privilege, while they do add worrying context to the text’s political ideology, themselves “[do] not exhaust the production of meaning in the novel” (42).

This discussion focuses on Ruiz de Burton’s position as an early Chicano author and her ethical treatment of race; it repeats a common argument about Chicano dispossession that places ethnicity at the center of political ethos. However, I argue that nationality should be at the center because national belonging determines class status, work patterns, and land ownership in the novel. In this early scene, for instance, an American couple argues about national rights to land ownership and labor:

“I firmly believed then, that with my fine stock and good bank account, and broad government lands, free to all Americans ... that I would have saved money and would be getting more to make us rich [But] I am still poor, all I have earned is the name of ‘*Squatter*.’”

“...I am afraid I shall never be able to see the necessity of any one being a squatter in this blessed country of plentiful broad acres, which a most liberal government gives away for the asking.”

² The Chicano movement’s ethos is historically tied to working class ethics and the financial and national rights of migrant workers, especially in terms of their children’s rights to national belonging and education.

“That’s exactly it. We aren’t squatters. We are ‘settlers.’ We take up land that belongs to us, American citizens, by paying the government price for it.”

“Whenever you take up government land, yes, you are ‘settlers,’ but not when you locate claims on lands belonging to anyone else do not go on a Mexican land grant unless you buy the land from the owner.” (56-7) ³

Class lines and national lines here correspond, which suggests that nationalism and its corresponding class divisions, rather than ethnicity, drive dispossession. Thus, while other scholars read this novel as a novel about the ethnic dispossession of the Californios, I read it as a novel about how nationality confers certain class privileges and restricts others, specifically when nationality is defined by laws governing labor and the ownership of the land where that labor takes place. This reading unveils the crucial role labor plays in the early development of Chicano and American national identities and ethos, as well as sheds light on the historical class and national divisions among American policy makers, businessmen, settlers, squatters, and Californios. In *The Squatter and the Don*, the Californios shift their national affiliations to maintain land ownership, familiar labor practices, and class status, but these are effaced when American citizens and political figures pursue profitable American empire building ventures – other kinds of labor – like homesteading and railroad construction. Because this building must

³ Squatters are those who fence and so claim land already owned by Californios; settlers buy their land from the owners.

occur on land owned by Californios, American politicians enforce laws that dispossess them of their land; these laws render traditional Californio labor nationally unsanctified and thus challenge the Californios' land ownership and American citizenship. In other words, the Californios are coded as the wrong nationality, do the wrong labor, and so lose their land and class status.

But before I tackle the novel's representation of history, that history needs some explaining. The Californios, descendants of white Spaniards and originally Mexican citizens, were a class of land owning gentry who lived in California when it was part of Mexico. At the close of the Mexican-American War in 1848, the two countries signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which took large portions of the West from Mexico, including California, and deeded them to America. Mexican nationals who remained in these areas were given one year to claim American citizenship or return to Mexico; if they chose the former, they were assured they would keep their property and gain voting rights. However, two of the primary mechanisms of Manifest Destiny – homesteading and railroad construction – encouraged American squatters, policy makers, and railroad tycoons to disregard these assurances and design or vote in laws (specifically the Land Acts of 1851 and 1872) that deemed certain labors legally acceptable and so rewarded those who did that labor with American citizenship, voting rights, and land ownership. These laws favored the grain planting of Americans, which interfered with Californio fruit and cattle ranching. Grain planting required less land than ranching, which used large tracts of unfenced land owned by few Californios; more American

settlers and squatters could thus live in closer quarters and constitute a greater number of voters who would vote for American expansion policies. American squatters took advantage of these laws and staked land claims on unfenced Californio rancheros to gain land, American citizenship, and class status. Many Californios therefore, despite technically being American citizens, were treated as Mexican nationals who had no legal rights to land ownership or the class status that accompanies it because their labor was not legally protected. At the same time, capitalist railroad tycoons with political power (like Senator Leland Stanford) were bribed to pass Congressional bills on railroad building that would financially benefit them and further bankrupt the Californios. These bills authorized using government bonds to build the Central Pacific Railroad, which would run through San Francisco, rather than the Texas Pacific, which would run through San Diego. And while the owners of the Central Pacific bribed Congress to back their railroad and discourage competition from the Texas Pacific, no Texas Pacific owners (like railroad tycoon Thomas A Scott) did the same.

In the novel, the Central Pacific's railroad building and the squatter's grain planting are yoked as American labors, backed by American money, rewarding American citizens, performed on American soil. By contrast, the Californios' ranching is seen as outdated Mexican labor, supported by old Mexican wealth, performed by past Mexican citizens, on what was once Mexican land. And because the novel's central Californio family, the Alamars, live in San Diego, they support the Texas Pacific, which links the Texas Pacific to Mexican identity and ethos. The

class tensions between those who back the “right” railroad or do the “right” labor thus become issues of nationality and political ethos. To begin, then, I ask how national and political movements depicted in the novel – like late 19th century land laws, labor patterns, and railroad building – affect the novel’s Californios. How do their working, class, and national identities change as those events take place? And what interconnected roles do national belonging, labor, and class play in shaping Ruiz de Burton’s political ethos? Unlike other critical approaches that read ethos as ethic and stable, these questions bring to light the politicized class, labor, and national elements of the *process* of Ruiz de Burton’s “ethos-in-becoming.”

Seeing ethos as a process – a fluid and fragile negotiation of how historical/cultural moments and national/racial identities fashion and refashion political positions – resists inflexible, linear narrative trajectories. This rubric suggests that, to remain relevant, ethos must change in response to the political particularities of a given historical moment. As the counterpoint novel at the end of this chapter, Raymond Barrio’s *The Plum Plum Pickers* reveals that a lack of awareness of that history and how it shapes the present arrests the process of ethos and chains it to one dimensional conceptions of nationality and class dispossession. Thus, while most critics feel uneasy about Ruiz de Burton’s multiple affiliations with often contradictory collectives – Mexican, American, capitalist, land owning gentry, Spaniard, dispossessed Californio – I argue that this range nurtures a narrative plasticity that makes room for the novel’s intersecting, multiple subject positions because it develops ethos along multiple tracts. In other

words, this flexibility cultivates a rich, blossoming “ethos-in-becoming.” From this vantage, the novel’s depictions of class and national identities, kinds of labor, and characters’ connections to space trace the winding route Chicano ethos takes as it develops.

The legal galvanizing of civic identity and national space through political and commercial maneuvers also contributes to this ethos-in-becoming. The Alamars find their way of life and economic security in limbo as these maneuvers – new land and labor laws and railroad building – affect San Diego. In response, Ruiz de Burton uses the Alamars’ response to draw fine distinctions between membership and affiliation and nuance Californio ethos. Whereas memberships are often dictated by outside forces, affiliations are much more personal, delicate, and contingent. Affiliations are hazy and conditional upon individual need, historical context – they often respond to political and cultural pressure from within and without and shift unevenly, explicitly and implicitly, as need arises. In this context, Ruiz de Burton’s characters are consciousness of and outspoken about their ethnic membership and dispossession, but their actions indicate that they are more committed to pursuing national affiliations that benefit them at particular moments.

Finally, though space and class have inflected discussions of the novel’s ethos, labor is an issue that critics mention but leave undeveloped. For instance, while Sanchez and Pita note that Don Mariano Alamar is a “practical cattleman” and that Gabriel Alamar must “learn a trade and become a mason,” their

discussions about labor only identify the kind of work done (21, 33). Labor itself disappears. Making it reappear reveals a crucial component of the novel's "ethos-in-becoming:" the way Ruiz de Burton's characters anchor their identities in their work maps the changing directions of the novel's class and national identities. Analyzing labor in light of class and national belonging also further exposes that developing ethos demands affiliating with certain ideologies and dismissing others. So, if Don Mariano and his sons identify as Californio ranchers, yet contract that work out to those they devalue, then what can that situation tell us about how labor functions as an empowering, degrading, or imprisoning force? And what is the impact of that force on ethos, if, as I mean to argue, Ruiz de Burton's ethos-in-becoming responds to changing labor laws that orbit class and nationality? These questions draw attention to the central role labor plays – misleadingly – as a steady ground on which the novel's Chicanos balance as their civic and class identities chaotically shift in response to national-spatial changes.

II. ON CLASS

The monopolists are essentially the most dangerous citizens in the fullest acceptance of the word. They are dangerous citizens, not only in being guilty of violation of the law, in subverting the fundamental principles of public morality, but they are dangerous citizens because they *lead others* into the commission of the same crimes. Their example is deadly to honorable sentiments; it is poison to

Californians because it allures men with the glamour of success; it incites the unwary to imitate the conduct of men who have become immensely rich by such culpable means. (Ruiz de Burton 366)

These two men had heard strange rumors about Congressmen being *'bribed with money'* and in other ways *improperly influenced by a 'certain railroad man,'* who was organizing a powerful lobby to defeat the Texas Pacific Railroad. ...Mechlin had come across some startling facts regarding the manipulation of railroad bills, especially in the Congressional committees. George ... felt, also, a reluctance to believe that the Congress of these United States could be packed, bundled, and labeled, by a few of its treacherous members, who would sell themselves for money. (210)

In these moments of *The Squatter and the Don*, Ruiz de Burton figures national identity as the defining factor of class hierarchy through laws that reward American citizenship with land ownership and development. The Congressmen and monopolists Ruiz de Burton identifies – railroad owners politicians – are wealthy, powerful Anglo American citizens who prey on Californio citizens with their particular brand of political-economic corruption. These men, in Ruiz de Burton's eyes, break moral boundaries when they use the unfair Land Acts of 1851 and 1872, which nullify the land grants and rights afforded to Mexican citizens through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, to acquire land, improve their class status, and dispossess the Californios. Not ethnic discrimination but the unfair

manipulation of national power for profit forges the lines of class. While most critics argue that the novel's class dispossession is analogous to ethnic dispossession, I thus argue that class marginalization in *The Squatter and the Don* responds more closely national belonging. Class lines in the novel are drawn along flexible national affiliations that shift with changes in wealth, land ownership, and labor practices; that equation, in turn, calls attention to the flexibility of the novel's ethos.⁴

How Don Mariano's complicated class status is articulated through national affiliations with Mexico and America also becomes evident as American politics, railroad building, and Manifest Destiny take center stage in the novel. As Manifest Destiny marched steadily forward, legislators used various markers of identity to distinguish who could claim American citizenship and who couldn't in order to calcify America's rightful "ownership" both of Western land and the money that lands could make through agriculture, business, and travel. One of the easiest and most effective methods was to draw new class lines along existing national lines,

⁴ Crucial to this argument is the novel's distinction between nationality and ethnicity, which comes into focus through laws that use definitions of nationality to, as the novel articulates, "favor one class of citizens against another class" (66). While ethnicity is a personal decision that defines decorum – such as, for instance, when Don Mariano Alamar, the novel's patriarchal, Californio, land owning rancher, differentiates between himself and his friends and the novel's Indians (who work on rancheros and are characterized as "wild," versus himself and certain settlers who he repeatedly refers to as gentlemen) – nationality is a political and public decision, concretized by law (176). These laws govern how to locate land claims and, through a legal feedback loop, reward those who stake those claims by legally affirming their American civic identity. Settlers who come west stake claims on land owned by Mexican nationals; because of these laws, then not only do they own that land, but they own it as American citizens, who the law and Congress favor in the courts.

which not only solidified American identity by identifying Others against which it could be compared, but also gave political power to those who could claim land in the name of American progress. Labor was a crucial component of this progress, as Anglo settlers' cultivation of nature marked American ownership and control of space. As Ruiz de Burton critiques the Land Act of 1851, it was "‘An Act to ascertain and settle the private land claims in the State of California,’ It ought to have been said, ‘An Act to *unsettle* land titles and to upset the rights of the Spanish population of the State of California’" (88). This Land Act declared that any squatter who fenced the land for his own labor then owned that land and was, in turn, an American citizen. Because these land claims thus drew legitimacy from particular forms of labor done by those claiming particular national identities, the work of Manifest Destiny became the literal *work* of constructing class – in other words, the work of legally sanctifying one class over another because the former's labor was nationally profitable.

While these laws dispossess the Californios of their native land and so their ethnic stability, I argue that that ethnic dispossession is a secondary effect of these laws, which primarily sought to give labor rights – and so land rights – to American citizens and support certain kinds of agricultural labor and railroad building that would prove financially beneficial to America as a nation. In other words, those who enacted these laws, and therefore the laws themselves, cared less about ethnic dispossession and more about securing national space and identity through any means necessary – in this case, using American land ownership and

the power of the railroad to clamp down on economic and physical control over space. Hence George Mechlin's answer to his wife's inquiry, "why should Congress refuse to aid the Texas Pacific": "They have no earthly *right* to oppose the Texas Pacific, and all their motive is that they *don't want competition* to their Central Pacific Railroad. They have already made millions out of this road, but they want no one else to make a single dollar" (297). This perspective is also evident in the affiliations that characters choose as laws about land ownership and railroad building – a figurative and literal metaphor for nation building – are enforced in the novel. As the Alamars' land ownership and class status grow more tenuous because of legal battles, Don Mariano navigates a changing national identity. In particular, Ruiz de Burton begins distancing the Don from Mexico and identifying him as American or associating him with America in specific legal and political settings that benefit him and his family. As a result, analyzing how the novel's class discussion wields terms of national belonging reveals how nationality continually shapes and reshapes Californio class and political ethos and identity.

But most critics consider Ruiz de Burton's class dispossession of the Californios at heart an ethnic dispossession. As such, many argue that her disparaging commentary on working class mestizos and Indians⁵ troubles the ethnic and class sympathy she has for the aristocratic Californios. Her contradictory opinions on socioeconomics are seen as similarly unresolvable: she represents the Californios as eager to join the emerging capitalist system while she

⁵ "Indian" is often used as a catchall term for working class mestizos and American Indians in the novel.

attacks the capitalistic monopoly of the Big Four – wealthy Anglo merchants, politicians, and founders of the Central Pacific Railroad Company, Senator Stanford, Mark Hopkins, Collis P. Huntington, and Charles Crocker – and blames them for the loss of Californio class status, labor, land, and way of life. Critical unease about these contradictions suggests that, as Chicanos, the Alamars are obligated to feel solidarity with the mestizos and Indians and reject the practices of the Anglos. This rubric encourages critics to link the novel's class issues primarily to ethnic issues. For instance, as Priscilla Ybarra has argued, the Alamars' aristocratic class success is a reward of ethnic ecological awareness: "Ruiz de Burton's writings comprise an early Mexican American environmentalism," that financially "demonstrates *Californio* authority regarding the land" (135, 142). Similarly, Sanchez and Pita argue that in the aftermath of Californio dispossession, "Ethnically ... a new construct is suggested in the intermarriage of Californios and Anglos to produce new 'mestizos' These children thus also embody a resolution, which can be read ethnically or culturally, that is, as constructs of acculturation" (34-5). And Gonzalez and others argue that Ruiz de Burton's racial stereotyping of "Indians" as unreliable, lazy, and largely invisible is a form of combined ethnic-class posturing that portrays the Californios as the opposite – hardworking, dignified, and elite.

However, Ruiz de Burton's "Indians" are not the only representation of Mexico in the novel and her references to the Mexican government reveal that the novel's class lines and Chicano ethos are not etched only by ethnicity but also by

the weight of nationality. Critics have overlooked that critiques of the Mexican government in *The Squatter and the Don* suggest that class derives from national identity. Indeed, in their breakdown of the novel's ideological rubrics, Sanchez and Pita subsume "Spanish/Mexican land grants" under "Californio Ranchers" and so bypass the powerful but subtle role government plays in the Californios' class status (26). But in her take on these land grants, Ruiz de Burton emphasizes the Mexican government's failure to defend the Californios' rights to land under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and their consequential national and financial losses. William Darrell's bias against the Californios foreshadows these losses when he expresses anger that the Californios are initially "better off than the Americans! They should have been put on an equality with other settlers I always will maintain that the Spanish Californians should not have a right to any more land than Americans" (Ruiz de Burton 222). And those financial repercussions are clear when Don Mariano explains the injustice of American land laws to George Mechlin, a sympathetic settler. In response to the Don's class troubles caused by the Land Acts, Mechlin prods, "I thought the rights of the Spanish people were protected by our treaty with Mexico," which identifies the Mexican government's legal agreement with America as the primary mechanism of Spanish class security. Dona Josefa's morose response links socioeconomic instability to the gulf between national belonging and national inhabitance: "Mexico did not pay much attention to the future welfare of the children she left to their fate in the hands of a nation

which had no sympathies for us” (66). Don Mariano elaborates on this relationship:

...when I first read the text of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, I felt a bitter resentment against my people; against Mexico, the mother country, who abandoned us—her children—with so slight a provision of obligatory stipulations for protection. The treaty said that our rights would be the same as those enjoyed by all other American citizens. But, you see, Congress takes very good care not to enact retroactive laws for Americans; laws to take away from American citizens the property which they hold now, already, with a recognized legal title. No, indeed. But they do so quickly enough with us—with us, the Spano-Americans, who were to enjoy equal rights, mind you, according to the treaty of peace. This is what seems to me a breach of faith, which Mexico could neither presuppose nor prevent. (66-7).

The ethnic terms tossed around in this conversation *appear* to flow seamlessly among Spanish, Mexico, and Spano-American. But the fine lines Darrell, Mechlin, Dona Josefa, and Don Mariano draw among the Alamars as Spanish or Spano-American, their original government as Mexican, and their current government as American points to Ruiz de Burton’s awareness that class status can be abstractly reinforced by civic identity but can also lose power when it crosses national and legal lines. The Alamars are Spano-American citizens (calling on the class power

the Spanish once derived from their land grants and the present power America holds) who have been legally abandoned and so financially ruined by the Mexican government. As Don Mariano reflects later when he explains to Clarence Darrell, son of William Darrell the squatter, the unjust American laws leveled against Californio land owners, “here again come our *legislators* to encourage again wrong-doing—to offer a premium to one class of citizens to go and prey upon another class” (173). These two classes – Spanish and American – those in political power want to define for their own class and political power: if they can grant American citizens land rights, they can grant them voting rights as well. And Ruiz de Burton figures Congresses’ desire to seize this dual national-political and socioeconomic power as uncontrollable: “the politicians, who make and unmake each other, they are the power And if these law-givers see fit to *sell themselves* for money, what then? Who has the power to undo what is done” (207).

And the promise of class power depends on control of national space through American civic land ownership and railroad access across the West. Anglo American lawmakers and railroad tycoons (often, in the novel, one in the same) want to secure California as American land for civic voting reasons: as the Don explains to Clarence about who would contribute to “the prosperity of the state”, “The motive was that our politicians wanted *votes*. The squatters were in increasing majority; the Spanish natives, in diminishing minority” (175). Votes constitute political and financial power in the novel because “the bribes of the Central Pacific monopolists have more power with some Congressmen than the

sense of justice or the rights of communities” (297). In other words, money, and so class power, commands political power, both of which the novel’s Congressmen derive from national railroad building. And that railroad development would also bring widespread financial benefit to the towns it would run through; as George Mechlin points out to his wife and Don Mariano’s daughter, Elvira, “Don’t you see here in our little town of San Diego how everything is depending on the success of this road? Look at all the business of the town, all the farming of this county, all the industries of Southern California—everything is at a standstill, waiting for Congress to aid the Texas Pacific.” Even when he wrongly guesses which railway will come to fruition and benefit a burgeoning California city (he names San Diego, but San Francisco gets its railroad), Mr. Holman correctly pinpoints the importance of the railroad to nation-building, both financial and structural: “the building of the Texas Pacific was an issue of national importance so manifest that Congress would never have the hardihood to deny it existence” (231). Clarence arrives at the same conclusion when devising his own plans to gain wealth: his success “will entirely depend upon the building of the Texas Pacific Railroad; for if San Diego is to not have population, my plan will be impractical” (163). In each case, the railroad’s national benefits are socioeconomic benefits, tying nationality to class privilege. Ultimately, however, the Central Pacific railroad to San Francisco is more profitable to the novel’s monopolistic politicians than the Texas Pacific to San Diego, and thus Congress grants legal status to American settlements whose owners vote in favor of the “right” railway. The Californios, as Mexican citizens

who live in San Diego and support the Texas Pacific, stand in the way of that goal and so their land grants, backed by national legal agreements, must be negated. Their class dispossession is thus not an ethnic one but a national one; their ethos, thus, must turn its attention to how nationality reinforces class status.

The links among railroad politics, nation building, and financial security are not only public issues but private ones as well. In addition to the broad class growth the railroad would provide, it would also grant power to those in the novel who live in the towns the railroad would pass through. Specifically, the Alamars could potentially rescue their aristocratic national and class status through the wealth the Texas Pacific would bring to San Diego, as George Mechlin tells Elvira:

Look at our two families. All the future prosperity of the Alamares and the Mechlins is entirely based upon the success of this road. If it is built, we will be well off, we will have comfortable homes and a sure income to live on. But if the Texas Pacific fails, then we will be financially wrecked. That is, my father will, and Don Mariano will be sadly crippled, for he has invested heavily in town property. So my poor father and yours will be the worst sufferers. Many other poor fellows will suffer like them—for almost the entire San Diego is in the same boat with us. It all depends on Congress. (297)

Here, class depends on national, and urban, belonging: given where the railroad ends up, living in the “right” city is key. The railroad and Congress are thus building the nation by determining in which parts of that nation are worth

investing not only money but also resources. Additionally, the bonds between the Mechlins and the Alamars and the Don and Clarence showcase the weight of national affiliation on class position. The Mechlins and Clarence are American, and Don Alamar's friendship and partnership with them against Congress and antagonist Anglo squatter/settlers creates class affiliations that depend not on race but on land ownership and nationality. Indeed, almost all of San Diego's population risks the same financial fate as the Don because they live in a part of the nation whose growth would bring unwanted "*competition* to their Central Pacific Railroad."

In latter chapters, the focus of the novel shifts from private arguments between Don Mariano and the squatters about land use to more public debates among the Don and his fellow *American* land owners (like James and George Mechlin, Alfred Holman, and Clarence Darrell) and the Congressmen who decide which railroad to fund and the settlers who support the Central Pacific. The affiliations the Don must forge during this time reveal that he recognizes that his identity as an American land owner holds more political and class sway than his identity as a Californio. Though common financial suffering (and the novel's marriage plot) brings the Don and certain Anglo settlers closer together, their shared stake in maintaining their land ownership and therefore class status cements that bond. Together these men "go to see Governor Stanford" to assess his position on the Texas Pacific (306). The meeting not only reaffirms the

connections among the Don and the American settlers, but also ties class status firmly to railroad, and so to nation building.

During their meeting with Governor Stanford, one of the first divisions Ruiz de Burton makes clear is the division between the American public and Congress. When Mechlin expresses his surprise that Stanford's plan to block the Texas Pacific was not opposed, Stanford flexes his political muscle by accentuating the power of this divide: "The American people mind their business, and know better than to interfere with ours" (316). That divide, between American citizens and their government, rests primarily on privileged access to resources and money: as Mechlin points out of the railroad, "as the Central Pacific was constructed with Government subsidies, and the earnings of the Central Pacific were used to construct the Southern Pacific, it follows that you were helped by the Government to build both" (317). Here, the government has access to class power that ordinary citizens do not, which Stanford, as the novel's representative of Congressional might, flaunts openly at the close of their meeting: "Money commands success, you know" (319). His rhetoric reaffirms his political and economic control of the situation and, in turn, denies the Don and settlers' influence. Moreover, his political power is national and grants him legal authority to encourage American settlers to stake their claims on land owned by Mexican nationals. Holman recognizes the injustice here – "How confident he is of [the railroad tycoons'] power over Congress! And he certainly means to wield it as if he came by it legitimately" – and though his acknowledgement separates Congress and the Big

Four (a partial fallacy, as Stanford is governor), his despair is poignant (322). Congress holds the class power Don Mariano once enjoyed; national affiliation supersedes ethnic affiliation in terms of socioeconomic status and that is used to dispossess Don Mariano, the Mechlins, the Darrells, and Holman of the financial stability they would gain from the Texas Pacific.

Gabriel and Lizzie's story is especially telling of the ruin losing the Texas Pacific has on the class stability of those who live in San Diego and seek profit from its development, as well as the financial discrepancies among national Mexican, American private citizen, and American politician. Without the railroad to bring his family prosperity in San Diego, Gabriel must move to San Francisco to locate work; yet his responsibilities at the family ranch draw him from that work and interrupt the stability of his family's city life. In addition, his failure to find a stable job and etch out a middle class life in San Francisco further attests to how being bounded to space and nationality in the novel has an impact on class status. Lizzie once "moved in what was called San Francisco's *best* society," but her marriage to a Spanish-Mexican national who loses his family's wealth and his position at the bank in San Francisco causes her friends' past "cordiality [to] soon vanish The fact that Gabriel was a *native Spaniard*, she saw plainly, militated against them. If he had been rich, his nationality could have been forgiven, but no one could tolerate a *poor native Californian*" (351). Ruiz de Burton here suggests that Lizzie, as an American, does not need to rely entirely on her upper class status to maintain her "society company;" yet Gabriel's identity as a Spanish-Mexican

national, coupled with his financial decay, damns their status and their reacceptance into high society. Similarly, even when Clarence recommends the Alamars come to San Francisco because “San Diego is dead,” Dona Josefa recalls the distance between sound enterprising intentions and the power of class on personal worth: “Business without capital? See where my poor Gabriel is now” (359). His injuries as a manual laborer, as I will explore later, only amplify that divide and the impossibility of succeeding without already having capital. In their losses, Lizzie and Gabriel epitomize the collapse of national dispossession into class dispossession, coding the novel’s representation of class privilege with the unavoidable connections between money and land.

The Californios’ class dispossession is thus, at its root, not based in ethnic discrimination but national discrimination. Thus, though Ruiz de Burton refers to the Alamars as Spano-American, Californio, native Californians, or Spanish, they are irrevocably bound to Mexico nationally, politically, and legally because the Mexican government – impotent, financially bereft – is the antithesis of the power Stanford, his railroad partners, and Congress embody. In contrast, Mexico cannot compete or offer assistance to its citizens. As the Mexican government is, in the end, an ineffective one, its representation further teases apart the conflicting identities critics struggle with in the novel. Tracing the multiple subject positions related to civic identity that Ruiz de Burton uses to categorize the novel’s Chicanos – to disguise working class mestizos as “Indians;” to exclude the Alamars from American land rights based on nationality, yet to rope Don Mariano into later

debates about national railroad building; to not identify the Alamars as Mexican but bind them to the past rulings of the now defunct Mexican government; to use Congressional law making and railroad building to articulate the differences between Spanish, Mexican, American, and American governmental nationality – suggests that she needs the Alamars’ nationality to be fluid in order to account for and adjust to the changes in Californio class status due to Congressional socioeconomic and political power. And because the Mexican government loses national power, thereby wresting class power from its citizens who identify as Spanish, Don Mariano claims membership to Spanish ethnic identity and affiliates himself and his family with Mexico in the past yet breaks that affiliation in favor of affiliation with other American settlers and America as a nation in the novel’s present. Thus, the class issues of the novel’s Chicano ethos become yoked to nation in ways that continually bend and reshape it.

In that context, the novel’s derogatory take on Indians and mestizos “makes sense”: they come from past Mexico and stand for the nation’s failures and its citizens’ class failure. Thus, while the Don’s ridicule of mestizos and Indians does not originate from these losses, their continued abuse reflects the fallout from that political abandonment. Because, in the novel, nationality is used to accentuate political maneuvers that calcify civic distinctions and rights, it also becomes delicate terrain that those accustomed to class power feel they need to continually refashion and defend. In other words, as Don Mariano’s class power – largely derived from Mexican land grants once protected under the Treaty of Guadalupe

Hidalgo, which the Land Acts of 1851 and 1872 undermined – diminishes, so too do his affiliations with Mexico, both legally and personally. By the same token, his repeated references to Spanish national heritage derive strength from a class status once held by landed Spanish gentry in California. And his affiliations, at the end of the novel, with Holman, the Mechlins, and Clarence Darrell mark him as American in certain civic contexts that nonetheless do not belay his continued national dispossession.

Class, in *The Squatter and the Don*, is thus a knotty and layered identity that leans on fickle legality and national belonging, as well as fickle personal ethos. Moreover, examining when Don Mariano and Dona Josefa affiliate with Mexico and its government brings the multifaceted national inheritance of that identity to light. In claiming Mexican civic identity but Spano-American ethnic identity and American land rights, the Alamars hold onto three bastions of upper class status – the political power Mexico once had, the aristocratic power the Californios once had, and the legal power American settlers of San Diego once had – a triumvirate of losses Ruiz de Burton uses the novel to document.

III. ON LABOR

Both Californio and American identity also develops from forms of work in the novel, which indicates that ethos is not only fungible contingent on national belonging and class status, but also depends on legal *and* personal definitions of what constitutes good, or productive, labor. The Alamars, and specifically Don

Mariano and his sons, identify as landed Californio gentry who oversee fruit growing and ranching – labors they see as best suited to San Diego’s ecology; when he defends these labors to the settlers and squatters, he claims “you would not have to wait very long to begin getting a return from your labor and capital” (92). However, because that labor occurs on land they own under the defunct Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and because that ownership is connected to their Mexican citizenship and the Mexican government, it loses traction as American squatters use the exploitative Land Acts to acquire that land for their own labor. Hence their repeated refusal to identify as Mexican and derogatory references to the “Indians” who work their on ranch: though they are Mexican by citizenship, the Alamars avoid a national membership that would link them to lower working class Mexicans. Distancing themselves from the working class mestizo and Indians thus differentiates not only along class lines but also between the manual labor the “Indians” perform from the overseeing labor the upper class ranchers perform. The ethos set forth here is thus one that responds not to ecology, as Don Alamar’s superficial gestures toward ecologically responsible would suggest, but one that depends on the aristocracy of hiring workers to do physical, land based work.

It is from that privileged position that the Don demonstrates financial and practical insight into San Diego’s ecology – though, as I will discuss later, this environmentalism falters in the face of class pressure, again accentuating the role nationality plays in the novel’s Chicano ethos. As Priscilla Ybarra has pointed out, over the course of their long tenure in Southern California, “landholding Mexicans

had learned a great deal about how to profitably and sustainably maintain their haciendas” (136). But that knowledge and its benefits suffer when American squatter rights’ take legal precedence:

By those laws any man can come to my land, for instance, plant ten acres of grain, without any fence, and then catch my cattle which, seeing the green grass without a fence, will go to eat it. Then he puts them into a ‘*corral*’ and makes me pay damages and so much per head for keeping them, and costs of legal proceedings and many other trumped up expenses, until for such little fields of grain I may be obligated to pay thousands of dollars. Or, if the grain fields are large enough to bring enough money by keeping the cattle away, then the settler shoots the cattle at any time without the least hesitation And so it is all the time. I must pay damages and expenses of litigation, or my cattle get killed almost every day. (Ruiz de Burton 66)

These practices threaten the Don’s labor in two ways: first, they endanger its necessary components by forcing him to pay or lose his cattle and second, they endanger his labor practices because planting grain is an unwise and wasteful agricultural decision: “it is a mistake to try to make San Diego a grain-producing county—one of the best counties for cattle-raising on this coast, and the very best for fruit-raising on the face of the earth” (91). If settlers institute new labor

patterns, it will undermine the Alamars' ranches' success metaphorically, figuratively, and financially.

And because labor plays a large part in shaping identity in the novel, losing work also offends its characters. Early in *The Squatter and the Don*, an exchange about the weight of work on identity occurs between William Darrell and his then soon to be wife, Mary:

"You know, Mr. Darrell, I teach to support myself."

"Yes, only because you have a notion to do it."

"A notion! Do you think I am rich?"

"No, but there is no need of you working."

"It is a need to me to feel independent I know how to earn my own living." (59)

This moment indicates two purposes of work: to provide material *and* immaterial stability. Mary not only supports herself financially with her labor, but conceptually supports her sense of self as well: she has a particular skill – teaching – that fosters her sense of individuality. Specifically, her need "to feel independent" is satisfied because she knows "how to earn my own living," which yokes financial stability to independent identity. That same pattern occurs throughout – various characters express that their work is important not only because it makes them money, but also because it tells them who they are and what they do as individuals. Work is thus an important component to personal ethos.

Yet working identity is not only tied to skill in the novel; that sense of self is also tied to the place of work, as with Don Mariano's familiarity with San Diego and the work its ecology encourages. Indeed, the title of the novel itself – *The Squatter and the Don* – references identities that derive from what kind of work can be done in particular environments and legal contexts. The Don raises cattle and fruit – two industries he and his fellow ranch owners pursue with success. When meeting with the squatters on his land early in the novel, the Don suggests the squatters raise cattle and fruit trees as he does, because it both provides a reliable income and responds responsibly to San Diego's environment: "This county is, and has been and will be always, a good grazing county – one of the best counties for cattle raising on this coast," he advises, "Why, then, not devote your time, your labor and your money to raising vineyards, fruit, and cattle" (91). Here, the Don bolsters his confidence with work he does successfully in a specific place and so implicitly defends his ownership of the land. Ruiz de Burton here accentuates that success to frame Don Mariano's choice of labor as financially and ecologically sound, which indicates that the novel values his labor above the squatters, who want to fence the land, kill the Don's cattle, and grow wheat – an unsustainable crop on the San Diego landscape. This informed perspective also figures the Don as an authority about a particular skill. Thus, the Alamars' agricultural and financial success early in the novel ties national belonging to work[ing] skill. Like Mary, Don Mariano earns his living, and so a large part of his

identity, through acquiring specific knowledge about specific labor. Characters therefore craft personal ethos in large part through work.

Using work to express personal and political identity is most pronounced in the novel's differentiation of nationally coded labors between the Darrell the American squatter – and, by extension, his fellow squatters – and Don Mariano the Californio Don – and, by extension, other landed Californios. In short, the squatters are “the planters of the grain fields” and “the Spaniards are ... the owners of the cattle ranchos” (66). The central conflict of the novel arises because these “grain fields” actually belong to the Californios, who use them for ranching but do not fence them. The entire novel – all 317 pages of it – hinges on this conflict. In other words, all major struggles in the novel occur because the work of the squatters and legislators and the work of the dons do not mix. As Don Mariano explains, this conflict is ruinous to Spaniards because the California Land Acts favor American citizens/squatters by endorsing their nationally profitable labor:

...as we, the Spaniards, are the owners of Spanish—or Mexican—land grants and also the owners of the cattle ranchos, our State legislators will not make any law to protect cattle. They make laws ‘*to protect agriculture*’ (they say proudly), which means to drive to the wall all owners of cattle ranchos. I am told that at this session of the legislature a law more strict will be passed, which will be ostensibly ‘to protect agriculture,’ but in reality to destroy cattle and ruin the native Californians.

Here, labor and nation enter a feedback loop whereby legally sanctified work defines national power. The legal work done by State legislators counters the Don's agricultural work while it supports the squatter's land rights and agricultural work, suggesting that the legal approval of work trumps actual labor and its production. William Darrell and Don Mariano's first interaction ensues after several lengthy discussions about the differences between the work of American squatters and the work of landed Californios, which highlights the way divisions of labor affect national identity. But a careful look at this distinction begs the question: does Don Mariano actually do ranch work? When the Don and Darrell initially meet, they both *seem* to be working: "Don Mariano, accompanied by his two sons, rode up to the place where [Darrell] was then superintending his workers" to confront him about Darrell's settlement on his land (79). Here, Darrell oversees the construction of his new house and "his" plot's cultivation. However, it is unclear whether Don Mariano is at work or merely using his cattle horses for the trip; the same ambiguity occurs elsewhere in the novel; for instance, when Don Mariano explains "ranching" to the settlers he befriends: "You will not have to be a vaquero. I don't go '*busquering*' around *lassoing* unless I wish to do so" (94). Work is here a choice for the Don, rather than something he must do to claim his land, as Darrell does when he fences his fields. That distinction is along national lines and identifies work as a means by which individuals locate where they live, tying national belonging to productive use of space. Darrell is also more concretely tied to labor than the Don – a feature of identity that carries significant political and class

weight when we remember that the squatters are “planters” and the dons “owners.” Ruiz de Burton thus uses physical labor to reinforce class and national difference: Darrell must work to etch out a living and claim his space, while the Don already lives in comfort and so does not. And, to further yoke Chicano ethos to national identity, the Don explains why he doesn’t have to go busquering around: “You can hire an Indian boy to do that part.”

In fact, Ruiz de Burton rarely portrays prominent Chicano characters doing physical work in the novel. Work is more often described through political debate, which questions the legitimacy of the Californios’ ecological know-how and working identity. The few moments of actual work that do occur reveal curious differences between the Californios and the American squatters and their national-class distinctions. More often than not, when physical labor is depicted in the novel, Darrell and the other squatters are the ones doing it. In that first conversation, Darrell’s work is clearly outlined: “All the crops must be in first, so that Everett and Webster could take care of the dairy, but still, Darrell made his boys give their personal attention to all the work on the farm” (78). And again, “the settlers had harvested their crops of hay and grain, and were hauling them to town” and “The whir of the threshing machines was heard in the valleys of the Alamar rancho, and wagons loaded with hay went from the fields like moving hills” (185, 286). And though the Don disapproves of this labor because it is bad for ecological and financial health – “it is a mistake to try make San Diego county a grain-producing county,” he explains, “an orchard of forty acres or a vineyard of

twenty will pay better after three years' growth than one hundred sixty acres of wheat or barley in good seasons" – his rhetoric is not matched by work on his behalf (91, 92). Instead, Don Mariano's environmental knowledge stands in for working knowledge, which Ruiz de Burton uses to amplify his national belonging and class status. But that sophisticated knowledge, though it identifies an "appropriate" labor, remains abstract, which foreshadows the Don's loss of land, class, and identity. That absence also makes Chicano ethos less stable when connected to labor. Without work – either to do or assign – Don Mariano loses his sense of self and ultimately dies.

The work done on the Don's ranch is most often represented when Don Mariano philosophizes on the laws and conditions that make that labor difficult, as in the above passage. Moreover, the few scenes in which the Don and his family are depicted doing work, it is not work they want to do nor are good at. When, for instance, Victoriano must do heavy ranch work at the end of the novel, he is unprepared for the task at hand: "he worked very hard, in fact, entirely too hard for one so unused to labor. Work broke him down;" similarly, Gabriel cannot even find work in the city: when he "[tries to] find employment to support [himself and his wife, he] found the task most difficult (344, 340). Labor done by the Alamar family also often occurs because of an action Americans take: when Clarence offers to buy and essentially save his cattle from the squatters' culling, the Don and his sons feel they must "ride out every day to superintend personally the collecting of cattle" and ensure the safety of the herd (224). Victoriano calls this work a "rodeo

triste,” accentuating the uneasy melancholy Ruiz de Burton maps onto images of Californios performing heavy labor. Moreover, who actually does the everyday “hard labor” of ranching in the novel is unclear: Don Mariano and his sons talk the talk, but the “Indians” employed on the ranch tend the cattle. This lack of actual labor muddies the seemingly clear sense of identity Don Mariano and his sons derive from their family’s ranching: if they do not ranch, are they actually ranchers? Moreover, this ambiguity blurs the ethics behind the national legality between the squatters’ fenced claims and the Californios’ established ownership. If labor is how one claims land in the novel, then it would seem that Darrell and the other squatters claim land more vigorously in the present, whereas the Californios claimed it vigorously in the past. Both, in this light, use labor to enact a version of colonizing that, if all goes as planned, leads to class ascendancy and national belonging. Thus, while Ruiz de Burton sympathizes with the Californios, she connects labor to upper class land ownership, which leaves open the possibility that working identity encourages using marginalized populations for physical labor – a pattern of American colonization that the Alamars thus affiliate with.

Figuring the Californios’ work as abstract also challenges the Californio working body. Losing that identity leaves open gaps that invite the wrong kind of work into these characters’ lives. Late in the narrative the Alamars are forced to work to save their livelihoods and Don Mariano, Victoriano, and Gabriel undertake unusual and undesirable labor with severe consequences. All three succumb to illness or injury as a result of out of the ordinary work. Victoriano loses mobility

while herding cattle on an unexpectedly inclement ride with his father: “Father, I cannot stand up. From my knees down I have lost all feeling and have no control of my limbs at all”; from the same ride Don Mariano “himself [took] a severe cold in his lungs” (302); and Gabriel, when he loses his bank job and finds work as a stone mason for which he “had no training,” falls carrying bricks up a ladder and “the bricks fell upon him” (301, 342, 347). These labors are not tasks the Alamars can be proud of; instead, their work is demeaning and cripples them physically and psychologically. Rather than being a source of pride by which they can claim national belonging and ethos, like ranching, work here is a task that marginalizes sense of self and ruins the body, in turn preventing future work. Moreover, Don Mariano and Victoriano fall victim to usually cold weather and heavy snow, which hints that their ecological labor know-how is limited and cannot adjust to changing climates – environmental or political. At the same time, however, their injuries due to unpleasant work draw attention to the way Ruiz de Burton manipulates depictions of labor for class purposes. Certain kinds of labor are for certain classes of people and blurring those distinctions has dire consequences.

These labor-class connections only seem more inflexible when we consider that Don Mariano’s children are left too crippled to do the work they should inherit – work that, as the novel suggests, they would have done successfully. The cattle, too, ultimately die: those that were not shot by squatters “perished in the snow” that left Victoriano lame and Don Mariano sick (359). And once the Don dies – when he dramatically proclaims, yoking the work that killed him to the laws

that made that work necessary, it is “Too late. The sins of our legislators!” – and the remaining Alamars are left with no resources for ranching, they agree to sell their ranch to Clarence and move to San Francisco at his suggestion: “San Diego is dead now, and will remain so for many years, but San Francisco is a good business field. So we can all locate there, and Gabriel and Tano go into business easily” (329, 359). That they move to San Francisco – the city figured as San Diego’s nemesis in railroad building – notes broader changing business and labor practices of the West. Yet that business is not a kind of labor with which the Alamar children are familiar nor is it one they perform well. If, as Lee Edelman has argued, the child represents “the emblem of futurity’s unquestioned value,” then Don Marino’s children’s disabilities, the loss of the Alamar ranch, and the loss of family’s ability to ranch effectively eliminate, in the present and for the future, not only the Californio rancher identity but also the national, familial, and financial stabilities that identity carried (4).⁶ The Californios, Ruiz de Burton suggests, are effectively wiped out by the times. Simultaneously, the children’s failures cast more doubt on the overall stability of Californio ranch work. If Don Mariano is not actually a rancher, but rather a businessman who hires others to ranch for him, and his children can neither ranch nor do business, then it would seem that the Californios have no working identity at the end of the novel. Because this loss of labor muddies Chicano ethos, it reflects that Ruiz de Burton yokes labor to sense of self to accentuate national and class dispossession.

⁶ Edelman makes his argument in the context of queer studies, but his primary argument holds true outside that context: that literature often uses children to represent the future.

And, despite the fact that his generosity and marriage to Mercedes ultimately saves who is left of the Alamar family, Clarence's key role in the decision to sell the ranch and move to San Francisco only reinforces the evanescence of a sustainable working Californio identity. The son of a squatter who refuses to do the same labor as his father on moral grounds, Clarence is the only character poised to inherit the future at the end of the novel – we learn that, once settled in San Francisco, he is “worth twelve million dollars” – and thus his work in business represents the only financially feasible future possible, other than the exploitative railroad, another business venture (Ruiz de Burton 364).⁷ The Californios as ranchers (and indeed ranching itself) have slipped into the past; the only indication Ruiz de Burton gives us of the Alamars' future is bitter and brief: had they been allowed to continue their work, Dona Josefa reflects that “Her husband would have been alive ... and her sons would not have been driven to poverty and distress, and perhaps lost their health forever” (363). Clarence and the railroad owners, all American businessmen, represent the future of California's labor: driven into the ground by the need to survive in a capitalist market that no longer rewards physical labor but instead the corruption of that labor. And indeed, when we remember the Indians who work the Alamar's ranch, that future seems an unavoidable, cyclical pattern that divorces productive land use from labor for the sake of profit and nationally exploitative work.

⁷ It is, of course, important to note that Clarence's first business venture into mining fails.

Under these parameters, it is again clear that Ruiz de Burton's Chicano ethos is an ethos-in-becoming. If the Alamars represent Spanish-Mexicans nationals, then their complicated relationship to work makes it hard to trace a logical lineage of Chicano labor. On the one hand, their failures at ranching and business at the end of the novel portend the widespread exploitation of Chicano workers by the INS in the present day. On the other hand, however, Don Mariano's choices about who does manual labor on his ranch and his national affiliations – and how they change his focus from environmentally sound work to investment in nationality – challenge several key concepts of the Chicano ethos, such as attentive proletariat consciousness, attention to the environment, and ethnic solidarity. But rather than suggesting that these inconsistencies bar Ruiz de Burton and her novel from the genealogy of Chicano ethos, I argue that identifying these inconsistencies reminds us that crafting ethos is *always* a delicate, uneven, and messy process.

IV. ON SPACE

Nowhere is the productive messiness of that process more evident than in the novel's relationship to space. Because, as Teresa McKenna argues, "the Mexican is asked to feel not only like an immigrant in his or her own land, but like an alien in society as well," the novel's depiction of space as nation weighs particularly heavy on the growth of Chicano ethos (10). While *The Squatter and the Don* uses labor to draw class and national lines, it also manipulates relationships to space to nuance those identities. On the one hand, Ruiz de Burton aligns

environmental misuse and ethnic disenfranchisement to emphasize how land and ethnicity are similarly exploited; as Raúl Homero Villa argues, exploiting Chicanos via geography reveals “manifestations of the ‘spatial practice’ of the new American rulers of the land” that unfairly privilege one ethnicity over another (2). It is in this vein that many Chicano literary scholars have argued that the novel’s Chicano ecoconsciousness offers an avenue through which to articulate racial persecution and marginalization. Yet the novel’s Chicano ecoconsciousness is not a one dimensional issue. And this outlook collapses two ways of seeing space – as ecological and as national – that are intertwined in the novel, yet treated differently and cast different ripples on characters’ lives. Depictions of space as ecological focus on the land’s environmental features and have an environmentally sensitive tone; these depictions are ultimately superseded by depictions of space as nation, which focus on how certain actions claim space as American and consequently grant civic identity and financial leverage to American citizens. In *The Squatter and the Don*, Ruiz de Burton braids these two spaces in both form and content; detangling them unveils how legally sanctioned labor in specific spaces grants national belonging and power through monetary and capital gain. Specifically, that money comes with American national expansion – like voting rights and economic benefits for those who do “profitable” agricultural work and railroad building – and the focus in the latter part of the novel on these maneuvers suggests that land is most important for those civic and economic benefits. However, the consequences of using land for profit and national identity are dire.

The results of the land laws Ruiz de Burton replicates document a series of losses that result when individuals rely on national belonging for financial stability and identity. Because these laws benefit American citizens rather than the Californios – and indeed hurt their economic and personal stability – they reflect how nationally coded changes to spatial belonging consume Chicano ethos and identity. As Don Mariano reflects,

Here we are, living where we have lived for fifty or eighty years; the squatters are turned loose upon us to take our lands, and we must pay taxes for them, and we must go to work to prove that the lands are ours before the squatter goes We, as plaintiffs, have to bear heavy expenses, and as the delays and evasions of the law are endless, the squatter has generally managed to keep the land he took, for we have been impoverished by heavy taxation while trying to prove our rights, and the squatter has been making money out of our lands to fight us with. (Ruiz de Burton 176-7)

The laws that legally codify those national lines reward not environmental but financial insight. A closer look at the explanation Don Mariano gives Clarence as to why California lawmakers chose to enact laws that disenfranchise the native Californios reveals that securing national belonging and political power is key to economic security and so takes precedence over ecological health:

California was expected to be filled with a population of farmers, of industrious settlers who would have votes and would want their one

hundred and sixty acres of each of the best land to be had. And as our legislators thought that we, the Spano-American natives, had the best lands, and but few votes, there was nothing else to be done but to despoil us, to take our lands and give them to the coming population. Then the cry was raised that our land grants were too large; that a few lazy, thriftless, ignorant natives, holding such large tracts of land, would be a hindrance to the prosperity of the State, because such lazy people would never cultivate their lands, and were even too sluggish to sell them. The settlers want the lands of the lazy, the thriftless Spaniards. Such good-for-nothing, helpless wretches are not fit to own such lordly tracts of land. (Ruiz de Burton 175)

In this explanation, Don Mariano frames land as something to “cultivate” for financial gain, which American lawmakers argue “lazy” and “thriftless” Spaniards would not do; they thus manipulate existing national divisions to justify legal decisions about land use. The Don’s rhetoric reinforces that outlook: politically sanctioned use of space determines class and civic belonging. American settlers do the “right” kind of labor, while Spanish citizens do an outdated labor that makes no money. Consequentially, national identity, which in turn confers the power of legal voting status, fosters legal discrimination, which finds a convenient outlet in forms of land use and the legalization of nationalized land ownership based on that use. Land use, in other words, gives the American government a foundation

for the civic marginalization of the Californio population – a marginalization that occurs because their political use to that government is little to none.

However, the government's desire for control of land is not only in the interest of "industrious settlers" who would farm the land productively and, as American citizens, vote for those who legalized their gain under the Land Acts. The novel's most corrupt government officials want to construct the Central Pacific Railroad because its owners give those officials financial incentives. That relationship indicates that civic control of space grants control of capital and vice versa, accentuating the connections among national belonging and financial success. Thus, land ownership, class power, and political muscle enter a feedback loop that legitimizes and privileges American nationality and edges out Californio nationality. Once the squatters and the Land Acts cause too much of a financial burden for Don Mariano and his ranch to bear, the Don turns to Clarence and explains Californio land history under that rubric. He sidelines San Diego's environmental health to explain how land ownership affects his national and financial identity. In response, Clarence offers a plan that will financially save the Californios: encourage Congress to build the Texas Pacific, which would bring population and industry to San Diego instead of the Central Pacific, which would divert both to San Francisco. That railroad would exploit San Diego's environmental health – an issue abandoned at this point in the novel – but solidify its national and capital importance, which Mechlin defends to Stanford: "We have

plenty of national resources, which, if developed, would make plenty of business” (313).

These railroad politics further trouble Ruiz de Burton’s ecoconsciousness and tip the novel’s scale toward regarding San Diego as a space important for the nationalized capital it promises. In that vein, Don Mariano shifts his focus from concern about San Diego’s ecology under the misuse of the squatters to support for the Texas Pacific, which would congest the city. When he decides to pursue Clarence’s plan, the Don’s attention to the environment fades, a change that critical work on the novel’s environmental attention has ignored, as Priscilla Ybarra’s comments quotes earlier exemplify. However, though Ybarra does acknowledge that “The colonization of the Americas by the Spanish initiated an ecological revolution from lower-impact American Indian horticulture ... to European-style ranching,” that revolution is not examined for its ecological impact (144, 145). In particular, her diction resonates with Ruiz de Burton’s tangled spatial perspectives. Calling this environmental shift “an ecological revolution” veils the violent and destructive nature of these events and unveils how supporting certain political affiliations sometimes sidelines others. In downplaying the ecological harm of Californio settlement, Ybarra’s gloss also discounts the way national belonging demands inhabitants treat land as a tool for citizenry rather than an environment that needs protecting.

Calling attention to this shift in perspective between space as ecological and space as nation also troubles the link between class and environmentally sound

labor practices that the novel advocates early on and shines new lights on that perspective. In addition to Don Mariano's advice about the financial benefit to sound ecology, the squatters recognize this connection: "Our perfect climate, the fine sloping ground of our town site, our eucalyptus trees, sea breezes and mountain air, make San Diego a most healthy little city All we want now is a little stimulus of business prosperity, and the railroad is sure to bring us that. Then San Diego will be the best place on the coast for a residence" (Ruiz de Burton 73). Proper environmental awareness produces economically beneficial results. Yet the link here between profit and environment bodes poorly for attentive land use in the future. Later in the novel, Don Mariano manipulates his ecological skill when he, Mechlin, and Holman petition Leland Stanford to build a railroad through San Diego: "having lost all my cattle, I have only my land to rely on for a living—nothing else. Hence my great anxiety to have the Texas Pacific. My land will be very valuable if we have a railroad and our county becomes more settled; but if not, my land, like everybody else's land in our county, will be unsaleable, worthless. A railroad soon is our only salvation" (315-6). Whereas once the Don objected to more settlers on the basis of their impact on his land (and wanted the settlers already there to practice his kind of labor), now he sees their financial benefit and so advocates for their arrival. As such, land becomes an object valued for how financially fungible it is. Predicting that his land would be "very valuable if we have a railroad and our county becomes more settled" ties economic benefit to California's national value as well – in this case, a denser population of Americans

would solidify both San Diego's economic health and its importance to the country. Overall, settling "our country" to ensure socioeconomic and spatial security replaces ecological attention. Preserving class and national stability, and so space as nationalized capital, outweighs environmental attention and so space as ecology. Thus, the novel's Chicano ethos focuses on the financial potential of San Diego and so centralizes the role of national and civic belonging in identity.

This overt focus toward the end of the novel on using space to claim nationality through capital gain (and vice versa) reveals the socioeconomic and national tone of earlier scenes as well. When he initially warns the squatters of the dangers of making ecologically unwise agricultural decisions, Don Mariano cautions, "The foolishness of letting all the rainfall go to waste, is an old time folly with [the Californios] But we were not then, as now, guilty of the folly of making the land useless But now ... no money [will be] made out of land, for the grazing will be useless, when there will be no stock left to eat it" (93). What earlier seemed environmental consciousness now looks like environmental exploitation: without agricultural use – grazing – land is valueless. Moreover, he asks, "is it not a pity to impoverish our county by making the bulk of its land useless," which gauges "our county['s]" productivity by economic and national barometers. Clarence, too, voices an interest in capital gain cloaked in ecoconsciousness when he affirms Don Mariano's view on planting wheat: "Now it kills the cattle, afterward it will kill the county Plant wheat, if you can do so without killing cattle. But do not destroy the larger industry with the smaller" (96). Clarence's

advice here is financial, not environmental; his argument ends with protecting “industry” and thus that industry’s capital. This aim is reaffirmed later, when he reveals his motives for buying the Alamar ranch to Dona Josefa in financial and civic terms: “Don’t forget I am a money-making Yankee. I think four—or even three—dollars per acre is a high price for land in this county now I am trying to make money out of you” (360). Though Ruiz de Burton characterizes Clarence’s argument as “wily” and his manner “earnest,” the implication that land is regarded and handled primarily as a source of income and national identity remains uncontested.

Ruiz de Burton reaffirms land as profitable nation in her reproduction of legal documents related to land use, which locates the origin of her view of space in California’s political history and so roots Chicano ethos to that history. After Don Mariano explains that the laws made “*to protect agriculture*” in truth “favor one class of citizens against another class,” “mean to drive to the wall all owners of cattle ranchos,” and “destroy cattle and ruin the native Californians” because that population is not American and therefore cannot vote, Ruiz de Burton elaborates on and quotes those laws (66):

With a date of February 14, 1872, the Honorable Legislature of California passed a law “*To protect agriculture and to prevent the trespassing of animals upon private property in the County of Los Angeles, and the County of San Diego, and parts of Monterey County.*”

In the very first section it recited that “every owner or *occupant* of land, *whether it is enclosed or not*,” could take up cattle found in said land, etc., etc. It was not stated to be necessary that the *occupant* should have a good title. All that was required seemed to be that he should *claim to be an occupant* of land, no matter who was the owner. (80)

Here, Ruiz de Burton reproduces the actual text of the Land Act of 1872 to call attention to the Act’s focus on land ownership as an avenue to legalized national belonging. The twofold legislative reason behind this Act – to bring in settlers who could claim land under American law and then become voting American citizens – gestures toward the intersections between land and citizenry in the novel. In the same vein, the Californios stand in contrast to those who own “*private property in the County of Los Angeles, and the County of San Diego, and parts of Monterey County*,” using spatial boundaries to concretize the nationality of the squatters as American and erase the national identity of the Californios. Here, land rights become a legal issue that privileges those who enact and benefit from these laws, effectively making land a tool of national belonging and civic dispossession. Moreover, the novel’s braided form, which weaves together legal rhetoric and narrative, mimics these intersections and so indicates that land is *legally* significant when it is a nation. When the novel thus puts these laws on display in the context of the Californios’ dispossession, it posits that land has power when treated as national space, not ecological space. Even when Clarence expresses his

distaste for American land politics to the Don, his comments reaffirm that nationality is defined by these land laws:

As long as you, the native Californians, were to be despoiled of your lands, I think it would have been better to pass a law of confiscation This I call disgraceful to the American name I only wish I could wipe out those stains on our national honor, by repealing at once laws so discreditable to us. Yes, the more so, as they bear directly upon the most defenseless, the most powerless of our citizens—the orphaned Spano-Americans. So, then, I hope you will help me avoid this American shame, by permitting me to pay for our land whatever price you think just. (102-3)

Again, national identity and dispossession here rest on national belonging, Clarence also subtly alludes to the degrees of power different kinds of control over land confer across those personal national boundaries. Law makers have unrestricted control over who can use land to claim nationality, American squatters use that control for financial and civic benefit, and Californios lose control in the face of those actions. These land based distinctions have class repercussions, again stressing the way legal definitions of space as national with capital benefits dispossess the Californios.

Read alongside one another, these legal documents, discussions about the railroad, and discussions about the [legal] use of space not only situate California's political history at the novel's core, but use that core to comment on Chicano

ethos and national identity. Driven to desperate measures because of these unfair socioeconomic developments, the novel's Californios must construct a relationship to land that leverages it for class and national power. The specific class identity this relationship revolves around suggests that *The Squatter and the Don's* early incarnation of Chicano ethos draws from the political issues surrounding space. And because that space is so crowded with issues of national belonging and security, there is no space for ethnic solidarity -- nor a need for it. Ruiz de Burton, in order to prove that the Californio population deserves upper class status, must pit that population against its ineffective Mexican homeland and those more ethnically connected to that homeland. The Californios, in other words, must be different.

And using nationality, reinforced by legally sanctioned labor in space, to craft ethos and identity instigates the series of losses the Californios suffer at the end of the novel that ultimately ruins the Alamars. If, prior to the arrival of American squatters and the railroad, the Alamars defined themselves as Californio ranchers, then once American squatters, politicians, and railroads change the way those who live there regard their relationship to their land, that identity is effectively made moot. That loss of self echoes in the bodily harms and death that come to the Don and his sons. And loss of self is not the only hole this change leaves: without a stable ethos, founded in a sense of productive labor, the Alamars lose the markers of identity that made them Californios and become the

dispossessed children of Mexico, abandoned by their home country and left to falter in a hostile nation.

V. ON THE AFTERMATH: THE PLUM PLUM PICKERS

Raymond Barrio's 1969 *The Plum Plum Pickers* looks at the long term effects this view of land as nationalized capital has on class politics and Chicano ethos in the Santa Clara Valley of California – a space ecologically similar to Ruiz de Burton's San Diego. In *The Plum Plum Pickers*, the Californios' – once landed gentry who employed laborers to run their ranches – "descendants" are the dispossessed Mexican-Americans who are now manual laborers in American fruit orchards – the Anglo owners of which represent the lineage of the Anglo settlers and squatters from *The Squatter and the Don*. Eerily, Don Mariano's charge to the squatters to plant fruit is realized in the exploitative employment practices of the California fruit picking industry, led by Frederick C. Turner, owner of the Western Grande Compound, Morton J. Quill, manager and warden, and Roberto Morales, head labor contractor. Together, Turner and Quill represent the now land owning Anglos who control the fate of Mexican migrant workers and Roberto Morales represents the only – ironic and painful – option for workers who want to better their class status: exploit your own ethnicity. Turner sits at the top of this food chain and his power rests on control of the land, which he acquires because of the capital and class status his nationality permits. That control also grants him the power to imprison the novel's Mexican workers by forcing them to interact with land only as environment, which bars them from national identity and class

mobility. As Turner reflects to a fellow land owner about the necessity to control space in order to control individuals and their potential personal and capital gains, “You’ve got to keep control over every single square inch of soil. You don’t let ‘em plant one goddam single stalk of corn or boom you’re in trouble” (Barrio 79).

But this novel does more than replicate the familiar Chicano class dispossession argument I want to move beyond in my discussion of *The Squatter and the Don* and so complements Ruiz de Burton’s novel. While Barrio does reaffirm similar claims about the politics of ethnic dispossession through Chicano labor – indeed, what little critical work there is on the novel largely concerns *The Plum Plum Pickers*’ proletariat thrust – the narrative’s discussion of national belonging, especially in light of its depiction of labor, complicates broad assumptions about Chicano ethos. In particular, California’s historical connection to a defunct Mexico is reflected in the novel’s depiction of unstable futures for both adults – who are figured as childlike – and children alike, both of whom are preoccupied by uncertain national belonging. The fissure between land as nation and land as ecology hinders these characters from navigating a mature and productive relationship with their socioeconomic and environmental surroundings. That relationship could shape a productive Chicano ethos but instead directs energy to worries about civic security. Thus, reading Barrio’s novel alongside Ruiz de Burton’s suggests that *The Squatter and the Don*’s earlier ethos-in-blossoming blossomed on infertile soil that ultimately eroded the elements of ethos and ethnic identity that move beyond national belonging.

Like Ruiz de Burton, Barrio links a defunct Mexican government to childhood and immaturity; he also connects the novel's "children of Mexico" to a damaged Mexican ecology. Lupe Gutiérrez, one of his central characters, for instance, recalls her childhood in Mexico as one doubly marked by illness and ignorance: "There had been disease and hunger in her childhood Two of her little brothers had died as small boys. And ignorance. Here in America she dreamed of a chance of keeping her children in school so they would not suffer from her ignorance. Every family back home had children who had died of some sickness or another" (Barrio 123). Similarly, she grows an avocado plant that she identifies with and recalls "originated in her homeland, in southern Mexico": "Like herself. Another child. A child of the earth. An earthling. This treelet would never reach maturity. She knew that. She lost too many others. It would never bear fruit. The odds were too great against it. It would never shade her nor her children" (62, 63). And her children suffer a similar fate; they are consigned to the restrictive labor of their parents and anticipate such even in their play: "The children enjoyed digging up the soft friendly brown earth. It was just another day and, like all days, full of wonder and stunted promises and twisted dreams" (68). The young children find happiness in playing with "the soft friendly brown earth," but that happiness is tinged by the limitations that engaging with space as ecology carries. Lupe's children enjoy, in blissful unawareness, mimicking the work Lupe fears will lead to a destructive personal and civic relationship to both Mexico and America. And in response, Mexico, at its physically and political distance, can do nothing about this

dispossession. The novel's children and childlike adults alike signify that stasis: Roberto Morales, as the representation of Mexico at its most "effective" captures that ineptitude because, although he is "an organization man ... a built in toll gate Had he not been Mexican, he would have made a fantastic capitalist" (85). Though he has the capacity for leadership, his nationality acts as a socioeconomic tollgate, one he cannot pass through.

But again, Barrio's take on Mexico does offer an opportunity to move beyond this familiar, one dimensional class dispossession and ask questions about how these layered elements of national belonging contribute to Chicano ethos. Manuel Gutiérrez and Margarita Delgado, another two of Barrio's key characters, articulate the consequences to personal ethos of identifying with space as nation. After Barrio casts him in terms that highlight his childlikeness – for instance, "Outwardly, physically, Manuel was rough and strong. Inside he was soft and kind and even innocent" (122) – Manuel asks himself "WHAT AM I?":

Am I a rotting weed?

Am I no good?

Am I indeed a proud Mexican?

Am I indecent?

Am I Indian?

Or am I undemocratic?

Am I American citizen?

Am I – ignorant? (158)

Here, Manuel runs through a number of identities – linked to ecology, nation, ethnicity, citizenship – that could contribute to a sense of personal ethos, but ultimately lands on a far more uncertain question that belies his lack of confidence in his own identity and the ethos it would contribute to: “Am I – ignorant?” And Margarita – a young woman, and so another child figure – worries similar issues that betray her sense of national confusion and so uncertain Chicano ethos:

What was the good of being born a perfectly good, honest, private, legal citizen of the United States of America if everyone was going to snarl Mexican in your face like it was some dirty word? Where did she belong then? Back in her mother’s hometown? Her father’s? But what if she wasn’t from any of those places either? What then? She didn’t belong there, in old Mexico, either. She was California born. California... which was once Mexico. California... which once belonged to her people, for hundreds and thousands of years. And now she didn’t belong. In Mexico, on her two brief visits, the native Mexicans there always considered her as an American. (102)

Each of these moments draws attention to how delicate the nationality of Mexican American workers is in the face of an American citizenship that only makes Chicano ethos more uncertain. Where do Mexican-American citizens of California belong, both seem to ask, and what is Mexico’s role in that belonging? Neither Manuel nor Margarita knows how to identify themselves, despite their civic membership to America and cultural affiliation to Mexico – a membership and an

alliance of which both are aware and to which both refer. Their uncertainty is rooted in a deeper ignorance of Chicano history that almost every Chicano in the novel suffers from, which further contributes not only to the childishness of Barrio's characters, but also to the novel's dialogue about Chicano historical ethos and its relationship to space. None of Barrio's Chicano characters know their racial or national heritage – even Lupe, who Francisco A Lomelí argues develops the most complete Mexican historical memory in the novel, lacks the cultural-historical memory necessary to extract her family from the destructive cycle of working class migrant labor. Ethos, it would then seem, must in part grow from an awareness of the historical roots of ethnic and national belonging – belonging that developed during the time of *The Squatter and the Don*.

Moreover, when Manuel fails to recognize the historical significance of his work above the Diablo Range, that unawareness gestures toward the divide between land as nation and land as ecology: “What Manuel couldn't really know was that he was completing yet another arc in the unending circle that had been started two hundred years before – for even the memory of history was also robbed from him Both don Gaspar and don Manuel were landlords and landless at precisely the same instant of viewing all this heady beauty” (Barrio 90-1). As an ecological space, the Diablo Ridge is somewhere Manuel and don Gaspar belong because of Mexico's historical connection to it. However, the men are “landless” because that space is ultimately American and so delinked from Mexican nationality. Land, in the novel, thus exists doubly: as an environment in which one

can live and work and as a nation to which one belongs. And those ignorant of the background of either, like Barrio's characters, are fettered to the most marginalized versions of those existences.

These moments also point to the same kind of disenfranchisement from nation the Alamars suffer. Lupe, Manuel, and Margarita all keenly feel the oppositional tugs of damaging American nationalism – which chains them logistically to poorly paid manual labor on ecological land – and ineffective Mexican nationalism – which chains them personally to a national space and government that cannot act on their behalf because their civic identities are locked to the land on which they work. Those spatial forces ultimately prevent any Chicano characters in the novel from recruiting their national identity to better their class or working situation. Moreover, that twofold pressure gets in the way of a significant growth of Chicano ethos because those who could construct that ethos cannot move beyond the problem of national belonging. Thus, the abandoned children of Mexico conceit that Ruiz de Burton articulates finds historical and contemporary purchase in Barrio's work, a lineage which suggests a long tradition of national identity overshadowing a more comprehensive Chicano cultural history. Lupe, Manuel, Margarita, and the novel's other Chicanos must navigate Chicano cultural ethos, yet are barred from doing so with a mature comprehension of the history of that ethos because debates about nationality assume center stage in the discussion. In other words, ethnicity, in both novels, becomes a question of national belonging, which reduces the identity of those

struggling between American and Mexican citizenship to legal entities and what few rights they are afforded in that contested middle ground. And because those rights primarily orbit exploitative labor on the land, Chicano and environmental misuse and abuse become linked – in both literature and criticism – in ways that only concretize national ambiguity and stagnancy by sidelining the role of nation in Chicano ethos.

Thus, California, “the richest, the greatest, most productive chunk of rich earth in the world” is tethered to “agricultural production as the US headed toward its glorious 21st century, combining big land combines with perpetual migrant slavism” (80-1). A large part of California’s richness is an ecological, which the novel’s Chicanos engage, yet the benefits of that wealth are national and capital privileges enjoyed by Anglo American citizens. If, as Villa argues, the long term “geographic displacement” of Chicanos from multiple national and cultural grounds has “been an essential element of Chicanos’ social identity,” then the intricate, troubled relationship between California and Mexico and the Chicano relationship to these spaces in both Ruiz de Burton and Barrio’s novels speak to a broader problem inherent to the development of Chicano ethos (1). Comprehensive, thoughtful, productive ethos can only develop from a full understanding of the interwoven historical and contemporary elements of ethnicity, rights, environment, culture, nationalism, gender – the list goes on. And in these novels, those elements are largely marginalized themselves in the face of a national dispossession that prevents significant Chicano self-discovery. I thus

return to Gonzales' initial question – “Can a novel in which the narrator unabashedly refers to Native Americans and working-class mestizos in a racially derogatory manner be considered politically resistant?” – and argue that yes, it can. Understanding resistance, its imperfect consciousness, its alliances and memberships, and its often illogical path shed light on the uneven, messy development of political and cultural ethos in Ruiz de Burton's novel. In the context of *The Squatter and the Don*, resistance constantly changes with the socioeconomic and spatial demands California labor laws place on native Spanish Chicanos. Moreover, more single minded resistance to socioeconomic disenfranchisement – like that in *The Plum Plum Pickers* – leads to a reductive and narratively simple representation of experience: in that novel, all major Chicano characters fall within a graph of childishness and stunted maturity that renders them one dimensional. And in a broader sense, the novel's literary reproduction of a standard Chicano class dispossession narrative belies that same single mindedness.

How then can Chicano novels be resistant? Well, it would seem that multiple resistances create a complex Chicano ethos that is chaotic but productive. By focusing on Chicano ethos and how it orbits national dispossession through labor and class in *The Squatter and the Don*, and by reading that novel against one of its more contemporary literary companions, I suggest that resistance is more personal than public, that consciousness and affiliations are fluid and develop unevenly and irregularly alongside changing historical contexts, that ethos is

delicate, winding, and responds untidily to multiple issues at once. That rubric is crucial to understanding the imperfect nature of politically inflected ethos – here, composed by class and labor – as its multiple contributions to Chicano identity often oppose themselves as they change in response to changing national boundaries.

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MEZZANINE TWO: BUYING ETHNOS & WINNING THE WEST

Hence, *The Squatter and the Don* and *The Plum Plum Pickers* both contribute imperfectly to an emergent Chicano ethos, but in doing so both call attention to the slippery nature of ethnicity when it becomes entangled in the political mesh of class, labor, and space. Cultural belonging, as my reading suggests, depends on elements that only *become* cultural over time, and through struggle. In other words, while class, labor, and space begin with relatively autonomous or traditional inflections of their own, how those elements and practices interact will define the shape of an ever-changing Chicano cultural ethos. Don Mariano's ability to manage and labor within his ranch not only defines him, but solidifies his identity as a Californio rancher – an identity with a rich historical ethos of hard work and environmental care on which that sense of self relied. Unraveling that culturally and historically “thick” sense of identity wreaks havoc on his family – indeed, informs the class dispossession that is at the root of this novel.

As reading Ruiz de Burton's novel alongside Barrio's reveals, however, a “cultural” identity without capital can barely exist or survive over time. Barrio's characters are only responsive to their immediate circumstances; they cannot maintain their own livelihoods, and so their attention must go to basic survival rather than sustaining their cultural identity. As I have argued, financial security must be in place to allow room for cultural growth and development. While the end of Barrio's novel documents the death of one of its “American exploiters,”

there is little hope that this gesture will amount to anything more than a momentary suggestion of what could have been. Though I want to ascribe a more powerful activist thrust to Barrio's text, I cannot – too little character development and a stagnant storyline only foreground the cultural losses occurred therein. Conversely, too *much* of this heroic resolve – the too evidently Significant Metaphorical Weight given to the characters and actions of the novel – turn *The Squatter and the Don* into a farcical, overwrought drama that renders the loss of community identity merely ridiculous rather than tragic.

Moreover, this impasse raises a number of additional, equally uncomfortable, questions. To be sure, despite the limitations I felt undermining them, I also found that these novels paid the some of the strongest attention to labor, class, and space as fundamental elements of the Chicano ethos. However, even if the depiction of these elements was compelling, the narrative arc that composed it usually was not. Rather, both texts rely heavily on citations lifted from outside – legal documents, radio programs, personal letters, newspaper clippings, among others – to represent the challenges Chicanos' suffered at certain historical moments, as if legitimize their right to depict Chicano experience. While these attempts at verification may well have been – and I suspect were – necessary, their repetitive rhetorical intrusions often ended up defacing the very ethos they purported to have at heart. In part *because* of their deep concern about the future of an entire people, *The Squatter and the Don* seems didactic and *The Plum Plum Pickers* shot through with grief. Shouldn't we, then read these novels as

experiments *in articulating an ethos that failed* in ways specific to the intrusion of new class, labor, and place patterns on their way of life? And if so, how can we learn from this different approach?

So I now found myself with this different question: what is it that novelists must do to carry, distribute, or balance the weight of political action and its failures effectively on their narratives' shoulders? I answered that question in different ways. First, as the end of Chapter Two suggests, those novelists must be willing to grapple with the lived ramifications of class divisions, unfair or exploitative labor, and changing notions of space that the communities they represent have faced. Second, they must honestly portray the historical circumstances at hand with a delicacy that carefully unfolds the successes and the failures of those who lived through those moments. With those new charges in mind, this next chapter studies Frank Waters' *Below Grass Roots*, John Fante's *Wait Until Spring*, *Bandini* and *Ask the Dust*, and Sanora Babb's *Whose Names are Unknown*, novels that I believe achieve a different balance of literary inquisitiveness and historical specificity. What these authors have in common is a commitment to embracing the failure of ethos without embellishment. In these four novels, the ethos of hard work well done – which was also front and center in Chapter Two – results similarly in uncertain financial outcomes, but those outcomes are addressed head on, rather than buried under a tale of cultural or ethnic dispossession that was covering for a dubious class politics from the start. In other words, while Chapter Two's characters were once “winners” of the West

that interpreted their loss as a cultural one, Chapter Three's characters are not "winners" – in fact, despite their Anglo heritage, they almost always get the raw end of the deal.

CHAPTER THREE

Sanora Babb's *Whose Names are Unknown*, Frank Water's *Below Grass Roots*, and John Fante's *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* & *Ask the Dust*: Watching the West Erode in the 1930s

I. INTRODUCTION

“This is a story about the West,” says Joe Gordon in his introduction to Frank Waters’ *Below Grass Roots*, “the day-to-day reality of the men and women who came to a frontier town to build homes and businesses and to raise families” (vii). And it is – it’s a story about the lived experiences of a lower working class family in the hostile spatial and economic climates of the 1930s – as are the other books in this chapter: John Fante’s *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and *Ask the Dust* and Sanora Babb’s *Whose Names are Unknown*.¹ But Waters’ novel (and the others) is also, as Gordon points out, about failure and its consequences: “it is the story, not often told, of those who failed” (ix). Unlike Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, the popular narrative that readers feel captures the perseverance of the human will to succeed during the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression, these novels instead accentuate the impact of financial and ecological failure on senses of self and family. Perhaps that is part of the reason they have been largely ignored – they are overshadowed by the accessibility, ultimately uplifting message, and sheer literary weight of Steinbeck’s novel. As Walter Nugent puts it, individual determination in the face of environmental and economic misery was “made legendary ... by *The*

¹ The publication of Babb’s novel did not occur until 2006, despite being written in and originally slated for publication in 1939, because the popular *Grapes of Wrath* occupied the space for the migrant worker novel and publishers thought Babb’s novel repetitive and unnecessary.

Grapes of Wrath" (242-3). This legendary status infuses current critical scholarship and popular memory of this era in the West: critics and wider reading publics alike gravitate toward Steinbeck's novel because it memorializes and projects hope for success rather than recognizes failure, a much more common fate during this time.² In other words, while the narrative is often bleak, we as readers are seduced by how, in the end, it celebrates the fortitude of the human spirit to prevail in the future, if only armed with enough determination. Popular culture and memory and critical scholarship, thus, are inclined to view the politics of 1930s' labor literature as fertile ground for stories about families and communities who conquer environmental and economic hardships together and so thrive as unified collectives.

But the novels of this chapter tell a different story. Thus, I want to recover them because they add dimension and depth to the literary history of the Depression and Dust Bowl era West through stories of splintered communities and families that uncover a hidden cross section of 1930s politics. Read alongside one another, these novels, yoked by their depictions of hardship in the 1930s West, provide a unique counterpoint to Steinbeck's dry Oklahoma and fertile California, pluralize the Western landscape with places that experienced this time period's hardship in differing ways, and challenge traditional faith in collective labor politics as they use naturalistic and realist rhetoric to paint the failing conditions

² For an historical analysis and track of this failure, see, for instance, Donald Worster's introduction in *Dust Bowl* and Michael Bordo, Claudia Goldin, and Eugene White's numerical and textual analysis of economic and ecological disaster in *The Defining Moment*.

of a multifaceted drylands Western ecosystem – consisting of Oklahoma, Colorado, and the desert regions of southern California – that do not carry the hope popular culture wants to infuse into Western hardship in this era. In other words, these novels offer a more pluralistic portrait of a diverse set of Western places during this era, which challenges the popular assumption that the Western half of American experienced 1930s ecological and economic hardships in broadly similar ways.³ Communities and families in these spaces break apart as they encounter economic and environmental crises that cut across party lines and trouble the 1930s' working class leftist ideology of and faith in the dignity and cohesiveness of labor to restore order in more stable regions. More broadly, as these authors bind economic crises to ecological crises, they resituate political identity as one rooted in and fluidly responsive to fatalistic spatial challenges that touched various areas. Reading these texts alongside one another thus suggests that the harsh ecological, economic, and political conditions of the 1930s' drylands West troubled partisan ideologies that valued organized labor and government intervention; instead, these authors position labor and its structures as always dictated by often intertwined and contradictory space and class politics. I argue that these novels represent the period's uncertainty, failure, and loss and through episodes of daunting yet constricting spaces, hard labor, and the limits of class. Together, these episodes signify declines in choice and security that individuals and families faced as the circumstances of the Dust Bowl and the Depression

³ In this and all my chapters, I consider the West to be the wide expanse of land west of the 99th Meridian, where water density and aridity rates change drastically.

dictated their lives. And, similar to the other texts of this project, these politicized and thick depictions of class, labor, and space are crafted from a detailed naturalist and realist rhetorical style that responds to particular Western places. That specificity unveils how individual relationships to class as a function of labor in those spaces draw out the subtle, cross partisan nuances of fluid and kaleidoscopic Western national and political identities.

In this moment from *Below Grass Roots*, for instance, Joseph Rogier's obsession with mining Pikes Peak reveals his anxieties about the cost of labor and its spatial challenges:

Work on the Sylvanite progressed steadily. The shaft was down a hundred feet, commonly assumed the proper depth for a level, but Rogier was insisting on another forty feet before cutting a station. Cross-cutting would then be commenced to tap the vein traversing the property. Overhand stopping, working up on a raise instead of down on a winze, he had figured would be a good thirty percent cheaper; they could take advantage of gravity instead of having to install a small lift. But it cost so much – the dom hard country rock! He had to spend half his time in town, not daring to let his business drop; it was the only source of income to carry the mine. There were no mistakes made at the Sylvanite. He went over every detail a dozen times, spent half the night figuring and brooding over his plans. (Waters 114-5)

As protagonist and family patriarch, Rogier's perspectives and demeanor set the tone for both the novel and his family. Here, his preoccupation with mining is less choice and more desperation as it continues to sap the family's finances. Despite his intimate knowledge of this labor, which Waters indicates through realist mining rhetoric, Rogier is overwhelmed by the "great Peak ... which destiny has marked for his own" and so dedicates his life to pursuing the wealth that may be hidden within (1). However, this wealth is merely speculative, which renders the success of mining the Peak uncertain. Rogier's certainty in the practice of his labor thus stands in contrast to and accentuates the actual uncertainty of space. Moreover, as the novel progresses, these scenes become more frequent, gesturing toward the increasingly constricting force of Pikes Peak and the hard labor of its mining. Thus, this moment embodies a series of interlocking gears common to all four novels: the environment shapes work – work that should, but usually does not, pay off.

That equation and its inevitable feedback loop – that space dictates labor which dictates class, which in turn determines interactions with and understandings of space – also gestures toward the main challenges of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression in America. Though historians, with a few notable exceptions, tend to study the Depression and the Dust Bowl separately (and literature of the 1930s draws the same line) the two were intimately connected.⁴

⁴ For instance, much 1930s labor literature takes place on the East Coast and in the South and concerns the Depression and union foundation under that financial constraint,

Those like Brad D Lookingbill, Nugent, and Donald Worster have found important intersections between the two events in terms of treatments of money and land, outlooks on the future, and labor relations and the growth of labor unions. The extent of the damage caused by these connections transcends the weight of political maneuvers that sought to mitigate the crises of the era. Thus, a focus on the kaleidoscopic historical-political contexts of these two events drive the four novels I survey in this chapter. Though not every novel of this chapter binds the Dust Bowl and the Depression together, bearing in mind their historical connections reveals crucial ways this literature weaves landscape and economics together to create fatalistic tapestries. Additionally, these intersections constitute the kind of literary “super lattice” I explain in the introduction. If you turn the nanostructure toward leftist community building, one narrative emerges, but if you shift that political nanostructure to account for cross partisan ideologies, a new, denser narrative lattice emerges. Additionally, my close readings compose a more nuanced analysis of labor in 1930s Depression and Dust Bowl-era space than readings done by critics like Barbara Foley, whose 1993 *Radical Representations* stands as one of the most prominent critiques of 1930s proletariat literature. While Foley’s work studies both the national influence of The Communist Party of the United States and the international influence of Marxism on 1930s’ leftist fiction and argues that both “inspire[ed] [these authors] with a sense of revolutionary possibility [while] setting the limits within which they could imagine that

whereas 1930s literature from the West is either Steinbeck or little discussed novels like Fante’s, which are studied for their ethnic ties.

possibility” (45), I argue that a closer attention to the rhetoric of the personal, familial, and communal consequences of class as a function of labor in space reveals a more nuanced, less partisan and more individual sketch of Western lived experience. My tighter focus on primarily the personal unveils a more particularized and so complicated portrait of the challenges and tolls unforgiving political, ecological, economic, and working conditions placed upon individual, familial, and collective survival in the West.

Black Tuesday – October 29th, 1929 – most often marks the Depression’s beginning, when the US stock market crashed after falling steadily since September 4th of that year. Unemployment reached 25%; both cities and rural communities were hit hard by the falling value of agriculture, industry, and labor. Except for New York City, Washington DC, Denver, and Los Angeles, large cities and rural areas saw populations decrease dramatically, while smaller cities and towns absorbed those who had failed in other areas (Nugent). Herbert Hoover, president at the start of the Depression, pushed a number of “suggested” regulations and a few Acts meant to stimulate the economy, but the broad lack of success of these ventures led to Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s election in 1932. The Dust Bowl almost immediately followed Roosevelt’s inauguration and inspired him to craft the New Deal, which aimed to redesign the national economy through increased government spending on programs that would help Americans out of

debt and install new financial reforms and regulations.⁵ Many of these safety nets benefitted farming and banking, though numerous bills constructed to aid economic reform in agriculture by controlling supply and demand never made it into law. And while these policy changes encouraged farmers to lobby more aggressively for themselves, aligning government aid with private sector demands proved arduous (Bordo, Goldin, White). As such, during Roosevelt's first term, unemployment initially fell to between 9 and 11%. But though the country started to bounce back in 1934, the roughly year long recession of June 1937–1938 put financial strain and high levels of unemployment (as much as 19%) on America's geopolitical map again. Not until the beginning of World War II – which still caused the GDP to fall and unemployment to rise, though not as dramatically as during the Depression – did the US truly begin to recover.

A large element of and indeed contributing factor to the Great Depression in the United States was the Dust Bowl, the widespread drought of the southern Great Plains that enveloped the Oklahoma and Texas Panhandles, about one fifth of Colorado, half of Kansas, and an eastern slice of New Mexico from in roughly 1932 through the late 30s. In Lookingbill's words, "Desertification [in the Dust Bowl] represented a sign of failure and would continue to plague a capitalist

⁵ For instance, see the reference acts and reforms associated with the First New Deal, including the Emergency Banking Act, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the National Recovery Administration, and those associated with the Second New Deal including the Social Security Act, Works Progress Administration, growth in labor through the National Labor Relations Board, etc.

culture” that crossed party lines (4). That area was vicious and primed to suffer the worst effects of the Dust Bowl; as Worster acutely comments:

The Southern Plains are a vast austerity. They sprawl over more than 100 million acres, including parts of five states—Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Nothing that lives finds life easy under their severe skies; the weather has a nasty habit of turning harsh and violent just when things are getting comfortable. Failure to adapt to these rigors has been a common experience for Americans, so that the plains have become our cultural boneyard, where the evidences of bad judgment and misplaced schemes lie strewn about like bleached skulls. Few of us want to live in the region now. There is too much wind, dirt, flatness, space, barbed wire, drought, uncertainty, hard work. Better to fly over it with the shades pulled down. (3)

These elements first emerged during the Dust Bowl but had roots in earlier moments: poor wheat farming practices, which rested on notions of American expansion and right to profit from land – as Worster elegantly puts it, “Americans blazed their way across a richly endowed continent with a ruthless, devastating efficiency” yet soon after “The plains unexpectedly [became] a prime example of an older America that had failed” – paid little attention to the need to work an environment with light topsoil, little rainfall, and strong winds carefully (4, 100). Following developments in wheat farming and an increase in the price of grain

during World War I, farmers began ripping up natural grasses, which protected the delicate topsoil from high winds and regular drought, on larger scales to plant more wheat and make more money. The results were disastrous. Massive dust storms became regular occurrences that choked land and livestock, infiltrated houses, and ruined agriculture and the few producing crops. Those who lived on farms found their previous work unsustainable and often turned to migrant labor, for the most part fruit and cotton picking in California. And while the government provided housing and camps at these temporary workplaces and encouraged labor unions, such measures were generally ineffective against the exploitative practices of those who owned those workplaces.

All four of the novels in this chapter respond to one or both of these historical moments. Waters' novel is set in the Pikes Peak district of Colorado in about 1937, at the tail end of the Depression; Fante's novels also take place in the late 1930s and are set in the fictional town of Rocklin, Colorado, modeled after Colorado Springs, and Los Angeles; Babb's novel takes place in Cimarron County, Oklahoma and California and begins in the early 1930s. Because these four novels cover interrelated but distinct spaces affected by the crises of the time, when read alongside one another they showcase how the economic and ecological failures of the Dust Bowl and Depression were tightly linked in the West and shook traditional partisan ideologies of cooperative labor or government intervention. At the same time, however, because not all four novels grapple with the same ecological and economic crises – Waters' novel, for instance, very much deals with

the Depression but its place is untouched by the Dust Bowl – they also showcase a multitude of Western experiences with places in crises that indicates a plurality not normally associated with 1930s Western literature. Through shared naturalist and realist episodes and metaphors of uncertainty, loss, and desperation in the face of overwhelming circumstances – in space, class, and labor – these novels contribute to a more historically precise, zoomed in literary portrait of those who failed in the West in the 1930s, a literature lacking in critical recognition and popular memory.⁶

II. ON SPACE

In each novel, ecological and domestic spaces are described as damaged, overwhelming, and constrictive; those detailed and realist depictions communicate an uncertainty about the future instigated by the Depression and the Dust Bowl. These spaces engulf the novels' characters in vastness and by the pressures of working in broken spaces, which are unkind and unreliable. When, in Fante's *Ask the Dust*, Sammy (one of the novel's periphery characters) goes to Joshua Tree to die, Arturo, the protagonist, and his love interest, Camilla, go to find him in the vast California desert – a landscape far from Steinbeck's California of fertile hope that instead carries a naturalist tone of inevitable devastation due to environmental conditions:

⁶ What little critical work exists on these novels is limited to introductions to Babb's and Waters' texts, a handful of pieces on Fante and ethnicity, and a few unpublished dissertations on Babb.

By dawn we were in a land of grey desolation, of cactus and sagebrush and Joshua trees, a desert where the sand was scarce and the whole vast plain was pimpled with tumbled rocks and scarred by stumpy little hills. Then we turned off the main highway and entered a wagon trail clogged with boulders and rarely used. The road rose and fell to the rhythm of the listless hills. It was daylight when we came to a region of canyons and steep gulches, twenty miles in the interior of the Mojave Desert. There below us was where Sammy lived, and Camilla pointed to a squat adobe shack planted at the bottom of three sharp hills. It was at the very edge of a sandy plain. To the east the plain spread away infinitely. (136)

When they arrive, Sammy answers the door “eyes grey and dazed, the hair in ruins across his forehead He was tall, gaunt, a cadaver of a man, tanned almost to blackness” (136-7). The overwhelming desert, described in terms that render it both indifferent and hostile, has seeped into Sammy and accentuates his poor health. The description of the desert that precedes Arturo’s recognition that Sammy’s future is uncertain is itself tinged with a dreary apathy that reinforces that uncertainty. And the land is also constrictive in its overpowering, depressing openness; marked by “grey desolation,” it is “pimpled” and “scarred,” “rarely used” with “listless hills” that culminate in a “plain [that] spread away infinitely.” Depicted as an ugly, almost totally open space, its unfortunate features bar the characters and the reader from feeling engaged with or energized by the space or

their place in it. As Arturo even comments of the desert later in the novel, “Across the desolation lay a supreme indifference You could die, but the desert would hide the secret of your death, it would remain after you, to cover your memory with ageless wind of heat and cold” (164). Sammy thus represents the desert in human form and the effect of that desert on the human form: he is listless, physically desolate, and confined to what amounts to little more than a hovel.

Moreover, when he begins to lose his health, Sammy goes to the desert to work, where “he lived in a shack, writing feverishly”: here, health and work are yoked together and Fante’s descriptions of both reflect the surrounding desolate landscape (116). In the context of the Great Depression, Sammy’s financial focus – he is “interested in the financial side of writing more than in writing itself” – also gestures toward a loss of self and choice in the darkness of poverty, reinforced by his shabby condition (138). Arturo himself experiences a similar moment when a drunken woman who lives in the same hotel as him criticizes his writing and causes him to disparage his situation: “the absurdity of a hopelessly bad writer like myself buried in a cheap hotel in Los Angeles, California, of all places, writing banal things the world would never read and never get a chance to forget” (81). Again, personal situations and living conditions reflect one another and transcend political ideology. When read in context of Fante’s depictions of LA, that dark sense of anonymity and decay becomes even more poignantly biting. LA is a “sad flower in the sand” populated by “frame houses reeking with murder stories” and drab scenery; Arturo recalls one night when “I went up to my room, up the dusty

stairs of Bunker Hill, past the soot-covered frame buildings and along that dark street, sand and oil and grease choking the futile palm trees standing like dying prisoners, chained to a little plot of ground with black pavement hiding their feet. Dust and old buildings and old people sitting at windows” (13, 12, 45). Rather than being the glitzy land of opportunity he loved at first, LA is a drab, dirty, depressing reminder of his personal and financial struggles as a writer. Arturo himself makes that connection when an earthquake literally tears LA apart; he takes the widespread destruction as a sign that his lifestyle and working habits are destructive and must change: “This was the turning point. This was for me, a warning for Arturo Bandini” (99).

The disappointment of California ecology plays a similar role in Babb’s *Whose Names Are Unknown*: when the central family, the Dunnes, decide to leave their Dust Bowl attacked home in Cimarron County, Oklahoma, they are lured by the prospect of a friendlier space and better working and living conditions in Imperial County, California – a prospect that does not bring immediate success. Mrs. Starwood, an older neighbor who spearheads the move, dreams “Maybe someday I’ll have a little farm in California,” but still recognizes the working and financial challenges that lie ahead: “We got to pick a lot of fruit though” (124). These dreams, however, are quickly compromised as the Dunnes, Mrs. Starwood, and Freida (a young woman from their hometown who comes along to California) recognize frightening ecological similarities between California and Oklahoma: “The shadow of the car slid along the east side of the highway, blotting the

sagebrush and the cracked dry earth Jagging crazily through the great desert, the yawning, parched mouths of narrow gullies showed their sandy tongues. Julia leaned wearily against the back of the seat Her head was tied with a cotton bandana to keep the dust from her hair” (133). Though the dust here comes from the desert climate of Southern California, it leans heavily on the characters’ psyches and feelings about space because it reminds them of conditions back in Oklahoma. Again, the desert is described in naturalist terms as a palpable force of decay and depression; linked to the backbreaking, confining work of cotton and fruit picking – “Damn cotton picking will break your back,” in Milt Dunne’s words – the landscape in California recalls the difficulties they had in Oklahoma (133). When they move on from the desert, the next town is no better. Calipatria is “an uninteresting prospect. The gray stone buildings squatted along the dusty streets like tough beetles” (134). Their attitudes toward this space color their perception about future possibilities; as Mrs. Starwood reflects on the distance between their expectations and the truth: “Holy Moses! This is a lonesome-looking place Suppose we been hearing things again?” (135).

California, in both novels, represents a better hope for the future – as it did for many migrant working families during the Dust Bowl – that is ultimately suppressed, both metaphorically and literally, by its spatial conditions. The better futures, which both the Dunnes and Arturo Bandini looked for in California, turn into uncertain futures reinforced and reflected by indifferent and hostile landscapes. This loss of future stability points to broader losses of the Great

Depression and the Dust Bowl. While every family in the area suffered the effects of inclement weather and hostile land, in these novels those material hardships not only cast doubt the future but also rendered the individual members of those families themselves more uncertain and broke ties that were thought unbreakable. In *Whose Names Are Unknown*, Milt's father elects to stay behind on the farm in Oklahoma – a decision that depresses him and the rest of the family – and his character is not heard from again. *Wait Until Spring*, Bandini sees Arturo's father, Svevo Bandini, conduct a complicated affair of both sexual and class transgression around Christmas, tearing his wife and domestic space apart: "The house lost its identity now The world of inanimate things found voice, conversed with the old house, and the house chattered with the cronish delight of the discontent within its walls" (*Wait* 72). In *Ask the Dust*, his constant poverty and subsequent relentless begging strain Arturo's already estranged relationship with his parents. And Rogier's desperate obsession with the mining and the Peak literally break his family when his son-in-law, Cable, dies because of the effects of mining. In each case, the constricting conditions of space revisit and reflect the irreparable stress placed on family structure during the Depression and the Dust Bowl, gesturing toward yet another loss of certainty – that of the family bond. And filtering these losses through individual actions pushes against the strength of community other novels of the era portrayed by the success of the broader political identity of the collective.

Even when California enables more favorable working conditions compared to the Dust Bowl's more ecologically unsound spaces, Fante's naturalist depictions of its spatial realities disable an easy working life in that space. While superficially California's fertile spaces offer better chances for financial and familial success, these spaces are difficult to adjust to and take their own toll on those who inhabit them. When Arturo finds out about Camilla at the end of *Ask the Dust*, he realizes "She couldn't stay in Los Angeles. She needed a rest Laguna Beach! That was the place for her" (Fante, *Ask* 156). And he finds what he imagines is the perfect place, a direct opposition to the overwhelming grind and difficulty of Depression Era Los Angeles: "A tender day, a sky like the sea, the sea like the sky. On the left, golden hills, the gold of winter Camilla's land, Camilla's home The house I liked was a twin-gabled place, with a white picket fence around it, not fifty yards from the shore. The backyard was a bed of white sand. It was well furnished, full of bright curtains and water-colors" (159). But Camilla fails to accept the conditions of her new home and instead disappears into the desert, wherein Arturo is unable to find her. As the house stands in stark contrast to every other space of the novel it represents a spatial salvation; thus Camilla and then Arturo's departures mark the more gentle landscape as a place neither belongs. Salvation, it turns out, cannot hinge on merely location. Instead, the twin-gabled house gives way to the desert, which in comparison had "no roads, no towns, no human life ... nothing but wasteland for almost a hundred miles" (164). Losing Camilla to the overwhelming, desolate desert – already a place of uncertainty and death in the novel – cuts the

possibility of her from his life, let alone the certainty. Moreover, she leaves Arturo's promise of a steady income and quiet life in an actual house, where they could live as "brother and sister," which undermines Arturo's last hope for firm spatial and family structures in the novel (156). At the end of the novel, he "got back in the car, started the engine, and drove back to Los Angeles," which puts Arturo on the move through space, rather than rooted in place. Coupled with his move from the house, back to the desert, and then further back to LA, the end of the novel reinforces Arturo's loss of choice and security and his uncertain future on the horizon (165).

While Arturo's final move through overwhelming, unfriendly space symbolizes loss and uncertainty, the Rogier family's rootedness in the same kind of highly detailed space signifies a similar loss of perspective and individual power in *Below Grass Roots*. The title alone suggests that the novel orbits spatial entrenchment, especially when read alongside Rogier's returns to the mountain at the beginning. He

glimpse[s] again, after an absence of only months, that great Peak rising over the ears of his team; to watch it take shape above the forested slopes of pine and spruce and sparse aspen, above the frost-shattered granite of timberline; to see it stand at last an imperturbable sentinel on the crest of the Great Divide which separates earth and heaven as it does dreamless sleep and wakeful consciousness – to meet it thus, face to face, was to arouse in Rogier a resurgence of those inexpressible thoughts and conflicting

emotions provoked always in a man who returns to a realm which destiny has marked for his own. (Waters 1)

Rogier sees the Peak literally above all other elements of nature, which accentuates its prominence in his mind. Here, the Peak subsumes man and the nature around it, marking the mountain early in the text as the most overwhelming and naturalist space in the region. The towns at the base of the mountain similarly compose “not so much a landscape as a state of mind” that reflects the scarring and overwhelming presence of the Peak:

the high bare hills seamed with gulches, hirsute with gallows frames, smokestacks, and shaft houses, corroded by glory holes and splotted with ore dumps; the shabby little towns cluttering the gulches with squalid shanties and whose stubby streets were blocked by canyon walls or mountainous tailing dumps; the refuse-laden gullies below and the dizzily winding roads and railroad spurs above; the pale sparse aspen groves and dark patches of pines, the clouds filling the canyon; and rising above all, the snowy summit of the Peak itself. (174)

Here, the mountain controls the mood and shape of both nature and man-made structures; it engulfs the region in its vastness and casts a decaying shade on the space around it. Rogier even sees the mountain’s influence when union strikes derail mining work and bring violence to the area: “Enveloped by black clouds through which protruded only its pale summit, it looked like a ghastly spider

waiting in its web....it looked like the bloodless face of a giant underwater squib spewing out its inkish black fluid to poison all it touched" (35-6). Here, he extends the mountain's influence on man and nature, suggesting that the Peak subsumes leftist efforts toward community labor; instead, the Peak envelopes and poisons those who live in the area and the space, turning them dark and violent. The Peak's overpowering presence thus seeps into every aspect of life, especially labor related issues, and tears men from the galvanizing forces of 1930s proletariat politics.

Furthermore, Rogier reasons that the land inspired violence because it is "A raped and gutted earth that finally had turned on those who thought themselves its masters," lending it an autonomous, naturalist authority that resonates with the acceptance of nature's power in this era – an authority that ultimately destroys sense of self (35). As one of those masters, Rogier initially returns to "a realm which destiny has marked for his own," a space that he feels connected to and as if he can control. But ecological reality undermines his senses of ownership, mastery, and destiny and instead overwhelms Rogier so much so that his identity collapses into the Peak: "He had been born for this, geological eras, biological ages ago. Born as an incipient mammal to grow into an individual egohood only to seek and to find at last that universal self which combined within it both himself and the massive Peak whose granite armor he was meant to pierce" (74). Here, Rogier's diminished sense of self relies on the overwhelming force of labor and is divorced from the community of miners with whom he works. By this time in the novel,

Rogier ceases to understand himself as an individual outside his obsession with the Peak and its mining – for instance, he notes that both his and the mountain’s “future lay in depth.” Even earlier, he identifies with the Peak in a particularly disturbing way: “It looked, from where he sat at 11,000 feet, as close as a face in the mirror, one whose features he knew better than his own” (3). In these two moments, Rogier yokes his own biology and humanness to inhuman rock, deeply rooting himself as a natural extension of the mountain itself, which is unfriendly and brings no success or pleasure. That link reflects his loss of choice and community: because Rogier believes destiny and biology have joined him to the Peak, he dedicates himself to it with so much of his time and energy that he now does not choose but feels “meant” to pierce the mountain, losing his individual humanity.

Working the mountain’s mines successfully, of course, turns out to be an impossible goal that ruins the family’s stability. Ona and Mrs Rogier dream of moving to town and buying a “a fancy place like those in the North End with an iron fence and statues on the lawn,” but Rogier and ultimately Cable’s (Rogier’s son in law and Ona’s husband) desire to live near the mine and attend obsessively to its needs confines the family to brutal spaces and shakes their relationships with one another (79). When Cable takes Ona and their children to see their new plot of land near the mine, Ona is dismayed: “She could see well enough the dry prairies stretching eastward, brown and unfenced; the rough dirt road crawling so far back to town [she] covered her mouth with a handkerchief and snuggled

Leona against her breast to protect her from a dust devil that came whirling across the plains” and advises Cable “we ought to be in town, closer to water and trees and where the children can get to school.” Her dislike of the place is a dislike of a land that is unfriendly and difficult to live on comfortably and is without the necessities one needs to sustain a family. Moreover, Cable further shakes their familial stability when he insists they abandon that plot to move closer to the mine to another depressing, uncomfortable, and difficult place they cannot leave. The new house is “set on the street parallel to the high railroad embankment” and so the “shrill blast of the [train] whistle [and] ... the piercing scream of brakes” are heard and the “roar of the train [shakes] the house” on the hour (173). Living there is a consequence of the mine that affects the entire family structure – which March, Cable and Ona’s son, unknowingly pinpoints one evening while the family sits silent in the living room: “Here he sensed an ungiven bluntness, a tautness in the very air” (175).

Cable’s Depression era obsession with mining the Peak for profit saps him of energy and destroys his sense of self as well as his place in the family. Ultimately, the Peak and its work kills Cable; when March is told to go to his grandfather’s house so that he does not witness Cable dying, his entrance reflects the tension the Peak places on his whole family: “The boy did not move or speak. He clenched his teeth in a vain effort to stop the echo of a rattle that shook his whole body” (241). Cable’s death too is marked by the Peak: behind his death is “the same enigmatic mountains, the same curse that had killed Tom [and] old man

Reynold,” as is Ona’s realization that losing Cable means losing her self as well: “Henceforth she was to be not an individual but a part, indistinguishable from those others who had failed to escape their ancestral womb” (244, 243). Here, family is not the ties that bind but the ties that constrict, because those ties are rooted to a place that brings ruin and ends in death. Against the grain of popular memories and traditional literature of the 1930s, thus, Cable’s death illustrates how individuals can become divided over linked ecological and economic hardship, rather than roused to achieve a common goal.

Babb’s central family in *Whose Names Are Unknown* suffers similar challenges to and constraints placed on their family structure because they are trapped in or overwhelmed by a place consumed by the Dust Bowl. When the dust becomes particularly heavy at the Dunne farm, Babb calls it “a new attack of nature ... an evil monster coming on in mysterious, footless silence. It was magnificent and horrible like a nightmare of destiny towering over their slight world that had every day before this impressed upon them its vast unconquerable might” (77-8). Here, she uses naturalist rhetoric similar to Waters and highlights the uncontrollable force of space on human life, despite efforts at cultivation. Like Rogier, Babb’s patriarchs – Milt and his father – stand between awe and fear of the dust storms. And also like Rogier, this straddling comes about from a sense of connection to and ownership of the land that men individually express early in the novel: “They looked at the land they had planted the day before, and the land they would plant this day, and they felt a sense of possession growing in them for the

piece of earth that was theirs” (6). But, again like in Waters’ novel, that sense of mastery over an overwhelming space brings uncertainty and failure into their lives. Later, Milt’s father recalls what living in that space for so long has taught him and paints a very different picture: “I got nothing for my work, and I ain’t the only one....I may lose my farm and then there’s no place to go. No more new land, no more free gold out west” (101). As the Dust Bowl progresses, outlooks on the present and the future change and reflect the failures the time period carries with it. Here, ownership is not something that comes easy given present circumstances and instead brings with it a host of problems – failure, loss, uncertainty – to entire families that ultimately undo senses of communal work on difficult land.

As the climate and land get harder to manage, the characters’ reactions and perspectives get more desperate, reflecting a continued failure of secure living patterns. Lives are scarred by dust and dirt, homes and living patterns upended by the consistency of the Dust Bowl and the relative inconsistency of everything else. Julia, Milt Dunne’s wife, keeps a journal of the weather and her naturalist-like records are poignantly summed up by her only comment on April 5th, “Today is a terror” (Babb 90). On April 10th she writes,

Blowing all night again and all day today. Got up at 5:30, very dark and dirty. At nine o’clock a car stopped and people wanted a drink. Looked like bandits with noses and mouths tied up, faces and hair dirty, and clothes covered. They told us people in town were asked over radio to keep porch lights on overnight to aid someone who

might have to get out. Said hospitals refuse to operate on anyone unless it's life or death. Some people getting dust pneumonia. 10 a.m. Just lighted lamp, fierce dark at times. Hope those people get where they are going safely. (91)

The poor health and general condition of those that Julia meets indicates how such a space constrains all who live there. She recognizes the wider scope of these problems too: "It is just terrible for everyone. The drought years are bad enough but this is almost more than people can stand on top of being so poor from the depression and all....If the land is ruined we can't just sit here and starve" (93). Here, she links the Dust Bowl to the economic troubles of the Depression, accentuating the devastating link between financial and ecological ruin – they will starve without ecological and financial stability. The dust is a relentless force that saps certainty from everyone's lives and ruins not just the land and income but families as well; the journal ends when a neighbor, Mr. Starwood, dies alone trapped overnight in his truck due to a dust storm; the event prompts Julia to stop writing: "No use to keep writing on dust, dust, dust. Seems it will outlast us" (95). Her hopelessness here points to the overwhelming insistency of the Dust Bowl, specifically how that overwhelming power can cause even the most hopeful to admit defeat or the most secure community efforts and families to fail.

When Milt and Julia finally decide to take the family along with Mrs. Starwood and Frieda to California, their move recognizes that the Dust Bowl and the Depression's unforgiving financial and ecological consequences ultimately

become too much for even the most stalwart: “The never-settled hearts of these pioneer-bred people, working hard to make a lifelong home in an unrelenting land, stirred uneasily and dreamed of newer lands” (62). Milt’s father stays in that “unrelenting land” that he identifies as a “lifelong home” – here, the land and his dedication to the farm preside over his dedication to family (126). The old man thus loses his choice to leave and stay with his family because of his overpowering connection to the land. These losses are foreshadowed in his thoughts on the landscape and his family’s property that the chapter opens with:

The dust was blowing thinly off the field and over the yard like a worn and dingy curtain flapping disconsolately at the window of the world. Through it the old man saw the faded landscape, gray and colorless except for the line of half-dead trees along the creek. *It will be another year, he thought, before the high wide plains are green.* He turned away. (125)

That desolation and desperate landscape reveals how much his decision is governed by an irrational connection to an unfriendly landscape. His personal politics, thus, respond to a constricting landscape that bars him from community effort. The obligation he feels tears him from his family, despite his own unhappiness with his decision: “Tears ran down his brown weathered face” as the Dunnes leave (128). As the family prepares to drive off, he “[stands] back away from the car” and remarks again on the landscape, its recalcitrance and isolation: “In this ethereal light the prairie became more vast, more immense, the whole

plain seemed unpeopled and deserted” (128). Here, the environment both determines and reflects the grandfather’s state of mind; it is “vast” and “immense” and so its overwhelming power bounds him to it and tears him from his family, causing his loneliness that he then sees reflected in the plain which seems “unpeopled and deserted.” The chapter and Part I end when “Feeling utterly desolate, he tramped off toward the dry creek,” accepting the loss of his family and community in exchange for the familiarity of unfriendly surroundings (130). Proletariat visions of 1930s cooperation find no place here, as Oklahoma’s naturalist overtones compel individuals to act, foolishly, alone.

III. ON LABOR

Each of the novels in this chapter also look at how these unfriendly landscapes make the hard work that occurs in them even more challenging; the difficulty of that work consumes those who labor because they feel compelled to keep pursuing familiar labor that fails given the social, ecological, and economic contexts of the Dust Bowl and Depression. Labor’s all encompassing nature also swallows individual will – those engaged in hard work they identify with often feel they have no choice but to turn themselves over to that pursuit. Ultimately, work’s all consuming presence in these four novels leads to a loss of identity, self-value, family security, and certainty about the future because those who work obsessively over identify with and measure their self worth by labor that increasingly fails.

That presence simultaneously shakes the leftist ideology of the dignity of labor as work in these novels goes largely unrewarded.

In *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, for instance, Fante's naturalist descriptions of unfriendly climates dictate Svevo Bandini's mood and sense of self, which in turn affects his barometer that measures the success of his work and his life. Bandini's work in unfavorable conditions connects a hostile environment to the loss of labor and so economic security, and by extension the loss of psychological stability: "He came along, kicking the deep snow. Here was a disgusted man....He was cold and there were holes in his shoes....He hated the snow. He was a bricklayer and the snow froze the mortar between the brick he laid" (Fante 11). This connection between ecology and labor is not without precedence; Bandini also recalls "build[ing] a fireplace in a mountain lodge. It was dangerous out there in the winter. He had said the devil with danger ... he needed the money. But the roof of the lodge had caved beneath the suffocating snow" (12). Again, his work, its payoff, and his sense of self are compromised by snow, which "harassed him always." Labor that is already hard thus becomes harder when climate comes to bear on that work; that difficulty encapsulates Bandini's own frustration with the change to his working patterns, which he unleashes on the snow: "in his fury he plunged into the deeper snow off the sidewalk, letting his anger fight it out with the snow" (14). This moment of frustration with the hard work of bricklaying in poor conditions foreshadows the difficulty Bandini will have maintaining the security of his life as his labor continues to overwhelm him and determine his self worth. Again, the

naturalist links among living conditions and financial health point to individual politics that keep those individuals from communal effort: Bandini always works alone.

Like Bandini's reaction to snow is dictated by its effect on his work, Rogier's relationship with Pikes Peak in Waters' *Below Grass Roots* – which manifests because he is both obsessed with and repeatedly disappointed by mining the mountain – changes his perception of labor, space, and his own sense of an independent self. This is, again, in large part because the physical work of mining is so arduous and often ends in failure. *Below Grass Roots* depicts how difficult mining is in a realist tone, especially in an unforgiving climate:

Everything had gone wrong from the start. The Gloriana ran into water. Cripple Creek from the beginning had been known as a wet mining district. Annual precipitation of from fifteen to eighteen inches accumulated water which had no outlet from this big granite bowl of porphyry. Hence the depth limit of all mines was restricted by the underground water that filled the shafts faster than it could be pumped out....The Gloriana lay in a steep gulch that received the runoff of the snowpacks on the very summit of the Peak. There was no going deeper. (4)

Though mining, like bricklaying, is nearly impossible in these conditions, "Rogier was stubborn;" when his partner, Reynolds, advises him that they would hit water quickly on drilling, Rogier disagrees and shouts, "Keep going down!" Like Bandini,

Rogier is compelled to keep working despite unfavorable conditions – here, despite the wiser advice of those he works with. When Reynold’s prediction comes true, Rogier looks upon the mountain and is “discomfited by its metamorphosis from the intimately personal to the monstrously impersonal. It was as if that great living entity had withdrawn into a sheath of ice which it was melting, day and night, to flood his world with water” (5). He feels betrayed by the mine, as if a personal relationship has been breached. Opening with the impossibility of mining the Gloriana – “This ain’t no mine. It’s a well,” Reynolds tells him – and Rogier’s bizarre relationship to the Peak thus introduces mining as hard work that engulfs individual sense of self in an obsessive loop of trying and failing to achieve impossible labor in a recalcitrant, but seductive, space. Moreover, coupled with this early glimpse into Rogier’s unhealthy relationship with the mountain and its mines, this moment gestures toward the lack of choice Rogier experiences when mining takes over his life: he feels compelled to continue because the almost human, overwhelming presence of the mountain tempts him to subdue it through work he is mistakenly convinced he can complete. His relationships to the men who work alongside him are similarly damaged, indicating a disconnect between the typical proletariat faith in collective labor and Rogier’s individual obsession. Rogier, trapped by his compulsion to subdue the mountain through mining, cannot leave his job.

Waters exposes this lack of choice and compulsion again when work begins on the Sylvanite and Rogier’s obsession prompts him to begin the job unprepared:

Little it mattered to Rogier that the plank shaft house and tool shanty looked like backhouses in Poverty Gulch, that everything was covered in muck and dust. He had not installed a single line of electric lights; the men were compelled to use carbide lamps. Nor had he put in a compartment shaft or cage. The men had to be lowered down in an empty ore bucket, coats over their heads to keep out the drip of water. The huge iron boiler that had been so laboriously hauled up the trail still sat unused on its frame....

No, nothing mattered to him if the plant was good enough to pass inspection. His one concern was to go down, down below grass roots. (165-6)

Rogier's obsession with mining sidelines more important matters and blinds him to what needs to be done – in this case, fixing up the mine so that it is safer for the men. Even though Reynolds dies in an earlier disaster at this mine – which should have signaled to Rogier that he needed to change his approach – his compulsion to work and tame the mountain overwhelms his sense of priority to others. Moreover, this section is followed by another thick, realist description of mining labor and the hard manual work it demands. Hard work is thus again linked to failure and loss of choice because of the mine's overwhelming power and recalcitrance. Rogier even anticipates the likelihood of this failure when he compares his mining to earlier mining that easily found and claimed “a vast unexplored treasure chest, half buried, whose hinges a man's burro might accidentally kick off and reveal the

hidden gold ... And now, down in granite, they were coming up against sterner stuff" (23). Yet that recognition does not challenge his decision to keep working in unfavorable conditions, even when his attempts to work consistently fail or end in disaster.

The hard, unrewarding and unsuccessful labor in these moments signifies not only the broad failure Rogier experiences when he attempts to mine the mountain, but also reflects the more personal, specific failures that accompany hard labor in each novel. When Reynolds dies because of a mining explosion that episode demonstrates how powerful and dangerous mining is to individuals when they work alone. His death comes immediately after Rogier finally recognizes the mine's obstinacy: "Rogier nodded. It was the same old story. Gash veins. Low grade ore. Laborious work. And dangerous" (43). Yet this recognition does not hamper his insistence that they keep working before *and* after the accident to offset the financial loss they have already suffered. Though Rogier mourns Reynolds' death and "on the perimeter of his thoughts, like a wolf at the edge of firelight, there prowled the specter of an accusation that he might have replaced those old timber sets" that collapsed beneath Reynolds, his guilt is absorbed by and his attention quickly redirected to mining: "Mostly he puttered around the dump and the ore bins, selecting the best samples. These he ground with mortar and pestle, pouring the pulverized ore into a white saucer and adding three or four drops of sulphuric acid" (44-5). Though the physical labor and danger of mining kills Reynolds and brings a temporary halt to its heavy labor, Rogier returns to meaningless, yet

familiar, mine-related chores. His return to mining work distracts and distances him from the event, signifying his dependence on work for self stability and his refutation of community input and organization. Mining is both at the root of this disaster and its antidote, which highlights the circular path Rogier follows because of the lack of choice he has along that path. Even though losing Reynolds should serve as an early sign of danger, Rogier's reaction is not to forgo mining but do more of it. Thus, though failure is staring him in the face, working the mine possesses Rogier, even as success becomes even less viable and Depression era economics take their toll. As March learns in the midst of these disasters, "not every venture, not every man, is unavoidably marked for success" (198).

In *Ask the Dust*, Arturo is also trapped by his labor – writing – and, similar to Rogier, it overwhelms his ability to make his own choices. Like mining imprisons Rogier through the temptation of success and the reality of disappointment in *Below Grass Roots*, writing – especially as an isolated pursuit – entraps Arturo because it consumes his energy on both ends of the spectrum; his failures – both in writing and elsewhere – leave him without the wherewithal to choose another kind of work, whereas his successes inflate his oversaturated, and so easily punctured, ego as a great writer. When Camilla rejects him, he responds by working obsessively: "I sat before my typewriter and worked most of the night" (Fante, *Ask* 108). He continues to write through that fall, channeling his energy into work; he asserts "I worked hard," and "Day after day I worked"; similarly, when he runs out of food and money, poverty "drove me to the typewriter. I sat

before it, overwhelmed with grief" (109, 27). Though writing seems a coping strategy here, it more resembles further punishment: in both cases he writes nothing he can publish because his sense of failure seeps into his writing. In this way, Arturo's personal failure begets a social and financial failure common to Depression era unemployment: the failure of isolated working situations. In the same vein, when Arturo struggles to write another piece for publication because his poverty and lack of publications depress him, he calls that period

The lean days of determination. That was the word for it, determination: Arturo Bandini in front of his typewriter two full days in succession, determined to succeed; but it didn't work, the longest siege of hard and fast determination in his life, and not one line done, only two words written over and over across the page, up and down, the same words: palm tree, palm tree, palm tree, a battle to the death of the palm tree and me, and the palm tree won.... (17)

Whenever Arturo talks about the work of writing, he hones in on its difficulty and the energy it takes to complete it, especially when he writes as a reaction to failure. Here, writing "palm tree" obsessively indicates a fruitless labor that produces no profitable result. He writes because Camilla rejects him, he writes when he has no money and no prospects, and each time, he writes without producing text; in contrast, when he writes his editor, Hackmuth, a letter he remarks is "easy" to write, Hackmuth asks to "remove the salutation and ending ... and print it as a short story for my magazine" (33, 56). Broadly, when his work thus has the hue of

desperation, it inspires feelings of failure and when it has the mark of joy or ease, it inspires his sense of success. However, even his few and far between successes reveal how Arturo's sense of self is determined by writing.

Arturo's sense of success is measured by outside sources – Hackmuth, publication – and thus his sense of self relies on those barometers. In other words, when forces beyond Arturo confirm his failure or his success, his sense of himself as a writer and an individual mimics those judgments. However, that mimicry does not generate a supportive community; rather, it further isolates him from those forces because of the power they hold over his sense of self. His mood and self value shift depending on how successful others perceive his work, which gives his labor and those who read it significant power over him. Arturo thus loses his sense of self in his work and its reception, a loss that points toward a larger failure of his independence. He often shames himself dramatically for being a poor writer – “Ha, great writer this!....Oh you lousy fake, you phony, no wonder you can't write!” – which early on accentuates how his sense of self responds to writing (18). When, for instance, he distributes copies in his hotel's lobby of the magazine in which is his first short story is published and they remain unread, gathering dust, Arturo is “dishearten[ed]. A big woman in one of the deep chairs had even seated herself upon a copy, not bothering to remove it....Once in awhile, every few days, I rubbed my handkerchief over them and scattered them about. They always returned untouched to the neat stack on the library table. Maybe they knew I had written it, and deliberately avoided it” (52). His mood drastically changes not even a page

later, however, when a young fan comes to tell him how much she loves his story. His excitement betrays his sudden good mood: "Welcome! Have a chair! What's your name? Of course you can have a copy. Of course! But please come in!" (53). He asks her to read his story out loud and his overzealous reaction indicates the excess of his joy: "the little girl read my story with a soft sweet voice that had me weeping at the first hundred words. It was like a dream" (54). And when Hackmuth informs him that another magazine wants his letter turned story, Arturo praises himself for imagined success: "Arturo Bandini, the novelist. Income of his own, made it writing short stories. Writing a book now" (133). His happiness and his sadness, and his sense of who he is and what he does, are thus balanced on the success of his work and his sense of being a successful writer. Without moments of success confirmed by others – like Judy's reception of his work or Hackmuth's approval – or in the presence of moments that shame his writing, Arturo collapses into depression, as he did when his story was ignored. His inability to extract himself from this vicious cycle gestures toward the control writing has over his life, rather than the dignity his labor could impart.

Arturo's sense of self and self-value are thus dependent on his work as a writer; his father, Svevo, suffers a similar fate in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* as his sense of self is lost in his work as a bricklayer. He often needs his labor to feel proud especially in the context of the Depression, when jobs were scarce and men measured self worth by providing adequately for a family: "He was a bricklayer, and to him there was not a more sacred calling upon the face of the earth....no

matter what you were you had to have a house; and if you had any sense at all it would be a brickhouse" (*Wait*, 74). To Svevo, his bricklaying is a noble labor that he does with skill and precision that produces a tangible object and so palpably represents financial stability.⁷ Fante also reflects the reverse in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*'s younger Arturo, who gauges and judges people by their labor. Angry with his unrequited love for Rosa, he demeans her father as "a Wop coal miner...a goddamn lousy coal miner....so low down he had to work in a coal mine. Could he put up a wall that lasted years and years, a hundred, two hundred years? Nah...he had to go down under the ground and make his living like a damn Dago rat" (50). Here, Arturo compares Rosa's father to his own and rationalizes that his father is superior because of his labor, which produces durable structures above ground rather than merely collecting material underground. More specifically, Arturo degrades Rosa's father's labor on the basis of its relationship to space. Salvatore, Rosa's father, must go down – in both status and in reality – to do his work, whereas Svevo remains lofted by his work building brick structures. Here and consequently in *Ask the Dust*, Arturo's measurement of pride and success by labor is a mechanism that reveals how particular kinds of work are more desirable, profitable, and noble than others during a time of financial restriction when physically proving financial success was a challenge. Again, leftist conceptions of the dignity of labor give way to unhealthy perceptions of individualistic self pride

⁷ Bandini is Italian, yet he and his family often sideline their heritage to prove themselves true American citizens. See Rocco Marinaccio's "'Tea and cookies. *Diavolo!*': Italian American Masculinity in John Fante's *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*" on national identity in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*.

that undermine more traditional associations between 1930s' labor politics and community galvanization.

At the same time, Fante uses Svevo's work for and affair with a wealthy widow to accentuate the personal failures Svevo's constrictive labor have brought about. The widow tries to make conversation by asking Svevo if he knew of paintings and cathedrals she admired in Italy, but Svevo "had seen none of these....He had worked hard as a boy. There had been no time for anything else" (176). And again, when she asks him about a writer from his own province, "he found himself unable to say more on the subject" because his work had always dominated his life, even as a young man (177). In the face of these inquiries, Svevo is silent and uncomfortable: "he turned his head in confusion, his gaze following the heavy beams across the room." Moreover, Svevo's disengagement from his own national identity effaces whatever national or international working class partisan maneuvers might positively contribute to his success in America. The only parts of the conversation he can contribute to are those which involve his work – "Did he like to lay brick?" she asks when he is obviously overwhelmed by her cultural knowledge – or otherwise lead him back to his work; when the widow brings up the climate, for instance, "He spoke then tumbling out his torment at the weather" and its effect on his bricklaying. This narrow conversation showcases the ways Svevo's hard labor has failed him and constricted his choices as an individual; without time or energy for a life outside of work, he cannot create a stable sense of self defined by anything but labor.

Without other means to support his sense of self value, Svevo's pride in his work indicates an unhealthy reliance on labor to cultivate a sense of self. When Svevo's lack of knowledge of his homeland's culture blunts his sense of pride, he begins his work on the widow's fireplace. Though his focus is to complete his job, that skill unknowingly reinforces his self worth. He is "Determined that the job should last a full day" to prove his ethic and proficiency (178).⁸ Fante's detailed, realist description of the work he does on the fireplace that follows this determination reaffirms Svevo's sense of self because it reinforces that he knows and does well a particular skill in isolation. For instance, at the end of a long day working, Fante hones in on Svevo's reflection of his work: "He had done a careful job: not a speck of mortar was smeared on the faces of the brick he had laid. Even the canvas was clean....She noticed this, and it pleased him" (178). The widow's approval strikes a cord in Svevo because that outside praise lends him interior pride and value as a bricklayer. She tells him "You're a splendid worker" and "those words almost pinched a tear from his eyes....She had called him a splendid worker, and rewarded him with more work [on her other house's fireplace]" (182-183). Outside perceptions of work determine his personal assessment of the value of his labor – the compliments he receives on his work are for him, as they were for Arturo, the most important components to his sense of identity. And that these compliments are directed Svevo, who deliberately does not belong to a labor

⁸ The rhetorical relationships between *Wait Until Spring*, *Bandini* and *Ask the Dust* preview the similarities in labor patterns between Arturo and Svevo – both Svevo's bricklaying and Arturo's writing is formulaic, done step by step, and methodical – which suggests that styles of labor are pre-determined, genetic traits.

union, challenges other popular 1930s' proletariat novels' depictions of communities organizing to collectively benefit from a job well done.

The widow's continued praise also limits his choice as it draws him from his family and renders his identity as a husband and a father obsolete when he remains at work instead of returning home for weeks. His confidence in his work rests on approval from others, which strains his family life: the widow appreciates his work while Maria, his wife, does not. The widow's constant rewards for his work – including getting him a heater to keep his working space warm and a better pair of shoes – reward the success of his labor and so reinforce his individual identity as a good bricklayer; after getting the heater, he looks at it and imagines telling her, “you're looking at the best bricklayer in Colorado, Lady” (190). Compared to Maria's reaction to his labor, that self satisfaction is what entices him to stay away from home during his work – he knows Maria “might sneer” at his labor and she attacks him for being away rather than acknowledging his financial gain and good work – but in the widow's house “there was no question of his ability” (182-3). But avoiding his role in his family and thus jeopardizing his family's stability reflects the way hard work that he is praised for determines his choices and isolates him from broader support. Work, thus, controls his sense of self, which in turn controls his personal decisions and how he spends his time. Though his relationship to work is superficially more positive than his son's or Rogier's, Svevo's nonetheless dictates his choices, controls his sense of self, hurts his family security, and ultimately brings financial and personal failure to his life.

Rogier's entrapment in his work in *Below Grass Roots* also effaces his personal life through isolation: mining absorbs his attention so thoroughly that he, his better judgment, his sense of humanity, and his relationships to his family and his fellow workers are destroyed across multiple planes because of his dedication to working the Pikes Peak mines. When it becomes evident that the mine will fail and Rogier himself figures the cost to be beyond their means, mining overpowers his sense of protecting the family's financial security: "Damn the expense! He knew what he wanted: the Sylvanite" (Waters 93). He thus continues to ensconce his family deeper in poverty to satiate his obsession, which indicates how mining dictates his decisions and prevents those decisions from considering broader communities. Waters also brings to light how physically dangerous and blinding this obsession is when Reynolds' death forces Rogier to close his mines for a brief period. He loses the false sense of security he derived from the lack of choice mining's entrapment brings and longs to get that security back. As a result, he thinks not of Reynolds or his death but the mountain and its "divinity of its everlasting promise of fulfillment, the diabolic cruelty with which it had blocked his every attempt to plumb its mystery! Yet never for an instant, even now, did it occur to him to give up his search" (58). Even though he recognizes that mining killed his partner and the mines have thus far resisted even his most extensive attempts to turn a profit from a good vein, the challenges he faces only reinforce his determination. Rather than a sign of strength, however, in context of the events of the novel, his single minded, self determination is a fault that puts Rogier

at the mercy of mining and leaves him no choice but to keep mining despite its costs.

That lack of choice also points to Rogier's loss of self and financial independence in the consistently hard, all encompassing labor of mining. As mining consumes his life with its rigor, it simultaneously consumes his previously successful identity as an architect: "Of cool, calm Rogier, master builder and contractor for \$100,000 jobs, there was now no semblance left" because of his investment in mining (109). Later in the novel, when his crew begins to lose faith in mining, Rogier becomes even more dedicated. At night, he stays in the bunkhouse at the mine instead of going home to his family because he is so compelled to continue to work when his men leave, sacrificing his identity as a friend, fellow worker, husband, father, and grandfather to maintain a "relationship" with the mine. His obsession haunts him even at night; he cannot sleep because "through floor and earth and granite, from the deep heart below, would come the measured rhythmic beat of the cosmic pulse of the Peak. With its throbbing in his aching head, he would get up, wrapped in blankets, and stare out the window" (211). Here, Waters' naturalist depiction of the mountain and its mining prospects have literally gotten into Rogier's head and change his priorities, sense of self, and sense of reason. And not only does mining keep him up at night, but also swallows him during the day. He "prowl[s] alone through abandoned drifts, stopes, and cross-cuts. And the deeper he descended the more secure he felt...He could feel its rhythmic beat, feel it close around him and adhere with the

familiar and comforting illusion of adding another strata to his being” (212-3). Here, Rogier needs to be in the presence of the mine to feel stable, even when that stability is an illusion. He becomes more and more individualistic, delusional, and obsessed with mining toward the end of the novel; Rawlings, his partner after Reynolds, even notices the change in Rogiers’ behavior as mining continues to fail and that failure undoes him: “But what was wrong with Rogier, to be so blind to the obvious? Rogier, he observed, was more nervous and erratic than ever before....And what was worse, he was gone for days at a stretch – up to his blessed mine in the mountains” (225). Failing prospects at the mine do not discourage Rogier nor indicate that he should return to architecture; instead, because he has lost all sense of himself as a being separate from the mine, he has no choice but to pursue his obsession at all costs, which in turn effaces the little sanity and security he had left.

Rogier isn't the only one in the novel who mining destroys; his entire family suffers in one way or another because of the overwhelming power of that labor. Most telling is how mining comes to ruin Cable and Ona’s life together and their lives as individuals with personal interests, needs, and history. Before Cable goes to the mine to work full time, he visits the Indian reservation he grew up on to reconnect with his roots. There, he feels alive and at home, but once he returns, working at the mine makes him forget his Indian roots and respect for his people’s traditions; when he condescendingly offers the reward of his mining – “Gold. Big nuggets” – to an older Indian, the reply is harsh: “The old Indian gave him a

penetrating stare and grunted he picked a lump of dirt the size of a marble and handed it to Cable. 'Gold no good for Indian. This more better" (216). Cable's response is ambiguous and denotes an uncertainty with himself he did not feel on the reservation: "Cable laughed. Slowly his face changed as he crumpled the dirt between his fingers. 'No, no good for an Indian.'" Cable here recognizes how far he is from his roots and those he once felt connected to, yet that realization does not dissuade him from mining, the pursuit of which only tears him further from the communal work and atmosphere of the reservation. Ona's earlier objections to his mining and her sense of what it will do – when her father insists that Cable should mine, "she felt impending a disaster that would rend her apart" – thus foreshadow how mining will undo Cable, his sense of self, personal history, familial ties, and ultimately his life, fulfilling her fear of an uncertain future with an insecure family (190).

Expectedly then, when Cable returns from a full season at the mine, mining has sapped his physical health and that decay hurts the family, which points to the deep scars mining has left on the Rogiers and their family structure. Waters relates, in a detailed, realist rhetoric, that Cable is "gaunt, hollow cheeked, and coughed continually [his skin] had lost its swarthy and was now an unhealthy yellow. His big dark eyes were somber and without luster....He was dull, tired, apathetic" (215). Cable's illness draws him into himself and also worries Ona, which removes both of them from the family structure and further divides the Rogiers from one another. As Cable grows sicker, "Ona every moment gave the

sick man her undivided care....But he, the beloved object of [her] unceasing attention, seemed oblivious to all" (239). His illness and the ripples it causes thus not only rip deeply into the family's security and relationship, but also point to the larger failure Ona sensed when her father first wanted to include Cable in mining. When Cable dies, his death sends Ona back to her parents' house to live, but not without repercussions. Ona recognizes that Cable's death now binds her permanently to her parents – she mourns losing "the precious independence for which Cable had stood against the Rogiers" – yet his death leaves her isolated from them as a family (243). Her isolation prompts her to think of all those connected to or in her family who were brought to death by mining, as it "seemed to her that the pattern of life in this gaunt old house never changed" (244). Mining thus consistently leads to personal failures: it entraps those who engage it and drains those who do it until death, causing individual sense of self and the stability and connections of families to fail. As Ona reflects of her own family at the novel's close, "She, with March, Leona, Nancy, and Mrs Rogier were imprisoned hostages to Rogier's monomaniacal search for gold in the Sylvanite, come what might."

The first part of *Whose Names Are Unknown*, set in Oklahoma, reaffirms this paradigm. In Cimarron County, the difficulty of compulsive labor in an unfriendly landscape that farmers are deeply attached to dictates choice and breaks families apart, ultimately leaving the Dunne family and others around them facing an uncertain future. From the beginning of the novel, Babb articulates that farming in the area affected by the Dust Bowl is difficult and causes undue stress.

When Milt wants to try wheat farming on their drying land, his father objects until their usual crop of corn can't grow in the climate: "The old man finally gave in. Life could not be any harder than it was or money more scarce" (3). And again, later in the novel, when older farmers discuss the ecological problems of the Dust Bowl, they mourn the current difficulty they have with farming given how they have changed the land over time: "We've been here for years and the dust wasn't so bad before the land was mostly all broken. The wind is bad enough anyway without blowing our wheat out," one points out. Another agrees, noting what they've learned from their time working the landscape, "And we need tress. My wife said we ought to plant trees because the place was unnatural" (97). The third attempts to distance the dust from its root in poor farming practices and instead indicates a lingering hope for the land that is still tinged with uncertainty: "We got a fine country, big and rich as you can find anywhere in the world, I reckon, and if things were right we'd be getting along fine" (98). These disagreements over the shape of labor on unprofitable, fatalistic land challenge leftist partisan ideologies of farmers joining to work together to pursue common survival. Community action, thus, remains a fraught issue that those who traditionally work alone cannot undertake.

In both these episodes, farmers realize the challenges of farming under current circumstances but are reluctant to change working patterns they use to build their labor identities. Those who work the land for resources therefore recognize aspects of the problem, but feel trapped by the promise of what the land could provide (and what it provided in the past) and so feel they have no choice

but to keep farming their individual plots. That “promise” of future prosperity effaces good reason and lets man think that his labor is ultimately a good choice, or a choice at all; Milt’s father thinks of how working the land in a familiar way lets man “[make] a good life for himself....Farmers around him would not be living the way they were if this were not true. The earth was generous and could give him his needs” (39). Blinded by what was once the land’s potential, farmers continue to work in nearly impossible circumstances because they stubbornly hold to the notion that the Dust Bowl will naturally end soon and their past farming practices will then go well, affirming their identity as Western farmers who chose profitable American land.

But part of the reason these men are left without choice is because their identities and senses of personal success are yoked closely to work they know well that once went well on their own land, which blinds them to the ecological and financial challenges of farming in the Southern Plains during the Dust Bowl. Even as it becomes more and more obvious that the Dust Bowl makes their labor impossible, Milt hangs onto his identity as a self sufficient farmer and still feels that “nothing was quite like the satisfaction he felt after he planted or harvested a crop. *This kind of feeling is one of the things a man lives for ... the feeling that I made something, I made something with the soil, together we made a crop grow in order and loveliness*” (58). Similarly, Milt and his father “looked over the land they had planted the day before, and the land they would plant this day, and they felt a sense of possession growing in them for the piece of earth that was theirs” (6). But

it is this sense of pride and ownership that deprive men like Milt and his father of choice. Their “sense of possession” makes them feel inherently tied to the land, as if it is their responsibility to continue to labor even when failure is on the horizon. That their senses of accomplishment and identity are tied up in this work makes continuing, despite all odds, a matter of individual pride and stability that proves rightful ownership of space. Even though the output of farming declines as they continue to grow crops in Cimarron County, the novel’s farmers feel that their futures are certain when rooted in a labor they trust will return to normal. Like the other male protagonists in this chapter who lose themselves – and perhaps even hide from the certainty of failure – in work that is familiar yet failing, these men are thus compelled to be isolated farmers even in the midst of terrible conditions.

This need to stand and work on familiar ground pulls multiple families apart in the novel – as when Milt’s father chooses to stay behind at the farm – and so gestures toward an uncertain future in that place, which reflects the era’s linked uncertain futures in financial, social, and spatial security. Families run into trouble even before they are official, which further casts the shadow of ecological failure onto community and the future. When Anna and Max, a young couple engaged to be married, talk about the future, their conversation is tinged with uncertainty and orbits shaky family structures: “And now what have we got?....My wheat ruined, so I’ve lost my start. We can’t get married on nothing, and things are even shaky with the folks. Yours are still safe; I’d be taking you from something sure, and I can’t do that” (106). For the younger generation to talk directly about the uncertainty of the

future because financially sustainable labor is impossible in that future reveals how much those who lived through the Dust Bowl relied on their labor for their livelihoods. Correspondingly, it foreshadows the long lasting linked environmental and economic damage the Dust Bowl and Depression caused. And that yokes the Depression's economic loss to the ecological loss of the Dust Bowl, again reinforcing the novel's naturalist roots. As the financial setbacks of the Depression moved across the country, the work and working identities of those living out West were compromised by not only environmental restriction, but class limitation as well.

IV. ON CLASS

In each of the novels in this chapter, class lines function as limiting forces that lock characters in spaces and to forms of work that themselves become yoked to particular economic spheres. Class mobility is thus not only impossible, but striving for it ends in multiple losses, especially when that mobility is pursued by individuals and not communities. In other words, living and working patterns both reflect and reinforce class status; labor in space is tied to particular classes, as is the case when Arturo calls Rosa's father "a goddamn lousy coal miner....so low down he had to work in a coal mine," using the space of his labor to accentuate his low class status (Fante *Wait*, 50). This feedback loop calcifies classes and their divisions spatially, which calls the possibility of class mobility into question. More than just a reflection of the economic stasis of the Depression, however, this lack

of mobility also suggests that class effectively inhabits characters regardless of socioeconomic status. And that lack of mobility is doubly reinforced when characters of each novel flirt with people and objects from classes other than their own; those moments of class transgression, especially when they result in the illusion of gaining social capital, are followed by losses on both personal and public levels.

In Fante's *Ask the Dust*, Arturo's obsession with money, what it can purchase, and how it conveys class status reveal inflexible class lines that persist despite outward appearance – an inflexibility that haunts and harms individuals and their relationships with one another. When Arturo meets Camilla, he disparages her choice of shoes because they “emphasize the fact that you always were and always will be a filthy little Greaser” (44). Although Arturo uses her shoes in part to degrade her nationality, he also notices that they are dirty and old, which reflects her lower class status.⁹ Camilla buys new shoes in response, which only reinforces this association between ornamentation and class. However, while her “new white pumps, with high heels” are clean and nondescript and indicate that she possesses purchasing power to better her situation, she ultimately trades them for her old shoes, which reaffirms her persistent lower class identity (60). That series of choices emphasizes that when individuals make isolated class based decisions, those decisions often end in further alienation and failure. Fante reinforces this connection between the outward image of class status, especially in

⁹ See Charles Scrugg's ““Oh for a Mexican Girl!”: The Limits of Literature in John Fante's *Ask the Dust*” on nationality and racism in *Ask the Dust*.

terms of clothing, and personal finance when Arturo earns some money by selling his letter turned story to Hackmuth:

It was the finest suit of clothes I ever bought, a brown pin-stripe with two pairs of pants. Now I could be well dressed at all times. I bought two-tone brown and white shoes, a lot of shirts and a lot of socks, and a hat. My first hat, dark brown, real felt with a white silk lining. I changed behind a curtain stall, put on everything new, with the hat to top it off. (58)

Here, Arturo's sense of success is reflected in the outward signs of that success: nice clothes. However, like Camilla's flirtation with an object of the upper class does not last long, Arturo grows uncomfortable in his new clothes and when he looks in the mirror, "The image in the glass seemed only vaguely familiar":

All at once everything began to irritate me. The stiff collar was strangling me. The shoes pinched my feet. The pants smelled like a clothing store basement and were too tight in the crotch. Sweat broke out at my temples where the hat band squeezed my skull. Suddenly I began to itch, and when I moved everything crackled like a paper sack....I pulled everything off, washed the smells out of my hair, and climbed into my old clothes. They were very glad to have me again: they clung to me with cool delight, and my tormented feet slipped into the old shoes as into the softness of Spring grass. (59)

Both Arturo and Camilla attempt to embrace elements of upper classes – here, nicer clothing – but neither can sustain the illusion. They remain locked to their lower class outfits and so also to the lower class. Though the failures here are personal and minor, they nonetheless recall the broader failure of family at the end of the novel, when Camilla and Arturo separately desert the beautiful middle class cottage Arturo rents on the beach for far more uncertain, lower class spaces. Especially in light of the fact that Arturo returns to LA after that failure, such episodes indicate that gestures and mobility toward the upper class are illusions that fail, have painful consequences that ruin communal relationships, and only reconfirm lower class status.

Similarly, in *Below Grass Roots*, the Rogiers set their sights on the class ascendancy mining could bring, if it were only profitable – yet no labor is profitable during the Depression, especially physical labor out West. Mining, rather than producing excess wealth or changing class status, only barely makes enough money to fund itself; instead, it dashes hope and threatens financial and individual security. Especially once Cable leaves for the Indian reservation, Rogier “was feeling a squeeze:” he cuts Ona’s monthly allowance in half and writes Boné, his nephew, for an investment because “To sink the shaft would be expensive” – the only form of communication he has with Boné, which casts him as little more than a financial resource (126). This is not the first time mining has cost Rogier more than he has available; when Ona and Cable marry, “The wedding bills kept comin in....And yet all these were but the last embroidery on the immense tapestry

of Cripple Creek debt Rogier has woven: pumping equipment for the Gloriana, hoist machinery shipped to the Magpie, supplies drawn by Reynolds from an Altman store, and an overdrawn account on a Victor bank” (56). Even without the wedding expenses, the Rogiers’ finances are unforgiving and mining thus binds them to the working class. Mrs. Rogier recognizes this as it becomes apparent that their financial troubles will never cease:

To give up her last lingering hope of moving into a mansion in the North End was for Mrs. Rogier a feat of renunciation accomplished without bitterness or regret. She sat rocking in front of the window, counting off on her fingers the ragtag and bobtail of town who had struck it rich at Cripple Creek....more than forty who had become millionaires and were now the cream of North End society! Why was it that Lady Luck had led these men to fame and fortune instead of Rogier, so much smarter and more deserving. (57)

Here, mining and its failures have chained the Rogiers to their Depression era working class lifestyle, rather than providing the wealth they imagined. In her comparison between her husband and the men who have made money on mining, Mrs. Rogier falls prey to the myth of easy class mobility that she sees in others from a limited outside perspective. Because she fails to take into account the actual experiences of those who “struck it rich,” her comparison only undermines the apparent lack of “bitterness and regret” she claims and reinforces that class mobility is only an illusion. Additionally, that comparison draws sharp lines among

those who mine for a living, reinforcing the isolation this labor encourages and the communal ideology it discourages.

Moreover, Rogier's own thoughts on the weight of such repeated failures on his family indicate both the false allure of mining and its actual, ultimate financial hopelessness and how those facts bind families to unsteady futures and thus undo them. He thinks of his children, who witnessed and lived through mining's "hopeless incertitude;" they are

Children tinged with the bitterness of the wealth and luxury at their hands' reach but forever beyond their grasp, and touched by its splendor too. Children of that soil who hated it and yet were bound to it forever. Who loved it and were driven from it by the same blind fury that brought their fathers....They were the poor and their lives would enrich the earth. They achieved no dreams. (65)

Again, as the marker of the future, these children indicate a loss of security and certainty – financial and personal – that labor promised. The financial difficulties alluded to here are like the financial difficulties that prevent Mrs. Rogier and Ona from achieving their dream of living in North End. Working on difficult ground may have a tantalizing sheen, but in reality that sheen is dulled by socioeconomic failure. That these children would “enrich the earth” but “achieve no dreams” for themselves yokes these losses of hope and class ascendancy to the soil that their families are inextricably linked to. The lower class these families are part of thus functions like quicksand that ensnares the individual: the labor of mining makes it

impossible to achieve class mobility and so reflects that the period's rate of physical labor's success in this kind of rural region was drastically low.

Like mining, bricklaying in *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* is also inextricably linked to the lower class and that connection widens the gap among classes via labor. Svevo's work for and affair with Effie in her mansion only reaffirms this fact – instead of helping Svevo climb the social ladder, her social capital only tears his family apart and accentuates his personal lower class status. Fante narrates the affair from the outside in to establish the class dynamics of that relationship: he first introduces the widow, Effie Hildegarde, as a member of a class much higher than the Bandinis. While buying groceries on a credit account the family cannot settle, Maria learns that Mr. Craik, the grocer, saw her husband “up around Effie Hildegarde's house....[she's] got lots of money....Owns the street car company....Owns lots of real estate in this town” (105). Not only does that scene cast a shadow on Svevo's actions – Maria did not know where he was, and he was with another woman – but it also draws a sharp line between the Bandinis' poverty and Effie's wealth. The same thing happens when Arturo and August, walking home from school, spot Effie and Svevo in Effie's coupe. The boys argue about whether or not to tell their mother and whether or not their father is wrong, and their arguments come down to class difference. While August is upset over this first glimpse of the affair and defends his mother – “Just because Mamma hasn't got good clothes...” – Arturo is proud of his father for catching the attention of a wealthy woman and grows angry at August's disapproval: “You're just like

everybody else. Just because Papa's poor" (121, 122). Here, August acknowledges but does not despair his family's poverty, while Arturo disparages it and approves of his father's temporary class mobility. And even though Arturo's criticism is complicated by his dedication to his own family – "this was Effie Hildegarde, one of the richest women in town. Pretty good for his father; pretty swell. She wasn't as good as his mother—no: but that didn't have anything to do with it" – his admiration of his father's class jumping trounces the shame of his adultery and his failure to be a good family man (125). Again, sharp class lines are drawn to separate Svevo from both his family and from the upper class in the novel, which in turn hints at the inflexible class identities that come to haunt the affair.

After Svevo unsuccessfully tries to return home (Maria explodes at his return, claws his face bloody, and kicks him out into the snow), Fante uses the details of the affair to bring to light sharp divisions between the upper and lower classes that cannot be successfully crossed, as well as the power those divisions underpin. With Effie's class status already in the forefront, Svevo's thoughts brings lower class labor into the story and Fante uses them to draw a distinction between production and ownership: "That was it, Maria. A woman named Hildegarde had called Rocco and told him that her fireplace was out of order....'You go, Svevo,' he said. 'Maybe you can make a few dollars before Xmas.' That was how it started" – with labor (172-3). In comparison to his labor, Svevo's recollections of the house reveal that class gap:

A town of ten thousand people, and one woman owning most of the land—who among those ten thousand could avoid knowing her?....That was the first time he saw the Hildegarde cottage, a famous place around Rocklin because the stonework was so fine. Coming upon it in the late afternoon, that low house built of white flagstone and set among tall pine trees seemed a place out of his dreams: an irresistible place, the kind he would some day have, if he could afford it. (173)

Between the initial introduction to Effie as a solid member of the uppermost class in Rocklin, the extent of her land ownership, the fine architecture of her house, and Svevo's admiration and desire for it "if he could afford it," commerce emerges as the glue that links labor, class, and land together. Moreover, that the affair takes place solely in her house and under her terms suggests that money conveys power and can draw individuals away from their communities. Svevo's only role in the house is to service Effie and reconstruct the fireplace – here, a luxury that showcases wealth – and because that job fixes a non-necessity, it renders Svevo's work a non-necessity by association. His labor is thus downplayed in comparison to the wealth it begets for others. Money is the centerpiece of this affair, and thus the affair takes on the hue of class transgression.

But the affair itself is slow to start; early in their "courtship," Svevo works hard at the increasing number of odd jobs Effie finds for him rather than responds to her advances, which registers Svevo's unease with upper class habits and so

reinforces that he belongs in the lower working class. Yet the seduction of class success keeps him at her mansion and his discomfort in that space troubles the commitment to the ideology of a communal working class. His work is only broken by her insistence on upper class rituals like tea and formal meals, which Svevo feels uncomfortable participating in because they remind him of his class status: “Those grimy hands of his were unworthy of this,” he remarks of washing up in the “jewel-box” powder room before one meal; and “He had always identified tea with effeminacy and weakness, and he had no liking for sweets” he reflects about taking tea one afternoon (179, 180). Coupled with his imagined insistence to Maria that an affair was the last thing on his mind at first – “No Maria, not even her high heels, her thin blouse, the fragrance of the perfume in her dark hair, moved him to a stray thought of infidelity. As before he watched her in wonder and curiosity: this woman with a hundred, maybe two hundred thousand in the bank” – the initial descriptions of Svevo and Effie’s interactions more indicate a class transgression than a sexual one (178). Svevo is highly aware of the class difference between the two and, rather than inciting jealousy or lust, it incites “wonder and curiosity.” Here, Svevo is more like a boy discovering a new way of life that he cannot access, rather than a man embarking on an affair to achieve class mobility: he remains uncomfortable with the luxury Effie lives in, which solidifies his own lower class status. Like Arturo and Camilla changing back into their “poor clothes” in *Ask the Dust*, Svevo “prefer[s] the kitchen sink, just as he did at home” to the powder room and tries to refuse the new shoes she buys him:

“You give me work, and I buy my own” (179, 194). The accouterments of the lower class are comfortable and familiar, unlike those of the upper class. Familiar class lines are thus inflexible and limit characters in these novels to particular living habits.

When these limits are crossed, the results of transgression are devastating. When Effie grows tired of Svevo’s reluctance to take her hints, she draws him into the bedroom, has him pour her a glass of wine, and lies down on the bed. As she lures him closer, Svevo’s discomfort grows: “He could not be sure of himself. He squinted his eyes as he watched her. No—she could not mean it. This woman had too much money. Her wealth impeded the imagery. Such things did not happen” (198). This discomfort finds its roots in class difference, which casts their affair as class transgression. When he thus refuses her, Effie taps into that class based unease and calls after him, “You fool!...You ignorant peasant;” it is this insult that brings him back to the bedroom to indulge her fantasy and reclaim his own power, despite his lower class status: she “cr[ies] with ecstatic pain, weeping that he have mercy, her weeping a pretense, a beseeching for mercilessness. He laughed the triumph of his poverty and peasantry. This Widow! She with her wealth and deep plump warmth,” (199). Here, the power of class not only incites Svevo to return to Effie – he wants to prove his self worth in her eyes despite being poor – but also is what Effie now reveals drives her desire for Svevo. Their affair exists in the gap between their class statuses and so satiates a desire for class novelty they both have. Both thus use the affair to participate in class transgression – here, an

experiment wherein an individual wields class power over one of another class that speaks to how class divisions spawn isolation rather than community.

While he works in her house, “a place where he did not belong,” Effie sustains their affair by wielding her consumptive class power to accentuate the restrictions Svevo’s lower class identity produce. To showcase his constricted power and choices, she dons nice dresses, buys Svevo expensive gifts, and initiates “A strange rendezvous. No kisses and no embraces” (200). Despite those gifts, Effie never pays Svevo, which renders him financially dependent on her, binds him to her space, and disables his choice of class status. Though he imagines that eventually “He would leave, never to return. In his pockets would be money,” Svevo’s lack of capital reveals that his sense of individual and class power is false. Instead, objects and habits of upper class life tantalize Svevo and satiate him into remaining under Effie’s control:

Meantime, he liked it here. He liked the fine whiskey, the fragrant cigars. He liked this pleasant room and this rich woman who lived in it. She was not far from him, reading her book, and in a little while she would walk into the bedroom and he would follow. She would gasp and weep and then he would leave in the twilight, triumph giving zest to his legs. The leave-taking he loved most of all. That surge of satisfaction, that vague chauvinism telling him that no people on earth equalled [sic] the Italian people, that joy in his

peasantry. The Widow had money—yes. But back there she lay, crushed, and Bandini was a better man than she, by God. (202)

While gender and nationality play roles in Svevo's analysis of their affair, I argue that class lies at its heart. If Effie were American but poor, she would not hold the same appeal. Her wealth is what draws Svevo to her, and his poverty draws her to him. And though he leaves "certain he would not return," Maria's violent outburst drives him back "in less than an hour" (208). Without the means to support himself and without the support of his family structure, Svevo must return to Effie for protection, which gestures toward the power her class stability grants her over him. Here, class's impact on individuals' senses of themselves and relationships to one another uncover more personal, nuanced interactions than do broader depictions of partisan affiliations to leftist ideologies do of those who participate in them.

When Svevo is left alone in the house for the first time, he carefully explores Effie's belongings to reassert his independence; he desires to affirm his self worth and feel personal security by becoming familiar with and comfortable in the upper class despite being from the lower: "Here was a new world and he wished to know it well" (211). But Effie gives Svevo a key for the side door and requests that he make himself scarce when she has guests over, a class performance that undermines what power he draws from access to the house and further isolates him. Not only has Svevo thus lost the security of his family, but also the self-assuredness and class power he imagined he had over Effie. And though he

recognizes the unevenness of their relationship and uses his labor again to justify his self worth – “The stupidity of his position revolted him. What manner of jackass was he, that he could be led away by the nose because people were coming to this house? He was no criminal; he was a man, a good man too. He had a trade” – his failure to leave the space of the upper class undermines what pride his labor could produce, and so diminishes his sense of self worth (216). Svevo is thus compelled to stay with Effie and submit to his role as her lower class plaything until Arturo and his dog turn up at Effie’s house and prompt her to call them “You peasants,” to which Svevo retaliates, “Animal that you are!” (264-5). Here, both Effie and Svevo rely on class-based insults to claim control over and locate personal strength in their class identities. The novel, however, ends on an uncertain note as Svevo and Arturo walk away from Effie’s house: Svevo tries to reassure Arturo that all will be right come spring, but a single snowflake falls on his hand. Though the class transgression of his affair is behind him, his own poverty, lack of organized community support, and the difficulty of his work paying off stand in front of him, which emphasizes the uncertainty of the future for the lower class. Indeed, in light of the ending, Svevo’s affair looks like a desperate attempt for certainty in a space and climate unfriendly to his work and so his income, his attraction to Effie’s lifestyle an attraction to a security his own class and its limits cannot provide.

Rogier experiences that uncertainty of personal and familial lower class living patterns in *Below Grass Roots*, especially as mining saps more and more of

his family's money and pulls restrictive and damaging class lines tighter around them. But rather than just experiencing it, Rogier amplifies that uncertainty and the family instability it brings when he tries to draw his family financially into mining. When he tries to convince his nephew to go into business with him, given what he sees as the mine's high prospects, Boné tells him "It's not my line, mining" (104). Yet Rogier tries to convince him with the same empty promises he falls for: "If the Sylvanite runs into a blanket vein you won't ever have to worry, anymore than Cable and Ona. You'll be independent for life!" – a sentiment that bolsters individual success rather than the proletariat faith in community organization. This sentiment rings false, especially in light of Ona's prescient anger over her father's push to bring Cable back into mining: "I know how much trouble he has with his accounts and ledgers. With buildings, with Rawlings. And now he wants to drag you into another damned mine. I won't let him ruin you and March My boy's going to have all he ought to have—a nice home, a good education, all that. You're not going in on the Sylvanite. You're not!" (90). She earlier articulated the same to her father: "mining is a risky and expensive venture. I really wish you'd keep out of it. ...[Cable] hasn't got any business in it....He's got me and the children to look after. He can't afford to take any chances" (84-5). Ona's focus on how the financial cost of mining takes a personal toll yokes the two together, implying that if one fails, the other follows suit. Moreover, her focus on the future of her family indicates that mining is poison for the kind of familial security she expects for herself and, most importantly, her children.

Thus, Rogier's pleas to Boné only showcase the desperation mining evokes in men when it comes to financing ventures – Rogier is willing to bet his family's happiness and the certainty of their future on a labor that does not turn a profit. Mining has pushed the Rogiers deeply into the lower class at this point in the novel – as physical, rural work tended to do during the upheaval of the 1930s in the West – and Rogier's begging for money from his nephew demonstrates how blinded he is to the even broader national troubles and limits of class because of the mine, making those troubles and limits all the more evident to the reader. And knowing the eventual fate of the family, Boné's eventual decision to give his uncle the remainder of his money and then leave further calls the family's security into question and foreshadows their isolation from one another due to mining's overwhelming financial and physical presence. Coupled with Ona's distrust of mining and Cable's death, Boné's decision – and Rogier's glee about it – suggests that money means more to Rogier than family stability and securing a stable future for his family. As such, when Cable tries to explain to Rogier how much financial strain the mine has put on their family – “This is a business we've got to make pay,” he says – Rogier responds angrily and without empathy for, or even attention to, his family's situation. Instead, his attention is on the work of mining: “Business! Who told you this was a business? This is a mine, and more too. It's a shaft to Hell if I can get it there! There's going to be no fool business cluttering up the Sylvanite. Get that through your head” (171). Refusing the notion that mining is a collectively

experienced business also effaces the dignity of communal labor and the political ideology of unionized business ventures of the era.

The Rogiers' class and the security it could bring to the family are completely dependent on how well mining pays off and are thus both damaged by continual loss at the mine. The class limits mining creates also create and reinforce more private losses in the novel – such as individual identity and sane reason – that are connected to socioeconomic status and security and reflect the trickle down effect of failure that accompanied the Depression. Rogier's increasingly poor decisions, which affect not only him and his mining but his family as well, reflect the personal costs of uncontrolled financial drain. When offered “one of the most important [building] jobs” of his career, which he knows must be handled with care and attention, his need for mining money pushes recklessly him into the work: “Pressed to obtain money for the Sylvanite, he jumped into the job with abandon, letting sub-contracts as quickly as possible. Never in his life had he gone into partnership without losing money, and Ona warned him against doing so” (223). His blind choice of partners again troubles national partisan politics of organized working ventures. And instead of heeding or even respecting Ona's worries about what Rogier knows of one particular contractor, Rogier lashes out at her about his experience compared to hers: “Nothing except he's in the business and you're not!” Using “business” (the pursuit of money) as justification for leaping into the project haphazardly, hiring this man, and dismissing Ona's concerns exemplifies how much the need for money at the mine has hurt both individual

members of the family and the family as a whole. And not only Rogier but other members of the family as well begin to change because of their financial decay; Mrs Rogier, for instance, becomes “sharp and grasping as a miser” (190). Each family member loses certainty – both in the family at large and in themselves, and in the sense of a financially secure future – because of the class troubles and restrictions mining causes. In light of these losses, Ona’s comments to Cable again foreshadow the disaster mining brings when the Rogiers obsess over its illusory potential: “I’ve tried to encourage you to make a success in business – real estate, insurance, anything to keep you out of mining. All of you are alike. Cursed by a damn mine – whatever name it’s called” (123).

Whose Names Are Unknown’s section in Oklahoma follows the same suit. The Dunnes are limited by their lower class status, which is itself reinforced by the financially unproductive nature of labor to which they are accustomed. The book opens with the depressing financial facts of crop growing in Cimarron County during the Dust Bowl: “The average for any crop in this drought country was two out of every four or five years, the rest being outright failures or just enough harvest to get by with pinching” (3). As I have already explored, crop planting during the Dust Bowl was a fruitless pursuit that left most families without the resources needed, financial and otherwise, to get by. And because the men of the novel are unable to leave their individual plots of land and isolated labor even when both fail to produce capital or resources, their reluctance to find other employment or another space with better opportunities indicates losses of

confidence and stability that the Dust Bowl's widespread ecological and employment failure caused. That they cannot move indicates distrust in outside communities that stems from growing distrust in the land they thought they knew well. However, in one particularly telling moment, Julia and Mrs. Long, one of the Dunne's neighbors, converse about their current situation and indicate an awareness of the gravity of widespread ecological and economic decay. Julia thinks, *"It is pitiful the way people have to fight nowadays to make a bare living....Which way is a poor man to turn if there isn't even work and honest pay?"* and Mrs. Long "interrupted Julia's thoughts as if she felt them meet her own bewildered questioning,"

We wouldn't think of leaving here if it wasn't for the drought and the depression. Ordinary times we like it well enough and it's healthy country. Drought'll come to an end, I reckon, always has before, but this time the depression don't end. Nearly ten years long now. My kids never lived in good times. I'm scared sometimes they won't have good health and won't get an education. I always wanted 'em to know something and be what they want. (56-7)

Julia's despair over the situation she sees unfolding in front of her gestures toward the crumbling of the future that class entrapment begets when labor fails to make money. Julia sees the future as uncertain and hopeless, but Mrs. Long, in her defense of leaving Oklahoma, indicates that there is a better chance of a more certain future elsewhere. Mrs. Long's willingness to leave well known but failing

land thus indicates a growing realization that the currently hostile conditions of Cimarron County are not worth working in, despite the familiarity of and consequent comfort in that space. Like Ona's concerns in *Below Grass Roots*, Mrs. Long worries about her children's future become the guiding reason to leave for California, where labor patterns and the land are different and could better class status.

Finally, after witnessing so much failure, Mrs. Starwood, Frieda, and Julia insist they get out of Oklahoma and go to California, following the Longs' trail to a potentially better life for them and their children. Though cotton picking in California is difficult – “Damn cotton picking’ll break your back,” Milt comments – and means living in temporary housing at job sites, it holds more financial promise and so offers a chance at a better and more secure future than crop planting in Oklahoma (133). Leaving Oklahoma also puts the implications of that future in the forefront of the Dunnes' minds. Though “The whole family had to work in the prunes if they were to make even two dollars a day school was important” and takes precedent over making money when it comes time to send the children off (164). Unlike in Oklahoma, where school became impossible because of dust storms and labor requirements, school in California is a necessity and does not get pushed aside, which registers a broader view of future working and living prospects. In other words, the repeated constrictive tolls the Dust Bowl took on Cimarron County barred characters from envisioning a different future, where as California's potential opens up the possibility.

This commitment to education and the children's future also indicates a broader change in the novel's perception of possibility when the Dunnes move to California. Unlike Oklahoma, where particular labor done on repressive land chains them to one particular class, in California class mobility is possible as a collective. The Dunnes, along with Frieda and Mrs. Starwood, join a group that wants to start a union to protest the unfair treatment of laborers at the picking camps. In Oklahoma, such a move would have been impossible, as the farmers functioned as individuals, tending to their own plot of land. However, in California, the fruit pickers band together and use their community social capital to better their economic capital. The spatial change from Oklahoma to California thus breaks the cycle of overwhelming, unfriendly land constricting labor and class and so allows for more working and financial possibilities. Milt anticipates this transition when driving from one camp to another and thinking of the unfair labor camps; unlike his focus on money back in Oklahoma, which orbited how much crop growing would make in a given season, his reflections in California take on an ethical tone: "It was money, maybe—money enough to hire another man. There was something else behind that, which let a man get money enough to harden his heart and forget the humanity of man" (168). For the first time, Milt considers the implications of individual gain and not just the need for it – a recognition that would have been impossible under the constrictions of living and working in Oklahoma.

This new kind of relationship to money enables the Dunnes to participate in forming the union in California and challenges the familial and community failure the other novels document. Because the union is a community project, it encourages developing a strong “family” that uses labor as a crucial but flexible component to maintaining a life, rather than submits to labor that does not bring financial or structural support. Another specifically proletarian gesture toward the future – asking for better rates not just for one season but looking to improve conditions for the long run – the union would provide “Better hours, better wages, better living conditions” and the early pamphlets and notices about it are in the interest of “educat[ing] the people to get in a union and protect themselves” (174-5). Here, the union promises a kind of group education – itself linked to the future – that would support the laborers standing up for themselves and their living standards as a cohesive and powerful group. And though forming the union is not a smooth or easy process – often, government backed labor initiatives and unions formed during the Dust Bowl failed and, at the end of the novel, many key union members, including Milt, are in jail – it is something the Dunnes are wholly committed to, along with many other members of their labor camp, which strengthens family and community bonds. Yet the novel’s uncertain ending on these terms does not exclude the possibility of failure, which, I argue, makes it distinct from Steinbeck’s hopeful ending. Babb indicates that sturdy relationships could lead either way: “One thing was left, as clear and perfect as a drop of rain—the desperate need to stand together as one man. They would rise and fall and, in

their falling, rise again” (222). Her attention to the certainty of “falling” counteracts the one-dimensional story of the triumph of the human spirit this novel could be reduced to. Ending on such an uncertain plot and rhetorical note gives Babb the opportunity to remind her reader that failure was an inevitable component of the Dust Bowl and the Depression, even when removing the chains of space and labor change relationships to class and give families more potential for living with more than minimal needs. This uncertain ending also reminds the reader that the naturalist bent of the novel includes the possibility that fatalistic landscapes could continue to isolate individuals from communities. Indeed, the title of the novel itself refers to a vaguely worded eviction notice to workers “whose names are unknown,” which again reinforces the danger of individuals becoming splintered from one another and losing leftist communal efforts at improving working conditions (219). While we are prone to read Babb as another Steinbeck – the initial reason her novel was refused for publication in the 1930s was that it replicated *Grapes of Wrath* – her ending precludes that inclination and instead forces the reader to take seriously the possibility of failure.

When thus read in tandem, these novels’ thick realistic and naturalist perspectives on the harsh reality of lived experience tell a story of communal and familial failure and uncertainty in the Dust Bowl and Depression era that popular memory often overlooks in favor of narratives about the unavoidable triumph of human will. Moreover, those depictions trouble typical 1930s’ leftist proletariat ideologies of the dignity of labor and community organization and instead use

naturalist and realist rhetoric to zoom in on individual pursuits that encourage isolation in the face of overwhelming ecological, economic, and working conditions. Those perspectives and their national and political overtones recall the other novels of this project and suggest that labor in the West gives rise to fixed class systems and a corresponding lack of class mobility unique to this environment. Although Babb's novel ends on the most positive note of the four, its uncertainty in the future recalls the losses depicted in this novel, *Wait Until Spring*, *Bandini*, *Ask the Dust*, and *Below Grass Roots*. Though the union may succeed, Svevo's family may repair itself, Arturo may find another love and another writing cottage, and Rogier might strike it rich at the mine and save his family, the failures experienced along the way are not easily forgotten or forgiven. The widespread losses of labor, class security, and spatial rootedness generated by the unforgiving socioeconomic and environmental dimensions of the Depression and the Dust Bowl haunt these narratives and bar their authors from endorsing the traditionally leftist successful renegotiation of class difference and private lives through the dignity of labor. Instead, these authors use this literature to showcase the knotty national politics and political identities that lie at the axes of labor, class, and space and, in doing so, reveal their specific historical dependencies on one another during this period of time in the West.

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MEZZANINE THREE: OLIVE BRANCHES OF FAILURE

At this point in my project, it's safe to say that I have focused on loss and failure as defining components of Western experience. The twinned ecological and economic challenges showcased in the four novels of the previous chapter demonstrate just how difficult life out West could – and still can – be. In all of those texts, however, family and community emerge as the antidotes to the kind of broad, panoramic losses that each character experiences individually. Even in the often-bleak idioms of Depression-era realism and naturalism, family and the community could intervene positively on behalf of individuals to improve their lives. Realist and naturalist texts bind together descriptions of class, labor, and space, pointing to a larger turn toward community over the rugged individualism of the past.

And in fact, looking back, the arc of the novels I have discussed follows precisely that kind of trend. The two earlier texts of this dissertation – Frank Norris' *McTeague* and Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* – each featured highly individualistic, patriarchal, and masculine protagonists. Although *McTeague* and Don Mariano do draw upon their respective community histories, they otherwise take firm stances that operate outside the influence of their peers and family. And by and large we see this strategy fail – only in the end of her novel does Ruiz de Burton turn to the Alamar family's collective experience. Not until the books of my third chapter do families or communities come to play a significant role from the outset. Arturo and Svevo's family history weighs heavy on

both: Arturo, for instance, often finds himself awaiting undelivered praise from his mother that will confirm that deciding to be a writer was a wise choice. Waters' central family may ultimately fail, but their ties to one another remain strong at the end of the novel. Babb's family, the Dunnes – likewise as splintered as they are at the end of the narrative – also stands as a positive force in individual lives, underscoring the novel's overall faith that connections among people are what can bring lasting change.

In Chapter Four, a different kind of family emerges. Cowboys, ranchers, and their ranch hands form a bonded group separate from the big business of banks, large-scale agribusiness, and industrialized ranching corporations that rose to prominence after World War II. Definitions of the family shifted as well, as styles of labor now became the common ground for older ranchers, creating bonds that directly opposed a younger generation's interests in the new glitz and glamour associated with rodeo life and big business. Ironically, the image of the “old faded cowboy,” so long associated with the rugged Wild West, would be memorialized in these new commercial ventures, while actual cowboy work faced continuing struggles: to resist the overwhelming damage this mythos brought to class security and ways of life; to outlast environmental threats, like the Long Texas Drought of the 1950s, that threatened labor patterns that had sustained ranching and cowboy lives for years; to offset the idealization of cowboy labor that actually edged out older working patterns that had long bonded the ranch community together.

And again, the dark mood of naturalist and realist representation dominates throughout. In the novels I chose for this section – Larry McMurtry’s *Horseman, Pass By*, Elmer Kelton’s *The Time it Never Rained*, and Cormac McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses* – depictions of work, class divisions, and urban and rural spaces are harsh and gritty; scenes are captured with a cinematic, moment-by-moment technique that zooms in on each particular second as equally important. The cumulative result, in all cases, is a series of literary episodes that communicate the harsh, daily reality of the ranch without embellishment or exaggeration. Albeit comparatively limited, my own experience working on farms and ranches, as well as the secondary resources I now consulted, assured me that these novels were the real deal.

Admittedly, these novels are usually relegated to the pulp fiction corner of the bookstore or left as “genre formula” Westerns, easily written and easily forgotten. But I will argue that their literary skill, historical awareness, and descriptive detail demand more careful consideration. I argue that these novels are especially significant in the context of Western regional literature and criticism because they offer a glance at a social group we normally mistake as one of the “winners” of Western history and legend. The cowboy, we imagine, is almost always riding off into the sunset with his chosen girl, casually triumphant with a gun slung across his hip and a worn Stetson balanced on his head as testaments to that triumph. But these cowboys aren’t those of popular memory; in order to truly pluralize the West, we must include those who we think we know best alongside

those we know least. Who are the cowboys who were *not* winners? How did they perform their work in a West that posed new challenges? And ultimately, where did *they* go?

I also offer up this literature as a kind of olive branch to scholars more ready to forget the cowboy – those who are willing to see all cowboys as the same, and ignore the more nuanced lived experiences that many endured. In fact, I like to see each text of this dissertation as an olive branch offered up from experiences closer to history than we commonly realize. Each novel is the author’s act of peering around the corner of the past, and offering a manuscript that can tell us something about a group we think we know, or do not know at all. I suppose that is why I return to the question of “authenticity” in the beginning of this Fourth chapter, because terms like “authenticity,” “the West,” and “cowboys” regularly turn up in the same sentence – and, as I’ve noticed in scholarly work especially, in not always a constructive way. On the contrary: our popular conceptions of the cowboy are more commonly *inauthentic*, and play into a West that emphasizes the epic themes of domination, conquest, and control. And I’ll concede that, in many ways, that history is true enough. But I hope you can read the following chapter with a more open mind that’s willing to see these cowboys as they are – as a community of men and women who identified with a particular labor pattern, created specific class systems, and existed on identifiable landscapes. And they, like all of us, had to face whatever came their way as time marched on. So here they are: the cowboys.

CHAPTER FOUR

He Was a Good Cowboy: Identity and History on the Post World War II Texas Ranch in Larry McMurtry's *Horseman Pass By*, Elmer Kelton's *The Time it Never Rained*, and Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*

I. INTRODUCTION

If asked what makes up the “authentic American West,” most people list “cowboys” pretty quickly. The image of a rugged man on horseback, riding off into the sunset, heels down in worn leather boots, gun slung across his hip or back, Stetson on his head, is a familiar one that American culture loves to capitalize on – for cigarette and car sales, for lullabies and campfire songs, for fashion and film. But is that image the “authentic West?” What does “authentic” mean in this context anyway? According to William R. Handley and Nathaniel Lewis in *True West: Authenticity and the American West*, the “authentic West” does not even exist, so knotted together are the historical and mythological representations of the West. Instead, they argue that “the concept of authenticity is used to invent, test, advertise, and read the West” (1). So if the cowboy is tied up in this mess of “authenticity” and its unreliable barometer, where did he come from? And where has he gone?

At the center of this chapter sit four primary questions that seek to excavate some of the bones that hide under this road to cultural icon. More precisely, these questions sift through the cultural, historical, and socioeconomic groundwork layered under the seemingly uncomplicated literary representations of ranch work following World War II. First, what constitutes the labor done by cowboys and

cattlemen? Second, how is ranching labor depicted in the latter half of 20th century American fiction? Third, how does labor on the ranch provide the bedrock for class systems on the ranch, and how does the performance of those class systems shift over time and in(to) other social spaces? And finally, how do these cowboys, cattlemen, and ranchers, as figures of labor, organize, mediate, and reflect on their social and environmental spaces? These questions pivot on Janet Zandy's suggestion that physical labor and its literary representations carry a cultural weight that must be interrogated on its own terms; more acutely, however, they respond to a sentiment I've found common to historical and fictional ranching literature, which John R Erickson nicely sums up in *The Modern Cowboy*:

The cowboy I know is a working man. He is defined by his work, which should not be confused with the term 'job.' Cowboy work is more than a job; it is a life-style and a medium of expression. Remove the cowboy from his working environment and you have someone else, someone who resembles a cowboy in outward appearance but who, to one degree or another, is an imposter. (4-5)

Erickson's text might be riddled with often conservative and narrow minded defenses of what he calls the traditional cowboy, but he isn't alone in his sense that cowboy identity is, primarily, a working identity. It is in light, then, of Zandy's academic theory and Erickson's more personal reflection that I examine the cowboy as a figure of labor and so argue that we should productively resituate him in the Western literary canon.

“Resituate” suggests that cowboys are not well placed at the moment – and indeed, they occupy contested terrain in Western literary studies. Melody Graulich warns us that “the ‘cowboy’ identity is a commodity, transportable anywhere,” (187). Christine Bold reads the Western as an emblem of consumerism in the literary marketplace that often trades artistic risk for financial payoff. And, perhaps a little scathingly, Jane Tompkins argues that the cowboy “posits a world without God, without ideas, without institutions, without what is commonly recognized as culture, a world of men and things, where male adults in the prime of life find ultimate meaning in doing their best together on the job” (13). Each of these studies posit that a sustained or uncritical focus on the more masculine cultures of the West would, as Krista Comer puts it, run “the risk of replicating a mythic white-male center” (33). The literary identities at the center of these studies constitute what we think of as the mythic cowboy, who is often misogynistic, insular, and intolerant – yet he remains in the popular culture spotlight. Even the late Lawrence Clayton – past English professor and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Hardin-Simmons University at Abilene, whose personal, historical, and biographical ethnographies and academic studies of ranching life are among the most respected in the field – admits, “The mythic figure has an appeal we cannot deny” (cite?).

But still, I like cowboys — and stubbornly planned to include a chapter on them — so I hope to avoid this trap in three ways. First, at the macro level, this chapter is nestled among studies of ethnic laboring bodies and alternative working

lifestyles in the West. The pressure these other sections exert on this chapter situates the laboring cowboy's West in a diverse constellation of dynamic Wests, denying it a literary or historical "center," yet still acknowledging its existence. Second, at the micro level, such pressure also encourages a non-mythologized analytic rubric that pays close attention to the subtle textures of cowboy labor, rather than celebrates the mythic West. I argue that a focus on the places and grain of cowboy work contributes to my overall project to unveil specific, diverse Western socio-ecological spaces that demand certain kinds of labor and social structures. Cowboys, rather than being monolithic effigies of the mythical West, are simply another series of actors in Western socioeconomic history whose fictional representations help lay bear the West's environmental and class multiplicity. Third, and perhaps most importantly, this pressure reveals the mythological fault lines that undergird the more historically inflected cowboys, ranchers, and cattlemen that populate this chapter. I argue, ultimately, that cowboys, ranchers, and their labor that I study are both historicized *and* idealized: they are West Texas men, deeply invested in their carefully cultivated ranches and farms, whose identities are intricately interwoven with local culture, broader national movements, and the nostalgia *and* history of their work.

As such, this chapter explores the literary habits and historical contexts that accompany labor in Larry McMurtry's *Horseman, Pass By*, Elmer Kelton's *The Time it Never Rained*, and Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* to tease apart the reciprocal yet thorny relationships among the cowboy, his labor, and the

socioeconomic and ecological landscape of Texas post World War II. All three texts document the financial and structural decay of the ranching industry through the eyes and bodies of their protagonists. McMurtry's Homer Bannon witnesses the loss of his cattle and land as a result of a devastating outbreak of hoof and mouth that financially ruins him; Kelton's Charlie Flagg experiences the destructive force of the 1950s long drought in West Texas firsthand as a ranch owner; and McCarthy's John Grady Cole faces the death of his grandfather, the ensuing loss of his family's ranch, and the destruction of his image of the cowboy's West when he moves from Texas to Mexico to realize his dream of working on a ranch. Through a deceptively one dimensional nostalgic lens, these protagonists mourn the loss and futility of their ranching labor while simultaneously seeking to pursue and preserve it. As this double barreled act of preservation and mourning becomes a public matter, its cultural and historical debris surface and in turn expose how the loss of work and identity is tied to the ranch's class system. Each novel thus bears witness to the intricate interdependence of labor, class, space, and identity in the cowboy's West.

Thus, focusing on the cowboy as a figure of labor, who participates in structured spatial and work systems, reveals as the locus of class stratification the crossroads of the natural and constructed landscapes. Moreover, the idealization of the loss of a working identity in these novels unveils the intricate way the memorialization of community history informs and contributes to class stratification and the limitations of class mobility in the present. In all three

novels, those who work on ranches manipulate and redefine several markers of class status — clothing, owning and developing land, livestock ownership, horseback riding skill, among others — through historical and contemporary lenses. These physical indications thus simultaneously draw from the nostalgized work they inherit, reflect the changes wrought across the landscapes in which these cowboys and ranchers live, and act as barometers for historically specific socioeconomic pressures. Thus, recovering the literary patterns that grapple with representations of cowboys in and out of work sheds light on the changing terms of success, class mobility, and spatial imagination in the West as its industry blossomed in the years following World War II. Ultimately, my study serves to refuse the unitary, conventional model of “the cowboy”; my attention to labor in space recognizes cowboys – in particular, the cowboys and ranchers of post World War II West Texas – as dynamic figures who both respond to and participate in the multifaceted construction of Western space.

II. ON HISTORY

Yet because the conventional model of the cowboy is not only a fictional construct but a historical one as well, the challenge of studying cowboys is, in part, an historical-etymological challenge. The term “cowboy” most strictly describes adolescent and young adult men who were employed by ranchers to drive, brand, castrate, and care for cattle herds prior to 1880. Cowboys were not land owners; indeed, they rarely remained at one ranch for longer than a season and were often

clustered in popular imagination with vagrants and drifters, dangerously mobile men who posed a threat to organized, feminine (and so familial), domestic space. However, with the advent of barbed wire and the subsequent end of the open range in the 1880s, cowboys dropped in number and so slipped into a collective mythical memory that celebrated and capitalized on their most commercially alluring — and superficial — qualities: freedom, masculinity, and dominance over nature. This image gained significant cultural traction through the early to mid 20th century as romanticized versions of cowboys and ranchers took center stage in Wild West films, cowboy pulp novels, and long running TV shows.¹ This shift — from practical worker to consumerist fantasy — galvanizes the most common readings of cowboys as idolized, patriarchal representations of ecological, social, and racial exploitation in the name of national expansion (and, indeed, this shift also often informed the cowboy's sense of his own identity and class as ranch work itself became more scarce in the years following World War II, as I will explain later).

The result is this: now, you say the word “cowboy” in certain circles and it conjures images of tall, dark, handsome men riding from the manly wilderness onto the edge of a barely civilized – but nonetheless feminized – frontier to engage in a series of gunfights, fistfights, and other forms of vigilante justice in order to protect that barely civilized frontier from advancing and menacing Indians, greedy and selfish absentee landowners, or irresponsible and destructive oil men. And, if

¹ Such as *Shane*, Zane Gray's works, the Lone Ranger and Tonto franchise, *The Shootist*, Spaghetti Westerns, etc.

they succeed, that barely civilized frontier sits all the more securely under the protective flag of American imperialist “democracy.” These cowboys are firmly planted in the bedrock of the past, moored to the circumstances of American expansion, empire building, and Manifest Destiny that necessitated their existence. This stereotype is especially persistent in literary studies, as I outlined earlier. However, the same is not true of historical studies, which have produced a body of grainy, fieldwork-like historical and ethnographic studies of cowboys, ranchers, and their labor. Texts like Paul Carlson’s collection *The Cowboy Way*, Jacqueline Moore’s collection *Cow Boys and Cattle Men*, and JW William’s *The Big Ranch Country* document, in close detail, the dynamic and complex real-life circumstances and identities of those who work on ranches. The gap indicated here – between the way these fields study and analyze those who work on the ranch – is one I intend to begin filling with this chapter.

However, most historical studies of cowboys and ranchers suffer from their own gap of periodization. The historical works I outline in the remaining bulk of this section focus heavily on cowboys and ranchers prior to World War II. In fact, most of these studies revolve around cowboys, ranchers, and the nature of their work from the 1880s through the 1930s. The references I’ve found to the post World War II moment often gesture toward transitions in the shape and aims of ranch labor; yet, the transitions themselves and the time after are not well documented. Instead, those studies primarily aim to rescue and archive a way of life that is quickly slipping from those who once practiced it. A good and well

grounded academic impulse, to be sure. But what arises from this scholarly focus on the cowboy and rancher of the past is just that: they stay firmly rooted in that past. Despite historical specificity and the weight of lived experience, these cowboys and ranchers undergo a kind of flattening that renders static the image and interpretation of their work. And while this image was, at one point in history, accurate, without sufficient work on how labor on the ranch has changed following the industrialization brought about by World War II, these historical accounts risk the very nostalgia and mythos they serve to dismantle. A productive though narrow focus on cowboys and ranchers of the past essentializes the grainy details and work ethic of ranch labor; it idealizes a one dimensional, unchanging view of that labor that risks overshadowing ranchers and cowboys who came after the ideal had fallen into the past. As Carlo Rotella similarly argues of the memorialization of blue collar work in the Rust Belt between the mid nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries,

Reacting to the aging of industrial urbanism and especially to the departure of factory jobs from the Rust Belt in the latter part of the twentieth century, trend spotters have been perhaps overly quick to attach a nostalgic aura to good hands and body work. Separating the virtue from the work ethic to which it inheres, this use of 'blue-collar' eulogizes actual blue-collar labor in such a way as to end up prematurely dismissing it as an anachronism. (8-9)

At the same time, that nostalgic idealization points to an ethos and aura that are very much present in the labor of the ranch and the minds of those who undertake that labor. Among those who study cowboys and ranchers *and* the cowboys and ranchers themselves exists an attitude that frames ranch labor as both physically real and mythically remembered. It is the same kind of ethos that Rotella examines in his introduction to *Good With Their Hands* when he identifies a “belief that strong hands doing skilled work had built particular ways of life infused with value” (3). Rotella, too, writes about the way the craft and execution of skilled labor become metonymic for a kind of work ethic legacy, which carries with it a commitment to “an honest day’s work” that is slowly slipping away. The cowboys and ranchers of this chapter, and those written about in history books, similarly see themselves engaged in the preservation of an almost lost labor and pattern of living that they have inherited from their predecessors. For them, working on the ranch is both realized *and* idealized; it inhabits a thorny and thick nexus of the memory of the past and the lived experience of the present, borrowing from the former as a way to mitigate and navigate the latter.

I am thus not arguing for an historical or literary binary between the real and the idealized or unrealistic. Such a dichotomy between cowboys and ranchers of the past and cowboys and ranchers of the present would only rest on and so reaffirm the idea that those who work on a ranch were once idyllic, hard working builders of American empire and, following that lineage, are now idyllic hard workers that lust after the empire building of the past. Instead, I want to suggest

that a morose kind of idealization and preservation of ranch work has been and remains an integral component to this labor and the sense of self of those who perform it. However, this self-mythologizing is neither one dimensional nor straightforward. It does not negate the gritty, unpleasant reality of ranching work; rather, it draws from that reality and its history. As I show in my cataloguing of historical sources, when these cowboys and ranchers think and talk about their identities, their labor, and where both are headed, they see themselves doing a quickly disappearing job that no one else wants to do. That perspective is a crucial component to the work ethic and ethos at hand here; as such, it bleeds into the literary representations of those who work on the ranch, especially when those representations are written by the likes of McMurtry or Kelton – men who worked and lived on ranches themselves. For those who experience ranching labor first hand, that labor is honest, hard work, inflected with the mythology of the past – and it needs to be, in order to sustain itself. Put simply, in a phrase that finds itself echoed, with slight alterations, in almost every book and article I researched for this chapter, “It’s dangerous, dirty work, but someone’s gotta do it.”

Someone’s gotta do it – and those someones, here, are the ranchers and cowboys of West Texas in the post-war era. But why study these someones? Why not the Clear Fork ranchers of East Texas, or the Spanish cattle barons of Southern California, or the owners of the fantasy “ranch-lands” of Wyoming? Because, I argue, post World War II West Texas experienced a particular windfall of socioeconomic, industrial, and environmental effects that simultaneously bore

down on these ranches and those who worked them in unique and revealing ways. While Southeast Texas more or less experienced the same drought, Southern California too had to adjust to new farm mechanizations, and Wyoming grappled with socioeconomic globalization long before its ranches embraced the steady income of dude ranching, none were beset with all of these ground shifting transformations at once – but West Texas was. Because Texas itself was slow to pick up the modernization most of the country moved through during the Industrial Revolution, because this modernization occurred during a financial boom that drove most industrial progress – and most of the population with it – into the cities or into agribusiness and industrial sized cattle houses, and because this urbanization dovetailed almost perfectly with one of the worst droughts in West Texas recorded history, these ranches found themselves at a series of juxtaposed crossroads that demanded one thing yet only allowed for the opposite. While the rest of Texas was modernizing during this time and agribusiness was devouring cash, West Texas, financially challenged and then ruined by the drought, was crawling along, its ranchers negotiating subsidies from DC to feed their almost starving, dwindling cattle. And while the drought, lack of payoff from man-run ranches (and, thus, lack of steady or significant mechanization on these isolated ranches), and glamor and wealth of the city and agribusiness drove young men off the ranches of their fathers and grandfathers², the hardships these ranches suffered because of these changes demanded – loudly – “someone’s gotta do it.”

² And daughters off the ranches of their mother’s and grandmother’s, as they did and do still exist.

And because that someone was a *someone* and not a mechanized *something*, post World War II West Texas developed a unique cultural and social makeup that seeped into the first hand accounts from, and then the fiction about, the region. This literature thus investigates environmental conditions long faced by ranchers that were now being shaped by the particular historical maneuvers that played out on the West Texas ranching stage. In this literature – of which the novels in this chapter serve as a representation – environmental, socioeconomic, and historical crises are yoked together, amplifying and enlarging each other. Whether by way of historical specificity, like Kelton’s take on the 50s long drought, or weighty symbolism, like McMurtry’s foot and mouth (a highly contagious disease with only a 2% mortality rate that has nonetheless been repetitively met with governmental orders to cull all potentially infected livestock), or imaginative license, like McCarthy’s metaphors of darkness, loss, and injury in domesticated animals and landscapes, these novels tie historical change to environmental sickness and plight. In short, those *someones* – those cowboys – had front row seats to the catastrophes that befell the ranches they worked on; hell, they played in the orchestra.

So what happens if we take a closer look at the post-World War II West Texas novels of this chapter and ask, “who are the cowboys here?” If a cowboy is the work he does – and, as Paul H Carlson suggests, “Real cowboys were dirty, overworked laborers who, writes William Forbis, ‘fried their brains under a hot prairie sun’” (3) – then there are actually two kinds of characters that constitute

the “cowboys” in these novels. In other words, there are two types of men (and women) who are doing the kind of ranching labor that defines the cowboy: cowboys and cattlemen or ranchers. Prior to World War II, the social differences between cattlemen – those who owned the ranch – and cowboys – those who worked on the ranch for the cattlemen – were palpable. Jacqueline Moore, in her study of cowboys and cattlemen from 1865-1900, states, “there was a clear class distinction between cowboy and cattleman. A cowboy was a hired hand who worked cattle on horseback on the ranch and/or up the trail, but who occasionally did other work on foot for the ranch such as repairing fences. Conversely, a cattleman was simply a ranch owner or manager who employed cowboys” (3). Or, to put it bluntly: “There is one difference between them that goes right to the heart of the matter,” Erickson articulates, “the rancher can take the day off or go into town whenever he wishes, but the cowboy can’t” (5). Moore expands on the cultural and historical roots of this distinction:

The cattle industry is an integral part of the history of American expansion in the nineteenth century. On the edges of the frontier, cattlemen were the forerunners of Anglo civilization, and were responsible for building new towns and ensuring economic growth. They were useful citizens. But the cowboy was a nostalgic figure from the start. In the nineteenth century view of the inevitable March of Progress, his job was to tame the frontier for the next wave

of productive farmers, and then fade away into history. He was a man outside of time. (6)

As Moore recognizes, from the outset cowboys and ranchers or cattlemen were distinct breeds; men needed for distinct tasks that yoked each to a particular social class and cultural use – and therefore representation.

However, post World War II these socioeconomic distinctions gave ground as the twinned forces of industrialization and urbanization chained both the cattleman and the cowboy to the labor of the ranch. At these historical crossroads, cowboys and ranchers alike began to see themselves as doing a unique, dirty, and well loved job that was quickly losing financial solubility. And this perspective drew the rancher out onto the ranch and so initiated a class identity collapse. The men who worked on ranches post World War II and the protagonists of the novels I study in this chapter by and large invest their energy in preserving a working lifestyle and the landscape necessary for that lifestyle, both of which Lawrence Clayton notes JW Williams sought to capture in his memoir, *The Big Ranch Country*. Williams “wrote of a sparsely populated area beginning to suffer from the big drought of the 1950s that caused people to retreat, especially from West Texas, until the rains came in 1957. He saw ranching undergoing a major transition after World War II, as ranchers mechanized their operations, requiring fewer and fewer cowboys to do the work” (3). Or, as Charlie Flagg, Kelton’s protagonist, sadly recounts to a journalist who covers the effect of modernization and the long Texas

drought on the novel's ranches, "The cowboy-rancher has had his day, Big says. It's a bookkeeper's world from here on out" (312).

Kelton's clever use of the term "cowboy-ranchers" pinpoints an important cultural consequence that I argue these changes brought about. During this period, cowboys and cattlemen became, on the ranch, superficially one in the same – or at least close enough that their work and lives much more closely mirrored one another than they had in the past. Cattlemen continued to own ranches and employ cowboys, but beyond that distinction the class lines blurred. Neither of these characters from this era of ranching literature had the time or luxury to go into town for a break or dance the night away at a dancehall. Instead, the often overlooked historical and political contexts that encircle their lives grant them much more complicated landscapes with which to grapple. As a result, my terms in this chapter reflect the amalgamation of the labor of the cowboy and the rancher due to the unique socioeconomic conditions that suffused this period of history.

However, this collapse of class identity does not displace the fact that the ranch functioned as a classed workplace, nor does it erase the class tension that questioned whether the rancher was *really* one of the workers. Instead, the modernization that brings these ranchers and cowboys together also brings to light a larger performance of class identity and class stratification on the ranch that proves to be both malleable and static. Moreover, the ways in which the elements of this performance are inherited by the younger generation – especially

McCarthy's John Grady Cole, who sits at the center of his own narrative, and Kelton's Tom Flagg, who orbits the periphery of his father's – gestures toward the pressure contemporary circumstances exert on and clash with historical constructs – in this case, class systems steeped in the history of ranch life. As Clayton elegantly reflects in his biographical ethnography, *Clear Fork Cowboys: Contemporary Cowboys along the Clear Fork of the Brazos River*, when accounting for the junction of traditional concepts of labor and the modernization of technology and business in the ranching business, "Cowboying has changed, but cowboys have not" (54).

Faced with a drastically shifting work landscape, these cowboys and ranchers began finding other outlets for the identities and work they assumed they would always have. Specifically, the younger generation's reaction to the loss of working life on the ranch comments on the deep cultural and personal scarring that such a loss causes. At the same time, that reaction also offers a unique vantage from which to investigate the architecture of class on the ranch. Between 1950 and 1970, the rodeo rose in both regional and national popularity at an unprecedented rate. With less to do on the ranch, McMurtry's, Kelton's, and McCarthy's younger protagonists – the sons and daughters of the traditional ranchers and cowboys – participate in rodeos or rodeo-like events that ameliorate the sting of loss while simultaneously revitalizing crucial components of ranching and cowboy identity. Put simply, the alluring fame and shiny rewards bestowed on the rodeo star momentarily distracted its participants from the loss of the actual work the show

represented. The rodeos and similar performance-based venues of these novels, then, act as central stages for and sites of codification of the performance of class identity as that identity messily collapsed back home on the ranch. Here, young would-be cowboys and ranchers could reaffirm their identities and class status by literally performing their talents at ranch work. Those who performed the best – usually, those with the most training and the most expensive horses and gear (in other words, sons and daughters of ranch owners who had both the time and money for these things) – could reestablish their family’s aristocratic status. But without real ranch labor to prove one’s skill, the articulation of class identity and class status at the rodeo becomes a strictly material and ultimately empty performance. In each novel, demonstrations of wealth in the form of clothing, trailers, and other commodities are commonplace at the rodeo and lend class status to those who can afford them – being a rodeo hero, it turns out, is not cheap.

I thus argue that ranching literature from the latter half of the twentieth century – of which the novels studied in this chapter serve as a representation – assumes a set of cultural and political concerns unique to its time period: West Texas – and, more broadly, the ranching West – post World War II. These novels filter representations of labor and class on the ranch through the lens of the very real historical and ecological circumstances of 1945 to 1965 to situate their cowboy protagonists in a shifting and often hostile socioeconomic landscape. At the same time, those representations respond to older notions of cowboy labor that, because

they represent the noble, hard work of the individual on the ranch, ranchers and cowboys are reluctant to give up. The space where work ethic and work ethos meet showcases the messy reality embedded in the historical framework around *All the Pretty Horses*, *Horseman, Pass By*, and *The Time it Never Rained*. Though written across a span of 30 years, these three novels concern only 7 years among them: *All the Pretty Horses* is set in 1949, *The Time it Never Rained* in 1956, and *Horseman, Pass By* in 1954. This period of time encompasses the unique combination of spatial, political, ecological, and cultural changes Texas underwent as a result of the forceful industrialization that World War II necessitated and the environmental effects of the long Texas drought. On an even broader scope than just West Texas ranching, Don Graham calls these twenty years a “period of radical transformation in population and economy, when the whole state was changing” (2). And in an article written for the Texas State Historical Association’s Almanac, Elmer Kelton zooms in more closely on the ranching industry:

World War II and its manpower shortages forced drastic changes upon the ranching scene. Much of the workforce went into military service. Ranchers had to streamline operations for efficiency, automating wherever possible, cutting pasture sizes, substituting machinery for manual labor, pickup trucks for horses. Most of these changes became permanent, for much of the pre-war manpower never returned. Former cowboys found higher paying jobs in the oil fields and in town. Many innovations appeared in the first decades

after the war: crossbreeding, artificial insemination and computerization being only a few.

A seven year drought in the 1950s drove home severe lessons in range management, bringing a greater awareness of proper stocking rates, encouraging rotation grazing, grass reseeding, new methods of brush control. (5)

The broader history of Texas around World War II reflects similar trends. In his *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*, Randolph B Campbell traces population density changes that “completed the transition from [Texas’] overwhelming rural past to a predominantly urban present”: “by 1950, for the first time, a majority (60 percent in fact) of Texans lived in towns and cities of more than 2,500 population” (405). This transition reflected a number of changes that TR Fehrenbach categorizes under “the urbanization of Texas”:

The urbanization of Texas, starting late but proceeding faster than the American norm after the 1940’s [sic], proceeded on several planes. The automobile sent the first growth to the small cities and towns. Then, suddenly, the new metropolis started to suck the countryside dry. as the counties became more and more depopulate, many of the small, rurally situated towns began to wither. Their market was drying up. In most Texas small towns established business declined; young men looked for opportunity elsewhere; numbers stagnated, then slowly declined. (674)

Across the state, vast spatial and socioeconomic changes were coming to bear on lifestyles and patterns of work. As small towns – like those featured in the novels in this chapter – lost their populations and businesses, the ranchers who once based their business in those towns began to rely more and more on industrial-sized output to cities to subsidize what local business they lost. “Cattlemen,” Erickson tells us, “have discovered they can produce finished beef more cheaply, more quickly, and more efficiently in a factory than on a ranch” (183). Hence, the need for industrial machinery found leverage from both social and economic changes and quickly swept across the ranching landscape; thus, beginning in the late 1940s and early 1950s, “machinery rapidly replaced most farm labor, changing the countryside” (Fehrenbach 666).

On the ranch, therefore, cowboys and ranchers participated in and witnessed a broad transition in labor from manpower to machinery once mechanized farm equipment like “tractors, disc plows, steam-powered brush-clearing equipment, and giant combines and harvesters” became needed and then common among ranches to meet growing industrial expectations of output (665). This transition to machinery “marked the transition from farming to agribusiness,” a move that itself gestured toward “a model for a totally mechanized and confined cattle industry” (Campbell 408; Erickson 183). On the surface, these changes brought the improvements Erickson notes were necessary to running a ranch post World War II: increased productivity, greater economic gain, and consistent efficiency:

Modern technology has transformed some of the old ways of the vaqueros. Rounding up three or four hundred cows, for example, used to take about a week's work performed by fifteen cowboys. With three helicopters (contracted with outside companies), the task can be accomplished in about three hours, and the entire job of branding and doctoring the cattle can be done in about two days. (Graham 221)

Yet, there was a cost to all this modernization. Along with greater output, "Mechanization and modernization of these cattle operations have brought about a reduction in the number of men working permanently on each ranch" (Clayton 28). And less labor meant fewer jobs: JW Williams remarked that "Unfortunately for the cowboy, each one of these advances and devices allows the ranch to do the work with fewer men. Although the horse remains the emotional center of ranching, the machine – pickup and stock trailer, bulldozer, helicopter, backhoe – does much of the work" (7). The men who did remain – like the cowboys and ranchers in these novels – lost much of the work that once furnished so much of their identity. In his account of King Ranch, Don Graham reflects on the emotional toll of the working changes the ranch's foreman, Tio Kleberg, faced in the wake of increased industrialization:

All Tio wanted to do was ranch. He was happiest on horseback when the worries of a balance sheet vanished in the feel of a good horse cutting off a recalcitrant calf's wayward progress. But Tio was a

throwback to the old days. Tio on horseback was what King Ranch was supposed to be. The horse and its rider [Tio] were working cattle in the old way, in the brush and dust.... They were laboring on King Ranch in the time-honored manner of the old vacqueros and cowboys going back to the days of the ranch's founding. [But] New conditions forced Tio off the ranch and onto the board of directions – meetings instead of roundups, days spent on golf carts instead of on horseback. (216)

Tio's story takes place in the 1980s and in South Texas, but the effects of mechanization on the cowboy's working identity mirror the effects of mechanization in the 1940s and 50s in West Texas. He, like the cowboys and ranchers I study, feel most at home on a horse, doing the same labor those who came before them did. But once this connection to the history of work is severed, the cowboy and the rancher both lose something crucial to their sense of self: their working identity – which, more often than not, was the basis for their sense of self more broadly. Like Erickson sadly recounts when he remembers seeing a young, modern cowboy, working on a feedlot instead of a ranch: "He sat in a new saddle, with a big daily horn wrapped with strips of rubber, a breast harness, and a roping cinch, but he carried no rope. Neither did the other men on the crew. And I thought to myself: 'Well, cowboy, they've taken away your rope. Tomorrow they'll take away your horse and issue you a four-wheeler'" (184). But four wheelers can't cut calves like a good quarter horse can.

It is from within this composite historical, cultural, and political framework that I read late 20th century cowboy literature as a site of identity production and negotiation. Both the rhetoric surrounding labor and class and the scenes that detail such labor in these novels reflect an ongoing conversation with and interrogation of the continued aftereffects of the changes during the late 1940s through early 1960s. If, as Besty Klimasmith argues, literature is a laboratory that tests the very real circumstances and consequences of particular moments, then reading novels like *Horseman, Pass By*, *All the Pretty Horses*, and *The Time it Never Rained* in their social contexts can unveil the intricate way regional history and socioeconomic experience come to bear on lived experience. Moreover, and more specifically, reading these novels through these lenses unveils the way cowboys and ranchers confront and question political and socioeconomic impacts on their identities as they feel those forces weighing heavy on how they conceptualize of their lives and work. My focus on the nuance and texture of how these cattlemen, cowboys, and ranchers negotiate their identities while standing on historically unstable ground helps to unravel the tangled threads that make up the tapestry of the cowboy in the West.

III. ON LABOR

Moreover, focusing in on this specific regional and cultural history and tying those histories to broader national movements sketches a rhetorical map of the West that locates Texas as the heart of cowboy culture *and* labor. The cultural

and historical imagination of the West reveals that often its inhabitants and authors collapse work ethic identity and class identity, and then map that collapse onto Western space. Critical studies have also tracked the growth of the significance of work to Western *and* American identity. Liza J Nichols, for instance, argues that the dude ranch in particular “provided significant status for both working-class icons like cowboys and the work they performed. In a Depression era that saluted the cultural importance of working Americans, dude ranches lauded physical work as the key to personal happiness” (67). Similarly, Blake Allmendinger argues that “cowboy [literature] values historically documented labor routines that cowboys have traditionally acted out in their work culture” (1). Here, Allmendinger ties the history of cowboy labor to its artistic expression, suggesting that the way historical and political modes of identity are woven into literature can unveil what qualities individuals value in their cultures and customs.

So I return to my original question: what happens when we read the cowboy as a figure of labor, rather than a figure of spectacle or cultural frontierism? How does this interpretative shift change the historical and literary definition of the cowboy? Here, I again turn to Allmendinger, who opens *The Cowboy: Representations of Labor in an American Work Culture* with “A cowboy is defined by the work that he does” — largely driving, branding, castrating, and nurturing a cowherd (3). Under this rubric, when read alongside the historical context I laid out earlier, the protagonists of both *The Time it Never Rained* and *Horseman, Pass By* — landowners who tend to their own stock — look a lot like

working cowboys. By the same token, McCarthy's protagonists embody the more "traditional" cowboy: drifters who move from ranch to ranch as work demands (or, in McCarthy's novel, as the long arm of the law demands). Despite their differences, these three novels all offer representations of what a working cowboy can look like. If this is true — if, as Allmendinger suggests, cowboys are "men who are culturally unified by engaging in labor routines that they think of as cowboy work" — then revisiting fictional cowboys with an eye for the details of their work and the lived experience it engenders encourages the kind of reassessment of cultural meaning that Zandy argues literature about work demands. Specifically, reading these cowboys and ranchers with a focus on the work they do reveals that they are intimately tied to and invested in the specific locales they live on, build on, and work in and so experience a connected, "on the ground" version of the laboring West.

Work in each novel is more than a necessity; it grants each text's cowboy protagonists identity and an intimate connection to their land and its patterns. However, each novel makes it clear that labor, while a crucial component to identity, is not an activity to be envied. While older novels may have, as Jane Tompkins has argued, transformed hard work "from the necessity one wants to escape into the most desirable of human endeavors: action that totally saturates the present moment, totally absorbs the body and mind, and directs one's life to the service of an unquestioned goal," the post World War II cowboy novel looks at work from a different vantage (12). When, in 1950, the Texas census revealed that

more citizens were living in urban centers than rural spaces and the long Texas drought first reared its ugly head, cattle prices plummeted and ranch after ranch declared bankruptcy. In other words, as ranches lost both labor and product, those who remained had to make up for both realms while also grappling with increased costs of industrialization. On this socioeconomic landscape, work was not an escape or a desired activity so much as a grueling necessity that barely kept ranchers and cowboys afloat. As Kelton's Charlie Flagg remarks of the labor necessary to maintain his ranch's functionality during the drought at its bare minimum, "Now there was no longer any fun in it; now it was an ordeal" (257).

These novels, then, cover a new work experience on the home front. Labor is reproduced in painstaking (and often painful) detail. Rather than taking pride in their work, Kelton, McMurtry, and McCarthy's ranchers and cowboys often feel ashamed of or depressed by the labor the environment now demands they undertake. Bound by a sense of ownership and responsibility to their ranches, as well as the memory of the joy that labor once offered, these ranchers become the laborers who do the tough physical work of the ranch. And, ironically, they then want to arrest the kind of national capitalist development that enabled them to claim their ranches in the first place. The kind of work they covet – the ranching and cattle herding, which lends them self-value – is predicated on stopping the movement of empire because that movement is hurtling toward the mechanization of the West. In each novel, if the West continues its growth and the

landscape continues to shift under the new demands of a mechanized ranching industry and an economy focused on oil, these cowboys will be out of a job.

And each novel showcases that transition through a series of catastrophes that comes to represent and indicate change in West Texas. Once the vet has confirmed the outbreak of hoof and mouth in Homer Bannon's cattle and the government has ordered a full quarantine of his ranch, McMurtry's *Horseman, Pass By* turns to the labor that remains to be done. However, this is not the work of the past, which included rounding up cattle for branding, castrating, milking, or selling and progressed the ranch's operations and finances. Instead, this is the depressing task of rounding up cattle for testing, isolation, and eventual slaughter, a job that will deplete the ranch of its resources and purpose. The novel's depictions of this work are often monotonous, unglamorous, and plain; these sections lose much of the nostalgic recollection characteristic of the rest of the novel. In a simultaneously tedious and harrowing event that reflects this atmosphere, Lonnie, Homer's grandson, remembers running a particularly difficult cow through a chute and into a holding pen for the government vets to test for the disease's progression:

We surrounded her and finally she stuck her head in like she meant to go. When she did I run up behind her to shut the gate. Then she turned back through herself like a bobcat and went charging down the west wall of the pen. As she went by me she threw out a big cracked hoof, and I spun away from it like I had from a thousand

others. Only I spun a fraction too slow, and it caught me on the hip.

(McMurtry 61)

This mistake knocks him unconscious. Lonnie's narration of this moment — its rhythmic regularity, its snapshot-like quality, and its critical distance from itself — underscores the regularity of this work and the mechanical routine and precision that accompanies it. At the same time, the clarity and candidness of this moment challenges Jane Tompkin's argument that cowboy labor is romanticized as "the most desirable of human endeavors" (12). The haze of nostalgia has been stripped from this scene to reveal the underbelly of work with cattle. That grainy tension — between labor as a rhythmic, familiar comfort and a dirty, detailed source of pain — remains unresolved in the novel. In other words — as I can say from experience — it just sucks to be kicked.

However, the subsequent loss of labor shifts the tenor and shape of work. When Homer is ordered to execute his infected herd and his nephew Hud suggests that oil derricks might take their place, his strange emotional outburst stands in stark contrast to Lonnie's unemotional narration:

there'll be no holes punched in this land while I'm here. They ain't gonna come in an' grade no roads, so the wind can blow me away ... What good's oil to me ... What can I do with it? With a bunch of fuckin' oil wells. I can't ride out ever day an' prowls amongst 'em, like I can my cattle. I can't breed 'em or tend 'em or rope 'em or chase 'em or nothin'. I can't feel a smidgen a pride in 'em, cause they ain't

none a my doin'. Money, yes. Piss on that kinda money ... I want mine to come from something that keeps a man doing for himself.

(McMurtry 105-6)

In this moment, the change from cattle to oil registers on multiple planes — ecological, emotional, and socioeconomic. Hud suggests oil as the obvious answer because of the financial stability (and even boom) it promises. Indeed, when Hud inherits the ranch at the end of the novel, he — in the fashion of many young ranchers of the time who were drawn to the glitz and glam of the city, where Hud spends most of his time and money — begins drawing the blueprint to turn the Bannon cattle ranch into an industrial oilfield. But to Homer, riddled with holes his land would be torn and incomplete, only capable of supporting a sterile and alienating kind of labor. That alienation resonates with Homer's sense of self as well, as his absentee control of the oil derricks would abstract him from his land and its work. As an oil baron, labor would not be something he does, but something about which he would think; the lack of physical involvement frustrates his sense of purpose and identity. At the same time, that physical distance and lack of work is linked to pride and capital — in other words, class. Homer's thoughts unveil that a cowboy's class success is not measured wholly by visible demonstrations or even the acclimation of wealth, but also in the active purpose and practice of the labor that results in that wealth.

The close connection between labor and landscape is foregrounded in *The Time it Never Rained* as well, when Charlie faces the changes the dry winter has brought to his ranching practices:

Winter wore on relentlessly with a constant series of cold, dry winds that droned a dusty dirge across the hills and prairies, robbing strength from the thinning livestock, seeking out and stealing any vestige of moisture that might still cling in hidden places. Out of necessity, feeding became heavier; it took fifteen sacks of cake a day rather than ten to keep the cattle from showing their ribs. It took longer now to circle the pastures and see that the sheep and cattle received extra protein to supplement the meager dry feed they still managed to rustle on the range. Charlie and Lupe each went in their separate pickups now, splitting the work because there was so much of it. (Kelton 127)

Similar to McMurtry's writing style when the cow kicks Lonnie, Kelton's rhythm here is even and paced, producing a monotonous and dreary effect. And while Kelton's prose is slightly more ornamented than Lonnie's narration, the "dry winds that droned a dusty dirge" and the "vestige of moisture that might still cling in hidden places" give the image of West Texas as a depressed and unusually arid landscape. Likewise, the labor on this landscape is "arduous, unrelenting work" that ensures its own continuation because there is no financial way out of the predicament Charlie and the other ranchers find themselves in (282). Kelton's

cowboys are here working against an almost inevitable economic avalanche that the drought has promised. Or, in Nancy Cook's words, when she describes the cost of owning and running a ranch, both personally and economically: "there is no pretense about making a living here -- this is where one spends a living" ("Romance of Ranching" 235).

Kelton subtly captures that tension between the physical work of the ranch and idealization of that work when Charlie must castrate the horse belonging to Manuel, the son of his foreman, Lupe Flores. Though it would be easy to read this scene as indicative of the racial inequality popular between Texas ranch owners and the Mexican laborers they hire, Kelton's novel refuses that stereotype. The Mexican laborers in Kelton's novel are not treated as racist caricatures or the representative of a romanticized Other. Charlie frequently defers to Lupe's expertise running the ranch and feeds weary and hungry illegal immigrants before advising them on where to find work and avoid the border patrol. Moreover, this scene focuses on the practical necessity of gelding a horse who is to work on a ranch. Kelton castrates the stallion not to act out a narrative of racial tension and oppression, but to showcase another crucial component of working ranch life: ensuring that you can manage the animals on your farm. As Charlie tells Manuel to underscore the need that the horse be useful, "If we leave him as a stud he won't be much 'count for you to ride. If we geld him you can make a good usin'-horse out of him" (Kelton 151).

As such, the episode is striking for its procedural treatment of the castration itself. Again, the prose is steady and unadorned, as if it were written for an instruction manual rather than a novel:

Then he told Jose in Spanish to rope both the colt's forefeet. Jose swung the loop and laid it easily around the feet as Manuel stepped back and the colt moved forward. Jose jerked, and the colt went to its knees. Charlie Flagg gave its shoulder a hard push; it went down heavily on its side. Jose pulled the forefeet back and took a wrap around the left hind leg, pulling it and the forefeet tightly together. He took a couple more wraps, these around all three legs, and made a tie. (152)

This scene, like McMurtry's depiction of running the cows through the chute to be tested for disease, is mechanized, yet still performed by human hands. Both Jose and Charlie contribute equally to the process, showcasing not the dominance or talent of one over the many, but the basic necessity to have all present participate in the work that needs to be done. Similarly, Kelton does not depict the horse in terms that would cast it as a wild emblem. Rather, Charlie coaches Manuel to "Pet him Talk to him so he won't hurt himself" (153) and the rest of the castration is done with a quick and painless, familiar routine. These three men are here doing the work to be done – work that Charlie commences with a reluctant, "Best we get it over with" (152).

But something strange happens between the publication of McMurtry's and Kelton's novels and McCarthy's roughly twenty-five years later. Or, more accurately, *someone* strange happens. That someone is John Grady Cole, McCarthy's young protagonist. Unlike Charlie Flagg and Homer Bannon, Grady has no ranch to rescue from almost certain financial and spatial ruin; instead, his parents are divorced and while his father nostalgically gives him a new saddle as an early Christmas present, his mother has moved to the city to be an actress and sell the family ranch. Grady's inheritance amounts to a romantic but ultimately futile gesture toward a working lifestyle that his mother has replaced with more lucrative performance in an urban center. And so, expectedly, there are no depictions of hard labor in McCarthy's novel, yet Grady's lineage nicely frames what there *is*: the performance of labor that belies a preoccupation with money and class. McCarthy's text thus stages what happens to those ranchers when Texas undergoes a complicated social, cultural, economic, and political shift that leaves them largely without their labor but with the memory of that labor – a shift that sits behind the Cole family lawyer's austere warning to a despondent Grady, "Son, not everybody thinks that life on a cattle ranch in west Texas is the second best thing to dyin and goin to heaven. If it was a payin proposition that'd be one thing. But it aint" (McCarthy 17).

A word on McCarthy criticism and the mythos of *All the Pretty Horses*. A New York Times Bestseller and one of McCarthy's most popular novels, *All the Pretty Horses* pays significant dues to its literary antecedents – dime store

Westerns and cowboy heroes. In this respect, the novel stands in stark contrast to McMurtry's and Kelton's; whereas the two latter authors sought to look more closely at the figure of the cowboy-rancher and complicate his role as the mythic figure of the West, McCarthy exploits that role in John Grady Cole. But Grady's ultimately futile chase after the idyllic cowboy life reveals *All the Pretty Horses*, as Sara Spurgeon has argued, as "an elegy for a romanticized way of life, a code of honor, a mythical world birthed and brutally murdered ... the world of the cowboy" – a world that is, as it turns out, based on a mythic figure that "is bound to crumble, for it is hollow at its core and stripped bare" (79). This argument is a common one; indeed, most McCarthy criticism on *All the Pretty Horses* delivers or relies on some manifestation of it. Phillip A Snyder, for instance, claims that, while John Grady Cole is faithful to the mythical and vanishing cowboy code, he and Rawlins must ultimately "engage other identities, as well as the binary cowboy codes, on ethical terms, because the cowboy culture in which they operate is not a unified totality but an infinite heterogeneity" (203). Even critical work on *All the Pretty Horses* that focuses on the novel's ethnic and racial components most often moves off this argument; Daniel Cooper Alarcon's "All the Pretty Mexicos: McCarthy's Mexican Representations" stipulates that McCarthy's reproduction of Mexico as an "Infernal Paradise" calls attention to the multiple dialogic planes on which Western racial identities, especially cowboys and vacqueros, are constructed. More broadly, Jose Limon names McCarthy the "Mexican from

Tennessee” because he successfully integrates authentic gestures toward Mexican culture into the traditional format of the Western cowboy novel.

While each of these critical pieces pick up on an important focus of McCarthy’s work – that *All the Pretty Horses* serves to display and then dismantle crucial elements of the typical Western and the romantic cowboy mythos through Grady’s failures – they also rely on the lack of authenticity of these cowboy identities. In order for Grady to come up empty handed after his search for the cowboy lifestyle, the cowboy lifestyle must be as Spurgeon argues – “hollow.” And, in many ways, it is hollow – the glamorous, romanticized image of the cowboy riding off into the sunset (how the novel ends, in a cruel twist of fate) is hollow, a memory constructed by the cowboys and ranchers who lost their sense of purpose. But, as it goes, in every lie there is a kernel of truth. And so, while I don’t disagree with these critics and the widely held perspective that McCarthy’s cowboys are largely hopelessly chasing after a dream that never existed in the first place, I do think there’s more weight and depth buried under image than we typically think. McCarthy’s lack of labor in the novel, then, both indicates the larger loss at the center of this paper and leaves room for the class tension that surfaces in its wake.

IV. ON CLASS

Laborless and so unmoored without the kind of working identity so crucial to McMurtry’s and Kelton’s protagonists’ senses of self, McCarthy’s John Grady Cole and his best friend Lacey Rawlins leave Texas for Mexico to find and

experience “authentic” cowboy labor on a ranch.³ When they arrive on the Hacienda de Nuestra Senora de la Purisima Concepcion, Grady quickly rises to local fame as his efficient and superior ability to break young, wild horses travels through the town: “the vacqueros seemed to treat them with a certain deference” and when Grady and Lacey arrive to work more horses, “there were some twenty people standing about looking at the horses ... and all waiting for them to return” (105). Here, Grady earns the respect and awe of the local, “authentic” population because he handles breaking horses – “authentic” cowboy ranch work – with grace and skill. This respect, in turn, earns him class mobility when Don Hector, the owner of the hacienda, promotes him on the ranch because his labor is so impressive.

Yet, on closer inspection, Grady’s breaking of the horses on the ranch resembles a performance of class more than actual labor. As word of his work spreads and his audience grows, McCarthy’s prose fashions the ranch into a stage and the horses and Grady into actors: “Someone had built a fire on the ground outside the potrero and there were something like a hundred people gathered, some come from the pueblo of La Vega six miles to the south, some from farther. He rode the last five of the horses by the light of that fire, the horses dancing,

³ The vacquero past McCarthy’s gestures toward here and elsewhere that Grady and Rawlins go to Mexico to rediscover functions as an ironic indication of how dangerous and misleading seeking a cowboy identity in the age of modernism can be. Positing Mexico as a space of the past where one can seamlessly assume the role of the “vacquero” suggests that the boys remain ignorant of Mexico as a nation with its own complicated political ranching history. See Jose Limon, Daniel Cooper Alarcon, Timothy P Carson, Sara Spurgeon, and John Cant on border crossing, multiethnic identities, and cowboy histories.

turning in the light, their red eyes flashing” (107). A makeshift rodeo, this scene sits on the thorny intersection of lived experience and historical memory. Like the rodeo stars who use fame in the spotlight to replace the work they once had reason to do, Grady’s breaking becomes a staged affair that is less important for its use and more important for its nostalgic entertainment value. The audience Grady draws *should* have to work – indeed, he should not have an audience at all. However, the laboring public he draws attests to the lack of work to be done, which underscores Grady’s “work” as unnecessary. Moreover, those who come to watch are poor workers – workers who are, right now, out of work – and Grady’s performance positions him in a constructed class status above his audience. On the surface, he is more talented at and vital to ranch work than those who watch; in reality, he merely plays the role of a staged distraction that recalls and memorializes the work many in the audience once did. This is, literally, a poor-man’s rodeo performance.

In the same vein, Grady’s promotion on the ranch is compromised by the way Don Hector’s house reveals the constructed nature of authenticity:

They sat at a long table of english walnut. The walls of the room were covered with blue damask and hung with portraits of men and horses. At the end of the room was a walnut sideboard with some chafingdishes and decanters set out upon Don Hector reached behind him and took a china ashtray from the sideboard and placed it before them and took from his shirtpocket a small tin box of

english cigarettes and opened them and offered them to John Grady
and John Grady took one. (112-3)

Here, the wealth in Don Hector's house reflects a kind of class difference and class demonstration Grady finds uncomfortable. Rather than an "authentic" ranch owner, Don Hector is a businessman who reaps the benefits of independent capital, which is both furnished by work that feeds off the desire of Grady and those like him to experience cowboy labor and showcases the global capitalist economy of which the West is becoming an integral part. Don Hector needs cowboys like Grady, who memorialize the labor of the ranch and continue to seek it out, to support his wealthy lifestyle and business. And ultimately, because the ranch and its working order are moored in class and labor stratification, the protection and use his work should lend him fails Grady. He is arrested under suspicious circumstances that, on the surface, concern his involvement in stealing a horse but, in reality, are a response to the class transgression Don Hector feels Grady committed when Grady began an affair with Don Hector's daughter. His arrest reflects the fact that, while class mobility is constructed and falsified, it is also punishable by law when it becomes class transgression. As an integral part of organizing the ranch along class lines, maintaining a strict hierarchy through his bloodline is one way Don Hector can continually remind those who work for him of their subordinate status. Even though he may also work the ranch, his familiarity with his family is not to be mimicked. Hence, McCarthy draws a firm line between kinds of class status on the ranch that his ranch's financial success

can underwrite. Class is thus not only a status that one inhabits and enjoys the benefits of, but it provides its also its own support.

Yet when the capital stability of the ranch itself is under pressure, class lines cannot be adhered to in the same ways. To further parse through how cowboys yoke class status to forms of active labor, I turn to Kelton's novel and Charlie Flagg's struggle with self-representation in the face of his ranch's economic and ecological deterioration. Early in the novel, Kelton stages a tension between ranching as pleasurable work and ranching as profitable business: "But later when [Charlie] went into ranching for himself he quickly found it was difficult to show much profit on that kind of cattle or that kind of operation. These blooded Herefords were poor sport but far more negotiable at the bank" (Kelton 20). Though he would rather raise cattle that offered more of a challenge, here Charlie recognizes the gulf between ranching as enjoyment and ranching as profitable. His discomfort with the financial promise yet physical ease of raising Herefords reflects the way cowboys and ranchers thought of their work in both memorialized and realized terms. Charlie desires the physical challenge of harder cattle he had in the past, yet understands that his ranch will quickly go under if he does not adjust to new economic demands. Moreover, Charlie's thoughts reflect the value a cowboy finds in a particular kind of difficult, yet invigorating, labor. Inasmuch as making money is not enough, a degree of difficulty of physical work, and the ability to reflect on that difficulty, becomes capital in the cowboy class system. Success at the bank, a domesticated and more artificial success, does not possess

the cultural weight of success on the ranch, a more physically obvious and productive success.

The line that Kelton draws here between kinds of labor also manifests in the way cowboy labor presents on the body. The Herefords represent the kind of abstraction from the landscape that the town's young deputy also represents; he "was dressed in a neatly tailored Western shirt and tight legged cowboy pants, shiny high heeled boots and a nicely creased Stetson hat," whereas Charlie "wore a nondescript straw hat beaten badly out of shape and a pair of old black boots, his baggy khaki trousers stuffed carelessly into their tops" (7). What's at stake here is not the appearance of spectacle or authenticity — which, as Nathaniel Lewis and others remind us, is a false barometer of Westernness — but practicality. Charlie's clothes lend him class purchase not because they gesture toward an "authentic" relationship to the West, but because they gesture toward the working relationship he has cultivated with his ranch. Still, the novel's cowboys do not enjoy a privileged connection to nature — indeed, their failure in the face of the drought magnifies how nature and humans stand connected via a complicated, and often misunderstood, tension. But their willingness to and the effort they put into work encourages a kind of necessary, mutable awareness and respect for what their land can provide. As Charlie reflects when economic instability encourages younger cowboys to overgraze their already dry land, "Continued long enough, this abuse would make barren desert pastures that once had grown tall grass he felt a deep and binding obligation to the land itself ... To see it bleed now brought him

grief; it was like watching a friend waste away with terminal cancer” (294-5). At the same time, this thought is imbued with nostalgia for a landscape that is swiftly slipping away, marking crucial the roles work identity *and* the memory of that work play in the rancher’s sense of self.

Yet tending to their labors ultimately prove to be a task beyond the cowboys’ reach. Soon, the battle over labor and the support of that labor unveils a tension between governmental support of the ranch during the long drought and the desire of the cowboy to be an independent laborer who can take pride in his work on his land. In other words, that tension showcases the conflicting reality of work and the memory of what that work used to be. When it becomes evident that Charlie and his community of ranchers must petition for federal aid to offset their losses, the community gathers at Charlie’s house to discuss the inevitable. When Charlie suggests that Prentice Harpe, a fellow rancher who does not work his own cattle, go to Washington as their representative because of his political suave, Harpe refuses Charlie’s request with an eye on the self-representation of social status: “I’m a drugstore cowboy. They’d sense it right off. We want somebody who *looks* the part, somebody who’s always been a cowman, somebody who’s got *ranch* burned onto him like a brand burned on a bull. We want a man who — when he walks in there — will make everybody say, ‘Now there is the genuine article.’ You’re the one for that, Charlie. You’ve got *image*” (269). While each man has equal need for federal aid because they each own a failing ranch, Charlie’s years of cowboy labor and experience “brand” him, a metaphor that links him to the

animals he owns and works and indicates the permanent scarring such work leaves on the body. But this branding also creates an image – a potent visual reminder that even those in Washington would be unable to deny. And while Charlie’s fellow ranchers and cowboys view this “branding” as a marker of class status gained only through years of hard work, to politicians in Washington DC – outsiders – this “branding” reflects an idealized image of the working cowboy. Here manipulating and relying on the very romanticizing their work theoretically effaces, Kelton’s ranchers, and especially Charlie, indicate the knotty intersection of realized and idealized that also constitutes cowboy class status – the junction of ecological labor and social representation.

But the process of accepting that aid is a reluctant and painful one. “Give us rain,” Kelton proclaims early in the novel, “and it makes no difference who is in the White House” (4), suggesting that the power of nature can overwhelm the power of politics. At the same time, the resistance of this phrase registers the pressure and impact of government on the lives of the ranchers and resonates with the complicated overlap of the history and memory of work and the present manifestation of that work. Ideally, Charlie and his fellow ranchers would work without government aid or interference, but the long drought and mechanization of the ranch has made that impossible. Now, the ranching community’s response to this ecological and financial crisis maps the gulf between ranch work before the drought and ranch work after onto the contradiction between pride in private work and shame in public funding. Early in the novel, Charlie and another rancher,

Page Mauldin, discuss the politics of accepting government money to offset the cost of grain and feed. When Charlie resists this help because of his pride in completing and funding his own work, Page explains the financial and legal logic behind his decision: “We ain’t paupers, Charlie; that ain’t the point. Most of the people who get government money ain’t paupers. It ain’t given to us because we need it; it’s given to us because somebody needs *us*... they need our vote. So everybody’s gettin’ it, and you’re payin’ your tax money for it. Only way you’ll ever get any of that back is to claim what’s comin’ to you” (58).

Here, Page hones in on the complicated political and emotional tension that accompanies accepting governmental help. In the interest of individual financial growth, Page advocates for federal aid because it will enable him and ranchers like him to continue their individual work. This moment unveils the West as a complicated intersection and composite of idealism and realism, of the working cowboy’s ideals and the reality of sustaining a ranch under extreme economic, political, cultural, and environmental pressures. Moreover, Charlie’s response expresses the fear that accepting government aid would jeopardize the romanticized, “authentic identity” he has unknowingly cultivated through both memory and his own work:

That ain’t the way I was brought up, or you either We was taught to believe in a man rustlin’ for himself as long as he’s able. If you get to dependin’ on the government, the day’ll come when the damn *federales* will dictate everything you do. Some desk clerk in

Washington will decide where you live and where you work and what color toilet paper you wipe yourself with. And you'll be scared to say anything because they might cut you off the tit. (58-9)

Charlie was "taught to believe," a phrase that unveils the role of memory and history in the cowboy's working identity. The larger discussion at stake here – relinquishing an "authentic" identity for a feeble shadow of that identity – only serves to undermine its supposed juxtaposition. There is no binary between the romantic and the real; instead, as Charlie's complicated position reveals, there is only the historically inflected sense of self these ranchers and cowboys possess, and the current circumstances that shape them.

IV. ON SPACE

And that history – and the memory of that history – is also written onto the space these cowboys and ranchers inhabit. Both a space for work and a space for leisure, the ranch and the open reaches of West Texas offer these laborers purpose and home. In all three novels, space is like labor itself – both realized and idealized, both shifting under the weight of new environmental and economic pressures and offering a stage onto which cowboys and ranchers can project visions of themselves they never really had in the first place. Like labor – once encapsulated by the cowboy's romanticized and exciting pursuit of cattle, lasso in hand, shouting "yee-haw" – after World War II, the spaces of the West in literature

transform from imagined, rural, wild ideals to a gridded and increasingly urban landscapes, infused with labor and class, in the process of industrialization.

As I explored early in this chapter, World War II and the period following ushered a new stage of capitalism onto the Texas landscape that, in turn, demanded a new urban workforce to help support the war effort. Population density changes accompanied these labor changes: “The farm population declined from 1,500,000 in 1945 to 215,000 in 1980, the number of farms from 384,977 to 186,000, and farmworkers from 350,000 (including part-time workers in the cotton fields) to 85,000” (Texas Historical Association Online). And while this new stage encouraged a general move from rural farmland to urban centers, that move was hastened by the long Texas drought, which made the family or individually run ranch an even harder venture to support. Oil became the predominant resource and, consequently, source of income in the state, displacing cattle and corn for the first time since Texas began to significantly contribute to the national economy. Such a shift in labor registered on the landscape itself, as Texas oilfields replaced cattle herds and cornrows. Rural space was no longer widely available for ranchers and cowboys to live or labor on, and so the city and its opportunities for work became the logical landing ground for younger generations. As a result, new spaces were etched into Texas: rural spaces were ornamented by mechanical labor and urban spaces by more industrial and domestic infrastructure. If Manifest Destiny, the Homestead Act, and 19th century patterns of family settlement onto Texas soil represented the first wave of capitalization on Western space, then

industrialization, with its mechanized labor processes, oilfields glittering with metallic oil rigs, trucks for ranch work, trains for transportation, and blossoming urban centers represented the next major flow of structural capital into Texas.

And it is precisely in the gap between these two stages of capitalization that the cowboys and ranchers in these novels find themselves. Their work undergoes a massive industrialization, slowly changing the hands-only work of the older generation to a more mechanized processes where hands and machines played equal roles. But the labor they memorialize – and, in many respects, continue to perform – is a skilled, biological labor that cultivates, in small doses, the land they own – often, that their families have owned for a century or more. Yet, as these novels have demonstrated, that kind of labor became all but pragmatically obsolete and ecologically impossible in Texas post-World War II. That obsolescence is mirrored in the changes the land of these novels undergoes. The environmental crises in Kelton's and McMurtry's novels mirror the complex political, structural, and economic devastation their ranches face; and these two plights become metonymic for one another. This connection in turn reflects the way that changes in expectations for labor production under modernization changed the landscape as well.

In each novel, several repeated episodes indicate, in particular, how the reshuffling of space and socioeconomics both undermines the identity of those who remain tied to the finances and labor of the ranch and transforms the lives of the younger men and women for whom ranch labor is no longer an option. The

result is a twinned shift of identity and space: the younger cowboys in *Time it Never Rained*, *All the Pretty Horses*, and *Horseman, Pass By*, in a desperate attempt to salvage the skills and familiar base of knowledge they have in a society that is charging headfirst into modernization, look to urban centers for work and perform as spectacle cowboys in the local rodeo. As I have already explored, John Grady Cole's breaking scene resembles and indeed becomes a rodeo performance that etches deeper class lines between laborers on the ranch. Additionally, Grady discovers that the real Jimmy Blevins – the name assumed by the young cowboy he and Rawlins discover on the way to Mexico, who is the best shot and rider of the three of them – is a Western radio minister who broadcasts across the globe. Together, the two Jimmy Blevins comprise the cowboy and the modern performance piece – one, at the end of the novel, dead because of conceptions of vigilante justice that recall the wild West, the other alive and well and reaching “The whole world [with] a voice ... like a instrument” (McCarthy 297).

Thus, reading the landscapes of these urban scenes alongside the landscapes of the novels' rural scenes reveals spaces that are both inflected with the nostalgia of the wild West and in the process of being transformed, crudely and suddenly, by modern industrialization. In particular, each novel draws together its urban and rural landscapes by showcasing and then foregrounding the passage of time on space in scenes that scan spaces coded by particular kinds of work. These scenes serve to stage the messy, complicated interaction between the spaces of Texas that remain largely undeveloped and the quickening development

bleeding across those spaces. When read alongside one another, this series of tableaux vivants chart a narrative trajectory that lays bare the intrusion of modern industrialism into Texas ranching and the way that intrusion blurs the assumed line between the nostalgia of the past and the reality of the present.

McMurtry's *Horseman, Pass By* contains relatively few detailed descriptions of the Texas landscape, which accentuates and yokes together those that are in the novel. The two earliest panoramas of the landscape are Lonnie's overtly (and overly) nostalgic opening, which, in the haze of memory, recalls the "green ... early oat fields" and lends a hue of rebirth to the landscape (3) and a dream of his, in which he imagines looking down from a cliff on "Texas, green and brown and graying in the sun, spread wide under the clear spread of sky like the opening scene in a big Western movie" (70). Together, these vistas set the scene for rural Texas, but a rural Texas that no longer exists. In both scenes, Lonnie must recall the past – either through narrative "looking back" or dreaming – to access a rich and detailed image of rural Texas, prior to extensive industrialization. Yet Lonnie's visions of Texas are inextricably connected to industrial change; his opening shifts registers when it subsequently recalls how "a train would go by and blow its whistle," an event that "always took the spirit out of the cowboys' talk; made them lonesome than they could say" (5). Lonnie's Texas may hold the memory of the idyllic, empty space of the nostalgic wild West, but at the same time it is encoded by the very present and unavoidable effects of a new capitalism and a new working order.

Moreover, when Lonnie does reflect on the present Texas of the novel, what emerges further interweaves Texas of the past with Texas of the present, historically inflecting space with past work processes. *Horseman, Pass By's* landscapes expose a Texas pulled between older and newer kinds of labor, showcased in a particularly haunting light when the government sends in contractors to dig the execution pits for the cattle:

When I mounted, I noticed the bulldozers. There were eight or ten of them, sitting out in the old grown-over field we never used. By the time I was a mile from the barn they had cranked up, and you could hear them all over the prairie. Huge clouds of dust began to roll out of the fields, and I knew they must be scraping out pits. (121)

The parallel here between Lonnie riding his horse and the contractors riding in their bulldozers draws a fine line between the forms of labor on display, while simultaneously interweaving them. On the one hand, Lonnie represents the cowboy gearing up for a day of labor on the ranch, as he would have in a less industrial time; on the other hand, his labor on this day is both necessitated and complicated by the presence of the bulldozers. He must spend the day rounding up cattle for slaughter – a familiar task for the cowboy, yet this time with an ending that will halt the work he traditionally does with the cattle on the ranch. And in addition to literally acting as the agent of his own destruction, Lonnie here also bears a futile witness the larger movements and forces of this destruction. The bulldozers not only broadly represent this new phase of capitalism – ultimately, as

I discussed earlier, the space they clear by killing the cattle makes room for the oilrigs Hud will eventually populate the ranch with – but they also claim the space of the Texas ranch when their form of labor is heard “all over the prairie.” By inhabiting and repurposing “the old grown-over field we never used” to aid the labor of slaughtering the cattle, these bulldozers usher in a new expectation for ranch work and layer that labor on top of the traditional work of the cowboy and rancher.

But where these cowboys subsequently go after their work has finished (and sometimes go to *find* work as well) only throws more light on the layers of capitalism’s sediment under which their working identities are being buried. Pushed off their ranches by a mechanized work force and the need for industrial grade and sized product, cowboys and ranchers gather at the rodeo – some for distracting entertainment, some to ride in the rodeo itself and thus participate in the reduction of a cowboy’s working identity to the disposable spectacle of the rodeo performer. Although for each novel’s protagonist, rodeo work is not an option because it mocks actual labor and produces nothing, *The Time it Never Rained* and *Horseman, Pass By* put both the post-industrial cowboy and his new urban working space on display in the rodeo. Moreover, in *Horseman, Pass By*, the urban rodeo scenes occur almost immediately after scenes of preparing to slaughter and slaughter on the ranch itself. Here, the timing seems to suggest the depressing fact that, for the cowboys, this is the only place they have left to go. On the first day the rodeo moves into town, Lonnie takes advantage of the show to

distract himself from the awful work he began the day before. While there, he watches “half of Thalia waking up”: “I saw a woman stagger out to her clothesline in a bathrobe, to hang out an early washing. In the arena below me a cowgirl was loping her paint horse around and around in circles—she acted like it was the only thing she knew how to do” (101). Situating this domestic image alongside the cowgirl’s mechanical riding warm-up suggests that the cowboy’s biological endeavor on the ranch is being buried under an industrialized, repetitive routine tied more closely to the urban interior than the rural exterior. And this urban interior leaks onto the exterior, marking it with the same industrialization: “The whole town had a rodeo look already, paper cups and beer cans everywhere, and piles of horseshit drying in the street” (107).

In *The Time it Never Rained*, Charlie Flagg’s son, Tom, chooses to embrace the post-industrial cowboy “working” identity and ride the rodeo circuit to make fast and easy money. His decision hinges on the structure of a new Western space, organized along the lines of modernization and spectacle. And as Tom’s fame as a rodeo circuit rider grows, he is roped into contributing to and sustaining this organization. After a successful rodeo ride, a Jason Ellender, president of the Ellender Trailer Company approaches him to “talk some business” (Kelton 182). Ellender proposes that Tom relinquish his father’s old trailer, one that “Charlie had bought from a tin-barn welder, its running gear made from an old car chassis” and was “hell for stout,” and instead haul one of his more modern, sleeker models

(183). When Tom refuses because he assumes the price is too high, Ellender explains why “It wouldn’t have to cost nearly as much as you think”:

I spend a lot of money on advertising, Tom. And one of the best advertisements I can have is for good rodeo hands like you to be seen pulling my trailers to hell and gone. We’d paint your name on the trailer in big letters where everybody could see them: TOM FLAGG. And below, much smaller, would be the company insignia. People would say to themselves, “If an Ellender trailer is good enough for Tom Flagg, it’s good enough for me.” And wherever you went, people would know Tom Flagg was in town. (183-4).

Here, class status and consumerism collide and produce, in the wake of their energy, space organized along the lines of capital. In accepting the trailer and acting as a mobile salesperson for the company, Tom literally embodies – and, indeed, aids – the force of capitalism’s growth in and across space. Moreover, his identity is not linked to unglamorous ranching labor, but instead the enviable and popular “work” of the rodeo cowboy. And while the reader knows he’s a tool for accepting, he’s also a tool of the broader forces of industrialism that, here, are modernizing and regulating the cowboy’s new, post-industrial working identity, the tools of that work, and the space in which that work occurs. The rodeo is the breeding ground of men like Jason Ellender – and the more Tom Flaggs the Jason Ellenders of Texas can recruit, the further they can spread the post-industrial seed.

Thus, as the space of the West becomes a gridded, modern space that becomes increasingly antithetical to the physical labor of the cowboy on the ranch, the deeper meaning of labor surfaces. If their work once lent these cowboys a sense of purpose, the loss of their work leaves them lost and unmoored in a rapidly changing landscape. And, in an attempt to rediscover their footing, these cowboys and ranchers memorialize their labor in spaces that make possible the work they want to do. Nowhere is this instability more evident than in the first and final scenes of McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*. As the novel opens, John Grady has returned home for his grandfather's funeral, the narrative literally beginning when *Horseman, Pass By* ends. To escape from the confines of the coffin and the corpse, he steps into the night for fresh air:

As he turned to go he heard the train. He stopped and waited for it. He could feel it under his feet. It came boring out of the east like some ribald satellite of the coming sun howling and bellowing in the distance and the long light of the headlamp running through the tangled mesquite brakes and creating out of the night the endless fenceline down the dead straight right of way and sucking it back again wire and post mile on mile into the darkness after where the boilers smoke disbanded slowly along the faint new horizon and the sound came lagging and he stood still holding his hat in his hands in the passing groundshudder watching it till it was gone. Then he turned and went back to the house. (3-4)

While the machine tears apart the garden in this familiar scene, John Grady's reaction is what interests me. He has not crossed the train tracks, yet he waits for the train to pass as if he had. Moreover, he stands "holding his hat in his hands" and "watching [the train] till it was gone," only moving back toward the house when the ground no longer shudders. The train arrests John Grady's attention and movement entirely; he loses himself in what McCarthy paints as the train's disruptive yet oddly controlled path through the rural landscape. Here, the industrial organization of space undoes John Grady's identity as a cowboy of the rural West; he even goes so far as to remove his hat while it passes, as if in the presence of a colonel or a king.

At the end of the narrative, after spending the novel searching for – and failing to find – what he considers authentic cowboy labor, John Grady finds himself again at a funeral and again without a job, and so without a working identity. In a sad attempt to do something cowboy-like when he has nothing else to do, he rides through the desert and comes upon a bull who eerily parallels his experience: "There were few cattle in that country because it was barren country indeed yet he came at evening upon a solitary bull rolling in the dust against the bloodred sunset like an animal in sacrificial torment" (302). Both John Grady and the bull are out of place, in a space that does not support the labor they, as residents of the ranch, generally do. That purpose and their identities, tied to their work and from which they have been separated, comprise the sacrifice that the bull enacts and the "sacrificial torment" he and John Grady endure. Lost in a

version of hell, without work to save him, John Grady can do nothing but silently walk on: “and horse and rider and horse passed on and their long shadows passed in tandem like the shadow of a single being. Passed and paled into the darkening land, the world to come.” Here, it is as if he and his horse – emblems of the cowboy’s life on the ranch – themselves fade to nothing but shadow. Pushed out of the space of the ranch by increasing industrial and modern legal processes that leave no room for the cowboy and his physical skills, John Grady finds himself “Passed and paled into the darkening land” of a desert hell. And this moment recalls, and is reinforced by, the other final image of the novel, when John Grady watches a group of Indians – the last, ruined descendants of the Comanche – who pay him no attention because he is just a pale representative of a mythical cowboy they have seen many times before: “They had no curiosity about him at all. As if they knew all that they needed to know. They stood and watched him pass and watched him vanish upon that landscape solely because he was passing. Solely because he would vanish” (301).

Here we go again, the novel seems to roll its eyes and sigh. John Grady, destitute and depressed through he is, rides into the sunset with the bull and the Indians flanking his exit. McCarthy’s parting shot of the West has John Grady reflect on it as a space that “was rushing away and seemed to care nothing for the old or the young or the rich or poor or dark or pale or he or she. Nothing for their struggles, nothing for their names. Nothing for the living or the dead” (301). This ending works for McCarthy – indeed, it works because he has spent so much of the

novel reinforcing the binary between the romantic Wild West Grady imagines and the unforgiving West Grady encounters. But though this familiar ending is the one that often crops up in McCarthy's works – the lonely cowboy, dislodged from his place in the old West, staring into a dark future in which he has no place – it is not the only ending. McMurtry's Lonnie finishes *Horseman, Pass By* in a similar way – he leaves the ranch, after its purpose leaves him – but he heads to the city, not the dark, hellish unknown. McMurtry also doesn't worry the novel with the romantic undermining the real quite as much as McCarthy does. And Kelton's Charlie Flagg does something entirely different. *The Time it Never Rained*, instead of relying on that perceived binary, uses its ending to explore the multidimensional relationship between cowboy labor and the spatial environment that hosts that labor.

Toward the end of *Time it Never Rained*, West Texas has betrayed Charlie. The drought has stretched on for more years than his ranch can accommodate and he is forced to turn to goats to keep his ranch afloat. But when the rains finally come, they wash most of his protective measures away, killing most of the newly sheared goats and drowning the landscape. As he realizes his efforts to save the goats are in vain, Charlie turns to his wife Mary and cries, “they saved *me*, but I can't save *them*” (393).

Those haunting words encompass not only the scene but also the complicated tensions among a rancher's labor, his ranch's economic health, and the environment he depends on for both. Despite his deep familiarity with the patterns of etching out a living in West Texas and his experience with past

droughts – as he confides to Manuel, “I’ve lived through other drouths, son. They usually break hard” (394) – this extreme environmental crisis represents a challenge beyond his ability. In addition to the toll the lack of water has taken on feeding his animals and tending his ranch, the goats become their own liability as they cease responding to Charlie’s attempts to save them: “He could sense the fear that was taking hold of the animals. The goat was more sensitive, more perceptive than the sheep, more responsive to weather changes” (389). Charlie’s efforts to drive the goats forward with his pickup and, as a last resort, to build a fire to keep them warm not only cause more harm than good, but also trouble the notion that more technology makes for better ranching. As Once Manuel takes the horse they bring and he continues in the pickup, Charlie even realizes that “It would have been better, he thought, to have brought two horses” rather than the pickup (388). But, encased in his truck, that natural sensitivity the goats have toward the environment is gone in Charlie, as he reacts to them with a clunky and useless pickup and an ultimately deadly gasoline fire. And finally, because they gave Charlie financial salvation, the deaths of the goats unveil the ties that bind environmental health to economic health. Without a sensitive pulse on the workings of the natural world, this ending seems to suggest, the socioeconomic world is bound to fail.

These final moments then pinpoint the uneven and messy relationship the ranchers and cowboys of these novels have with the spaces that provide and support their work. Despite advances in technology, despite more efficient

industrial ranching techniques, ranching itself remains a grueling, on the ground job that, in turn, encourages cowboys and ranchers to cast their minds back to when that job wasn't mediated by machines that cause more harm than good in crucial moments. Kelton's final scene recalls, in that way, McMurtry's harrowing depiction of Homer Bannon's cattle being shot, execution style, in a pit from the safety of bulldozers. These two episodes measure what can be the deadly cost of technological advancement and the abstraction of work from the environment; it isn't so surprising, then, that those who witness them turn to better memories of their work before the machines came to the ranch.

And yet, as Mary, Manuel, and now Kathy stand dumbfounded at the fate of the goats and the impossible task of rebuilding, Charlie manages an insightful encouragement: "There's still the land," he tells them, "A man can always start again. A man always *has* to" (394). At the core, the land itself offers the last salvation – it is, after all, the primary, necessary ingredient to ranch work. And as difficult as that rebuilding is, the novel ends with the promise that it will come. In the novel's final scene, with dawn breaking over their shoulders, Charlie and Mary "walk back together through the cold rain" (395) as the younger generation loads the still living goats into the trailer, half armed and half burdened with the knowledge that there is still work to be done. This ending is not the cowboy galloping into the sunset of *All the Pretty Horses*; it's not even the cowboy turning to the urban landscape for socioeconomic redemption of *Horseman, Pass By*. It is

the cowboy-rancher refusing to vanish and instead staying firmly put, in the coming light of dawn, on the land he owns.

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MEZZANINE FOUR: THE MANY WESTS WE LOST

Just as the families of the Dust Bowl encountered a drought that became too overwhelming to manage, so too do the cowboys of Chapter Four find themselves facing a future they cannot weather. As Charlie Flagg discovers, the twinned losses of environmental and economic health sap ranching resources to the point that both industrial and traditional solutions prove insufficient. Present-day ecocritics would be well advised to examine cowboy literature for similar treatments of harsh ecological realities that offer grim glimpses of coming crises to the nation's environmental health. But for the dimensions of this project, suffice it to say, more simply, that cowboy literature provides a unique perspective on working and living with the land, and how poverty and deprivation can have an impact on both.

Overall, the portrait the novels of Chapter Four paint of those ways of working and living is bleak. Grady cannot find real cowboy work, let alone life, at the end of McCarthy's novel; Charlie Flagg watches as the last hope for his ranch – the ill-fated goats – comes to ruin; Homer Barron's narrative ends when the rodeos come to town and offer the only vestige of cowboy life left – one cheaply sequined and littered on the road after the rodeos leave town. Again – loss. But like the families and communities from Chapter Three, these “families” – those made up of the ranchers, cowboys, and cowgirls who refuse to leave when their livelihoods fell apart – stuck around after the fall to face uncertain lives. If it leaves us uncertain about their futures, that very indeterminacy is also a theme these books have in

common: as such, it suggests that the openness of the West, rather than representing a mythic vista of endless possibility, was actually a constricting force. The overwhelming space of the West was hardly “tamed,” as legend would have it; in fact, what these novels show is that the very openness of that space only bred a series of new challenges for class, labor, and communal survival that were manifested in the uncertain futures of those who remained out there.

It is no wonder, then, that the texts of my final chapter also begin and end on a tone of uncertainty. Space, as we have seen, is almost constantly under siege in the West, as all those who live there struggle to gain a foothold in an unpredictable political and environmental landscape. In this light, the narrative strategies associated with the themes of the “blood/land/memory” complex and “survivance” that I examine in my final chapter likewise work to combat the loss that ensues when belonging and identity, tied to the landscape, become even more uncertain. In the American Indian novels I survey, entire ways of life are devastated, and loss is felt at the micro-level of the individual’s small, everyday frustrations. Without familiar patterns of spatial inhabitation to support them, characters feel unmoored from their senses of who they are, and often turn to destructive habits as they try to etch out new, yet ultimately unfulfilling, means of survival. As we’ll see, the characters of Stephen Graham Jones try to claim the Dakota Territory as their own, but their efforts often leave them without a coherent sense of belonging that can protect them. Ironically, they can only await the anthropologists that line the edge of their reservation to study “the Indians” as

if they were already a bygone culture. Belonging and ownership offer no protection in Jones's novel – space itself is vast, open, unforgiving – and those living in that space suffer the consequences.

These outcomes remind us of Hsuan Hsu's contention that *scale* arose as a major concern of American literature in the mid- and late nineteenth century. All of the novels in Chapter Five grapple with an American society that causes losses at the personal and the national scale. As the literature of the modern reservation began to take on regional scope, and even a national scale, issues like personal or communal loss – one of the central themes of this dissertation – grew so large, I argue, that Native American recognition of that loss became harder and harder to reconcile with the larger forces swirling around it. Or, in other words, as the literature of the “American” West began to recognize loss as a cornerstone of national identity, the theme started showing up with even greater force in the literature of those whom (Euro) “Americans” had most fundamentally dispossessed. This dissertation, I hope, documents that rising trend – everyone lost something they held was necessary to their definition of self. And as such, these Native American texts all pose a recurring question that haunts so many Western stories: If, in the end, belonging cannot truly offer these communities the protection their way of life needs, what can?

I thus argue that this feeling of loss and its ramifications — something that always accompanied movement across a “Western” space that itself was shifting between flux and fixity – are crucial components to what it means to be American

in all senses of the word. In order to settle themselves in a space that had in truth always been rapidly unraveling, individuals turned to the uncertainty of loss – specifically, the uncertainty brought about by losses in class, labor, and space – to re-attach themselves to tangible patterns of life they could point to – even patterns that had been and were still being eroded. The socioeconomic and political elements of these issues often gave loss an individual face – you lost money, you lost the ability to farm, you lost a home – and those tangible or personal losses sometimes made the national scale of loss easier to digest. Everyone lost money, lost food, lost a home — that’s just how it went: America, it turns out, was itself a space of loss. My hope is that collecting these stories of loss infuses American history with a humility that will resonate individually, communally, and nationally – and perhaps tell us something about one of the primary features of belonging in America.

CHAPTER FIVE

Tradition and Modernization Battle it out on Rocky Soil in Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Stephen Graham Jones' *The Bird is Gone*, and Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit*

I. INTRODUCTION

...the blood/land/memory complex articulates acts of indigenous minority recuperation that attempt to seize control of the symbolic and metaphorical meanings of indigenous "blood," "land," and "memory" and that seek to liberate indigenous minority identities from definitions of authenticity imposed by dominant settler cultures. (Chadwick Allen 16)

The character of survivance creates a sense of native presence over absence, nihilism, and victimry.

Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuing of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent....Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry. Survivance is the heritable right of succession or reversion of an estate and, in the course of international declarations of human rights, is a narrative estate of native survivance. (Gerald Vizenor 1)

In the two passages above, one gets a glimpse of two scholarly approaches that mark crucial landmarks in the project of reclaiming an American Indian literary history that seeks to recuperate ethnic identity after mass historical deterritorialization and massacres suffered at the hands of Anglo Americans. In different ways, Chadwick Allen and Gerald Vizenor each argue that American Indian narratives serve to recover ethnic and cultural stories, traditions, and memories, in order to push against the hostile conditions and consequences of Anglo American colonialism and reclaim Indigenous identity. Allen's "blood/land/memory complex" (adopted from N. Scott Momaday's trope "blood memory") and Vizenor's "survivance" see narrative as a tool that both enables recovery from the horrors of the past and proactive, productive engagement with the circumstances of the present and future.¹ Recuperating that identity ultimately

¹ Momaday's "blood memory" claims that there are "intrinsic variables in man's perception of his universe, variables that are determined to some real extent on the basis of his genetic constitution" whereby memory derives from "my experience, my deepest, oldest experience, the memory in my blood" (Martin 156, 157). Allen's "blood/land/memory complex" "indicate[s] a fluid movement between the key terms" and seeks to "evoke the complicated, multiperspectivist, and sometimes controversial maneuvers that are employed by indigenous minority writers when they attempt to render contemporary indigenous minority identities as literary and activists texts" (Allen 1). Similarly, Vizenor's survivance focuses on uses of new methods/technologies/narratives to promote native presence over absence and so encourage activist maneuvers that put those narratives and experiences in popular view. In this paper, I use the shared importance of narrative in Allen's "blood/land/memory complex" and Vizenor's "survivance" to draw the two together, but it is important to recognize that "survivance" is a method of categorizing native acts and narratives, while the "blood/land/memory complex" is a theoretical mode. It is also important to read the three theories in a lineage – their similarities come from their influences on and textual conversations with one another. For instance, Allen is critical of how scholars overuse "survivance" without etching out a precise definition of the term, while Vizenor is skeptical of the applicability and the essentialism of blood memory; as Arnold Krupat puts it, blood memory "only places unnecessary obstacles in the way of a fuller understanding and appreciation of

aids indigenous cultures in establishing their own contemporary agency and presence. This work, and other work like it, has fueled a continuing project that aims to define and continually refine American Indian identity in American and American Indian indigenous literature, especially in American Indian literature from the West, where conflicts between Anglos and Indians were especially violent.

In this chapter, I would like to interrogate these claims by extending the interests of this dissertation as a whole, which reads the connections among class, labor, and space in Western American novels (among which Native American texts should be included) as particularly fertile ground for such questions of identity, sovereignty, and culture. However, in doing so, I will also maintain that the two dominant approaches I list above do not fully explore the origins of the communal and individual damage sustained by American Indians in literature that depicts their cultures encountering American modernization. In these cases, we as scholars must critique the limitations of modernization *and* tradition in order to recognize the challenges of using the past to infiltrate or change the present. While both Allen and Vizenor warn against what Vizenor terms “terminal creeds” that lock individuals in the past to the detriment of their futures, I argue that uncritically engaging with either tradition *or* modernization without close attention to labor, space, and class exposes Indians to the dangers of both poles. In

Native American literature” (13). However, I think it is important to look at their similarities in order to recognize the way modernization must be a productive component of contemporary native life.

this chapter, I mean to show that works in which labor, class, and space are richly intertwined bring to light the way an uncritical recovery of traditional culture reaffirms a *false* dichotomy between modernization and tradition and harms American Indian relationships to the structures of modernization.² Altogether, a focus on Indian interactions with American modernizations of class, labor, and space unveil how uncritical uses of narrative to recall the past can encourage a dangerous stagnation that pits Indian cultural tradition and Anglo American modernization against one another. Moreover, those uncritical uses of narrative depict cultural traditions as too static to embrace adaptation. And I will argue that disengagement from the American modernization of class, labor, and space also distracts Indians from the way these structures' inner workings depend on American Indian exploitation through the feedback loop of modern capital.³ The stasis thus generated by the false binary between tradition versus modernization traps characters in the destructive relationships they have with newer forms of labor, new uses of capital and new class demarcations, and spaces that were once tranquil and familiar but are now damaged and dangerous.

² While narratives of ethnic culture, history, and tradition appear in Hogan's novel and the other texts, and even while, as Andrew Smith has argued, "Hogan's work is ... concerned with the recovery of traditional knowledge that has been lost" (176), this focus on *past* ethnic traditions makes it hard for Indian characters to form individual relationships to *new* patterns of class, labor, and space.

³ By "feedback loop," I mean the self reinforcing structure of modern capitalism, wherein low income members of society – here, disenfranchised American Indians – are exploited by unfair legal processes that evoke a false sense of economic gain that is unaccompanied by the power such gain should provide. Those who are exploited then spend their money in ways that benefit those doing the exploiting and so provide capital to fuel further exploitative practices.

My approach may initially seem counterintuitive: many of the spaces displayed in modern Native American narratives, particularly those set on reservations, seem to make only a small number of lived experiences possible. Historian Phillip Deloria has made this case, for instance, in *Indians in Unexpected Places*, where he argues that Indians are most often represented as traditional “Indian people, corralled on isolated and impoverished reservations” (6).⁴ Deloria’s argument, of course, is ultimately that this representation is largely inaccurate: more often, he argues, American Indians adapted to early 20th century modernization and productively interweaved its practices with their own cultural traditions.⁵ Taking Deloria’s argument as my starting point, I have chosen to examine three novels—Linda Hogan’s *Mean Spirit* (1991), Sherman Alexie’s *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), and Stephen Graham Jones’ *The Bird is Gone* (2005)—in which labor *seems* barely present but is actually quite fundamental in shaping the story. However, departing from Deloria, I argue that these novels demonstrate not only the dangers of uncritically embracing either tradition or American modernization but also the need to engage with both. In

⁴ This lack resonates with Robert Dale Parker’s recognition that, beginning in the 1930s, American Indian literature depicts young American Indian men as “restless ... with nothing to do” (5), which again suggests that modern forms of labor and uses of land for profit barred Indians from practicing their more traditional, land based labors.

⁵ Here, Deloria emphasizes how American Indians used modern forms of labor as a means of self representation in the public eye. For instance, Indians joined sports teams, composed and performed popular music, and represented themselves on stage in both film and theater. While the forms of labor I refer to are different than Deloria’s, his overall commentary on how Indians productively participated in modernity while maintaining their cultural identities helps me critique the lack of labor in this chapter’s texts.

these novels, as modernization advances and Indians turn to static traditions, memories, and stories that evoke the past, those narratives inhibit relationships with and production across multiple platforms – limits that in turn challenge cultural security in a number of ways. Specifically, class mobility is nullified by legal practices and land claims Indians are unfamiliar with that place money and valuable land in the hands of those for whom political and economic maneuvers are enacted. And in a similar vein, labor for the self recedes and is replaced by labor that manipulates land as capital or that is work contracted for others, shifting individual relationships to labor from rewarding and productive to spectacle or disembodied. Space, thus, enables forms of labor that bring profit to the few that hold power and disables other forms that once benefitted those who performed that labor. And all these negative relationships to space, class, and labor – which past narratives cannot ameliorate – reinforce and widen the falsified gap between Indians and modernization – a trap which these novels fall into. The lack of labor and adaptation depicted in these novels are casualties of falling into this trap. Given historical record and the activist tone of these novels, I would expect to read about Indians melding their traditional, cultural practices with modern circumstances. Instead, the two are kept at extreme distance from one another. For instance, why are no Indians depicted selling their home grown food, productively using a traditional labor in the capitalist marketplace to make their own money? Or why are Indians depicted purchasing essentially useless American goods, a move that indicates they know how to use a capitalist system, but then

bemoan their lack of income for necessities such as food? In other words, their over-commitment to static traditional practices bars the Indians of these novels from a more proactive and adaptive engagement with modernization.

I would therefore want to look more closely at the political and legal relationships and agreements between Indians and Americans in these novels, and by doing so suggest how the narrative strategies of the blood/land/memory complex and survivance might better represent and respond to those circumstances. In other words, none of the Indians in the works I survey fully meet Deloria's description; instead, they showcase the challenges Indians must but cannot overcome to integrate themselves into and live productively in American culture. I thus argue, on the one hand, that these authors deliberately anchor their Indian characters in the past in order to critique the limitations of static tradition, examine the impact of modernization, and refine the narrative elements of the blood/land/memory complex and survivance. But on the other, I would argue that reading these novels alongside one another actually highlights the importance of adaptation to and a more informed awareness of American modernization. While remembering the past offers a sanctuary from exploitation, I will show, it ultimately does not lend American Indians the resources they need to shape their own relationships to modernization. In my view, the the activist, narrative potential of survivance and the blood/land/memory complex actually lies in their ability to not only reflect the past but also (more importantly) participate productively and visibly in the present and future.

Other critics have studied the significance of space and the presence of class boundaries in these three texts, yet labor, which is an integral component to both, often goes unremarked upon, while class is commonly subordinated to ethnicity. Moreover, the texts I have selected only end up viewing the Anglo, capitalist structures of class and labor as fundamental components of the crises of land and sovereignty, which again highlights the way Anglo modernization rests on Indian exploitation. That in turn only suggests how narratives that engage survivance and the blood/land/memory complex must acknowledge and interrogate the power of labor and class *alongside* space. Moreover, my focus, following Deloria, about how American Indians faced new patterns of class, labor, and space at the turn of the 20th century also raises the issue of the perceived gulf between tradition and modernization that still influences how many view American Indian populations. Recently, history scholars have moved to right that perception with work in line with Colleen O'Neill's recognition that a "rigid modern/traditional dichotomy ... too often marks historical writing" about American Indians (143).⁶ These texts add their voice to that historical argument, as

⁶ As Deloria has argued, American Indian tribes participated in modernity far more often and with far more vigor than is widely recognized. And, as Donald L Fixico states, "the success of American Indian sovereignty" in the face of the intrusion of American white culture was American Indians' ability to "deal effectively with the white man's linear world" in both business and culture (ix). O'Neill correspondingly argues, "American Indians crafted resourceful ways to make a living without abandoning their cultural values and traditions" (3). Other American Indian scholars like Brian Hosmer, William J. Bauer, and Paul C. Rosier have argued similarly about the ingenious ways tribes were able to blend newer and older economic, political, spatial, cultural, and labor systems. Even Vizenor and the critics in his collection *Survivance* recognize and relate narratives of Indians using modernization to their benefit.

they demonstrate the harmful effects of that dichotomy on Indian identity. However, while these texts use that dichotomy to indicate why Indians must integrate modernization and tradition, they also demonstrate the dangerous consequences of that engagement when its patterns of exploitation are not critically evaluated.

Ultimately, because literature does not need to be true to history, these texts can converse with historical events in ways that both depict and contradict the past. For instance, Hogan's novel presents a very specific historical event that contradicts newly recognized historical trends yet simultaneously represents other histories that must be acknowledged. Moreover, because these texts depict minority cultures, it's important that we recognize the constraints they have been put under and the progress they have made in spite of those constraints – and one way to recognize that is through literature. In these cases, literature acts as an imaginative record of lived experience and survival. These texts take up issues of American Indian abuse and displacement, issues that inherently carry with them messages about how American Indians historically managed and found limited sovereignty in these circumstances. In other words, because these texts depict social, cultural, and political contexts that have real-life counterpoints, they represent historical patterns of survival and resistance and shape future ones. Beginning with a brief discussion of scenes of labor in Sarah Winnemucca

⁶ For those Indians who do own oil rich land, most often their money is under the control of law appointed guardians who oversee and dictate how much money they get, when they get it, and how they use it.

Hopkins' autobiographical *Life Among the Piutes* and D'Arcy McNickle's autobiographical *The Surrounded*, I foreground older forms of labor that emerged before the days of reservation living to offer a comparison to the newer labor "opportunities" oil represents in Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* and other works of this chapter. My first section looks at representations of space that prove disharmonious to more traditional forms of labor. I next explore how those fraught spatial relationships trouble class mobility and class status, in part because new forms of labor funnel capital goods and profits into the hands of those who acquire them immorally or through immoral laws. That financial benefit both draws from and reinforces the overall decline of labor that I re-examine in my final section. These troubled new relationships to space, class, and labor also cause characters to suffer a continuing loss of identity. In these ways, my authors explore the consequences of instability, frustration, vulnerability, and even danger for individuals and their larger communities when faced with a hostile modernization that presumes there will be no place for them. But, as I argue in closing, there are costs to this particular positing of cultural erasure in these novels: *modern* labor is made to disappear with it, and thus our fictional representations render absent a resource that, in modern history, American Indians have in fact drawn upon. I end with some reflections on why that "double erasure" has taken place.

* * *

II. PRELUDE: OLDER FORMS OF LABOR AND THE MYTHIC PAST

Hopkins' depiction of life on the Reservation of Pyramid and Muddy Lakes in the mid 1860s provides a good introduction to the changing patterns of labor, space, and class that will frame many of the changes fundamental to Native American narratives:

No white people lived there at the time it was given to us. We Piutes have always lived on the river, because out of those two lakes we caught beautiful mountain trout, weighing from two to twenty-five pounds each, which would give us good income if we had it all, as at first. Since the railroad ran through in 1867, the white people have taken all the best part of the reservation from us, and one of the lakes also.

The first work my people did on the reservation was to dig a ditch, to put up a grist-mill and saw-mill. Commencing where the railroad now crosses at Wadsmouth, they dug about a mile; but the saw-mill and grist-mill were never seen or heard of by my people, though the printed report in the United States statutes ... says twenty-five thousand dollars was appropriated to build them. Where did it go? The report says these mills were sold for the benefit of the Indians who were to be paid in lumber for hours, but no stick of lumber have they ever received. My people do not own their land anymore. The white people are using the ditch which my people

made to irrigate their land. This is the way are treated by our white brothers. (76-7)

Here, Hopkins' distinguishes between prior and post reservation life to draw sharp lines between the ways in which labor done on reservation land both disenfranchised indigenous populations from native land and shook the foundations of indigenous ethnic identity. Catching fish as labor to sustain a communal ethnic living is superseded by irrigation done for the benefit of unknown others. The railroad, too, interrupts the landscape and brings a new population, with a new ethnic identity, to formerly protected lands. Moreover, the modernization of these industries – railroad, grist-mill, and saw-mill construction – stands in direct contrast to the earlier, more embodied labor of maintaining life via natural resources. And these ventures' false promise of financial payoff for the American Indians doubles that marginalization and foreshadows a more lasting and more psychological removal from the land. "My people do not own their land anymore," Hopkins remarks, a phrase that ties emotional and physical distance from space together. Then, she uses both kinds of distance to indicate that the limited forms of early reservation labor demanded new systems of class and belonging that left indigenous populations vulnerable to the legal clout of American settlers.

McNickle's *The Surrounded* registers a similar early disconnection between ethnically coded labors when it compares the labor needed by Archilde's father,

the Spaniard Max Leon, to that of his two young Indian sons, Mike and Narcisse, who identify more with their Indian mother Agnes' older Indian ways:

The grain was being cut on Max Leon's ranch. In the morning he put on his riding boots and followed the men with their two binders into the field....After an oiling and a last tightening up the first binder was set to work. As the white arms revolved they tossed the tall grain stalks against the flying sickle and on to the moving aprons. A bundle collected at the side, was tied with twine and kicked into the carriage. A second bundle followed, then a third. The wheat was heavy and the bundles came through quickly. The second binder started into action.

"Send [Mike and Narcisse] to the field with a jug of water. Tell 'em to stay till the water's drunk up, then fetch more. They got to tend to that while the men are working or I'll give them my whip."

Agnes looked around the yard. "They're not here," she said.

"Then where are they?"

"Fishing, maybe. I don't know."

"Well, damn it all! Find 'em! They got to bring water to the men!"

....It was some time before he found the boys. They were lying quietly in a pile of driftwood in the center of the stream, waiting for a shy trout to get into position to be speared. They had already

brought up several this way....They were too engrossed in this occupation to see or hear anything. (76-77)

Again, the author creates drastically different associations around two forms of labor taking place on the same land . And because these two forms of labor rely on different patterns that measure labor's success and value by the attitude of those who practice them, labor is linked to how ethnic identity is fashioned. Max's labor is methodical, detailed, and routine – it evokes the atmosphere of hard labor that must be done on a large, industrial scale to make capital. In this scene, McNickle uses a mechanical, almost robotic rhetoric, and Max must conform to its tempo so that it will permit more labor. In addition, reaping grain stalks – far more than one community's needs – positions this labor as one done for profit rather than familial or community survival. In contrast, Mike and Narcisse's older form of self-directed labor (fishing) is patient and contemplative: it does not demand the same anxiety or speed that threshing wheat will. Because their older work is for their own familial benefit, its success reinforces their ethnic identity. Instead of being attached to machines, the boys rely on their own focused yet tranquil perception of their rhythmic connection to nature.

In addition, in both these cases, rival forms of labor possible on reservation land generate vastly distinct relationships to the production of resources that, in turn, dictate characters' interactions with space and one another. More traditional labor connects the self to the land directly, whereas modernized labor divorces bodies and selves from their environments or disenfranchises those who perform it

– a black and white picture that again suggests an irreconcilable divide between tradition and modernity. And as reservation politics intertwined with American Indian assimilation and reservation space itself deteriorated, remnants of earlier labor forms became less and less viable. The poor land on which the reservations were situated itself often stymied efforts to sustain older ways, as did overcrowding and diminishing or absent government support. In all, these novels will suggest their characters’ toxic relationships to class, labor, and space — indeed, even their own narrative strategies to capture the past – cannot reconcile themselves to the emerging practices of modernization. These damaged relationships thus raise the question whether or not narratives linked to the past, as my three are, can do much more than carve out imaginative spaces wherein ethnicity can be remembered, while lived experiences remain largely unchanged. The reservation becomes a space where *neither* modernization nor tradition thrive, and storytelling itself seems trapped in the same dilemma. Ultimately, what Allen and Vizenor call the blood/land/memory complex and survivance are superseded by simple matters of survival.

III. ON SPACE

As Linda Lizut Helstern argues in Vizenor’s *Survivance*, “Native history is traditionally encoded in landscape” (164). And in the years prior to reservation life, this tradition was manifested as a American Indian ecoconsciousness that bound inhabitants to the land. But life under reservation regulations shifted American

Indian relationships to space, in large part because American Indian and white settler views of land were so different. As Janet A McDonnell explains, the Anglo policy makers who enacted relocation saw moving Indians onto reservation land in the late 19th century as a civilizing project:

Tribal organization was recognized as a defining feature of Native identity, and private ownership of land was seen as a means of civilizing the Indians. By allotting reservation land in severalty, policymakers hoped to replace tribal civilization with a white one, protect the Indians from unscrupulous whites, promote progress, and save federal government money. Native Americans, however, did not view land in the same way as their white neighbors. They did not regard land as real estate to be bought, sold, and developed. Rather, they valued it for the things it produced that sustained life. To Native Americans the land represented existence, identity, and a place of belonging. (1)

This primary opposition – between land as capital resource and land as a source of survival and belonging – tainted the new relationship to often unfamiliar lands.

This abrupt dispossession and these rival views of space have made it easy to draw a strict line between tradition and modernity. In the case above, and in many like it, no longer did American Indians work for sustenance in places they knew well; instead, these unfamiliar spaces were unproductive and often barren in comparison to older spaces they had formerly inhabited. Even when American

Indians remained on land they knew well, those spaces often had new labor “opportunities” that effaced older patterns of living with the land, as is the case in Hopkins’ recollections. The same happens in Linda Hogan’s *Mean Spirit*, when oil found on Indian allotments upends traditional relationships those who live in the area have with their home space. As Alix Casteel argues, the discovery of that oil rhetorically conflated Indians with their homeland through the word ‘Osage’ in ways that actually hastened their cultural dispossession. Both land and the Indians, in Casteel’s argument, are figured as “dark wealth” that needs to be unearthed, a process that only tears Indians further away from the modernization the oil business represents. The Osage are disenfranchised to the point where they can no longer use their sensitivity or knowledge of the earth.

In *Mean Spirit*, which takes place in the early 1920s in the town of Watona and on the Osage Indian Reservation in Oklahoma Indian Territory, oil is discovered on what new settlers regard as otherwise largely unproductive land, a discovery that prompts a number of Anglo settlers – many of whom are guardians of Indians who own oil rich land – to wield political and legal weight in immoral ways – and even murder wealthy Indians – to benefit financially from that oil. At the center of the novel’s corruption is an oil man named John Hale, who mediates most Indians’ relationships to their land, the money it can make, and what labor is “needed” to make that space profitable. Thus, the very structures of modernization that make Indians rich also bar them from productive use of that capital for power. Though stories and depictions of older traditions occur throughout, by and large

they do not help American Indians forge unmediated relationships to their land and wealth. Instead, Hogan falls into this binary and represents these older traditions at odds with new uses of space, new class systems, and new labor patterns to enunciate the danger such opposition can cause. This dichotomy distances Indians from structures of modernization, reinforces feedback loops that strengthens Anglo control over Indian lives, and locks those Indians' identities in the past. Here, the false gulf between tradition and modernity comes to light – stories and recoveries of older cultural traditions in these novels become ineffective barricades against new structures of class, labor, and space. When Hogan describes the traditional dress of two of her female protagonists, for instance, that description hones in on not only the nostalgia it evokes in the white population but also the divide between tradition and modernity that such dress encourages; the two women's appearances "pleased the spectators They liked to romanticize the earlier days when they believed the Indians lived in a simpler way They believed the Indians used to have power. In the older, better times, that is, before the people had lost their land and their sacred place on earth to the very people who wished the Indians were as they had been in the past" (79-80). And in the same vein, Belle's work in her garden in *Mean Spirit*, LP Deal's memoirs and manual labor in the bowling alley in *The Bird is Gone*, and Alexie's references to the lack of available work for his male characters all inform the characters' senses of who they are. Belle identifies herself as connected to the land and the traditional labor practice of living off the land, LP Deal uses his memoir writing to satisfy the

intellectual stimulation he lacks in cleaning in the bowling alley, and Alexie's characters' lack of work causes apathy and disinterest in their lives on the reservation.

Early in the novel, in fact, Hogan foregrounds the novel's central conflict as one between Anglo settlers and both the Indians of the area and place itself, a common war waged in Western American Indian novels – and a war that Hogan uses to again draws that tradition/modernization line: “The Indian world is on a collision course with the white world It's more than a race war. They are waging a war with the earth. Our forests and cornfields are being burned by them” (13). For instance, Lila, a river prophet in *Mean Spirit*, tells the Hill Indians that “the white world was going to infringe on the peaceful Hill People” and that “Some of our children have to learn about the white world if we're going to ward off our downfall” (5). However, no one wants to “give their children up to that limbo between worlds, that town named Watona, and finally Lila ... selected her own beautiful daughter, Grace, for the task” (6). Lila later sends her two younger daughters, Sarah and Molene, to Watona – Molene dies from an illness spread by railroad workers and Sarah is paralyzed by it – but Grace's daughter Nola remains in Watona with her. However, even though Lila insists, “We've got too far away from the Americans to know how their laws are cutting into our life,” no other Indians come to live in Watona. And of those who remain, Grace is killed for her oil-rich land, Sarah dies when those who want her money blow up her house, and Nola's life is constantly in danger because she inherited Grace's land. Lila's

predictions recognize the need for Indians to integrate themselves and their traditions into modernization, but the events that occur thereafter suggest that that integration is fraught with the life threatening political and legal ramifications of Anglo capitalism that relies on Indian exploitation. Those ramifications thus reveal the limitations of tradition and modernization and the danger those limitations present when the relationship between the two develops without careful consideration.

Throughout Hogan's novel, space is vulnerable to a destructive outside influence that stretches beyond ethnic identity. That destructive influence aims to make space profitable – burning flora clears the way for oil rigging in the novel – which undermines traditional indigenous practices that had attended more sensitively to the resources place can naturally offer. For instance, when Michael Horse, “the small boned diviner,” surveys Grace Blanket's land and predicts, “Drill here. I feel water,” his foretelling turns out to be wrong: “The men put down an auger, bored deep into the earth, and struck oil on Grace Blanket's land There was no water on Grace Blanket's land, just the thick black fluid that had no use at all for growing corn or tomatoes. Not even zucchini squash would grow there” (8). This disconnect, between the usual success of Michael Horse's predictions and the fact that Grace's property holds oil that cannot grow vegetables, and so cannot provide sustenance, gestures toward a growing divide between older traditions of reading and using space and what new spatial ventures allow. That divide in turn

indicates instability in sense of place – no longer can the American Indians of the novel rely on their older practices to guide their decisions or reinforce belonging.

Moreover, the climate in the novel portends the same instability that effaces spatial belonging and thus cultural identity. The novel begins with a heat wave, which Michael Horse predicts will last for several weeks, that encourages the Indians to move their beds out of their houses at night and sleep outside – a traditional custom. But a storm comes suddenly and upends the preparations made: “The wind had whipped up the sheets. One billowed like a sail against the metal bedframe. Another was flat and wet, spread over several rosebushes nearby” (19). Here, the traditional practice of sleeping outside – something that Horse himself desires to do when he wants to “live closer to the land [and] escape the bad feeling in Watona” – is usurped by the storm, which foretells both the coming fissures between traditional spatial belonging and new interpretations of space, as well as the growing murkiness of their identity (110). Though Horse’s predictions have rarely been wrong before, this misreading of space – especially the activity of space encompassed in climate – suggests that space is growing antithetical to cultural traditions that had once supported survival. In addition, coupled with an early reference to the nearby oil fields, where “the pumps rose and fell, pulling black oil up through layers of rock,” the movement of the unexpected storm and the oil represent a lack of clarity that transcends space and becomes personal (4). In other words, Horse’s inability to predict the storm is mirrored by the “black oil” that clouds his vision and so indicates a growing loss of culture. By contrast, when

the Watchers arrive to keep an eye on Nola (who inherits Grace's old rich land when she is murdered), they are silent and their reticence implicates a closeness to the landscape others are unable to maintain. When watching one Watcher, Lettie notices that "his legs looked rooted to earth, and he stood like one of the Hill Indians, as if he'd never lived among white people or their dry goods, or the cursed blessing of oil" (29). Here, specifying that the Watcher remains unblemished by the capital goods associated with the Anglo settlers' expansion project indicates a kind of clarity that the other Indians, caught up in the capital system of goods and oil, do not enjoy. Yet, at the same time, the nearly-spectral Watchers are almost mystical – they appear never to sleep nor eat – and in light of their removal from modern culture and practices, it seems they cannot exist.

Land for capital gain thus becomes a primary deterrent to more traditional relationships with space in Hogan's novel. The same occurs in Alexie's short stories, which likewise suggest that traditional cultural relationships to land post reservation life suffer under new capital practices. In *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, for instance, Victor, one of Alexie's protagonists, poignantly comments of a once widely fished river on the Spokane Reservation, "Ain't no salmon left in our river. Just a school bus and a few hundred basketballs" (39). The immediate juxtaposition is obvious here: as opposed to the river in which Mike and Narcisse fish in *The Surrounded*, this river holds no sustenance, only manmade waste. That such waste was once purchased with capital and is located at the bottom of the river, mocks the river's potential to sustain the reservation. The

position of the bus at the bottom of the river also points to the novel's commitment to the modern/traditional binary, here manifested in the reservation Indians' inability to make modernization align with their older cultural traditions. Furthermore, the importance Alexie places on basketball on the reservation as a way out compounds the significance of such "waste." Throughout his collection, Alexie makes it clear that being talented at basketball could launch an Indian off the reservation: "We sat there in silence and remembered all of our heroes, ballplayers from seven generations It hurts to lose any of them because Indians kind of see ballplayers as saviors," Victor muses as he watches a particularly promising young player: "God, I hope she makes it all the way" (52, 53). Filling the river with a school bus once bound for a basketball game and the basketballs themselves mocks the social capital of the game and reinforces the quicksand the reservation stands for: it is not a space that supports survival, but rather a space that swallows the very means of that survival. Ironically, even narratives *about* the past, like Victor's own recollections, also give way to the ethos of mere survival.

Stagnancy thus emerges as one of the primary conditions these reservations and territories have in common. When Victor and Thomas return to the reservation one morning after staying out in the city all night, Alexie observes: "It was the beginning of a new day on earth, but the same old shit on the reservation" (73). The circular time on the reservation accentuates how stuck in the past the space and its residents are. Indeed, Alexie's characters rarely do anything other than remember earlier events and watch time pass; for instance, the morning

Victor and Adrian express hope that the young basketball player will use her talent to make it off of the reservation, the conversation ends when Adrian throws his coffee cup onto the front lawn: “And we both watched with all of our eyes, while the sun rose straight up above us and settled down below the house, watched that cup revolve, revolve, until it came down to the ground” (53). The young men watch “with all of our eyes” – a vague yet satirical reference to a hazy spirituality which positions Indian belief systems against the physical trash of the cup, which itself revolves like the sun behind the house. Conjoining these images together in one sentence highlights the uselessness of older Indian stories in the context of present life on the reservation. The scene is bland and motionless as the sun, and the cup settles to the ground back from where it came. That movement acutely demonstrates the stasis of tradition in the face of modernity, which again accentuates the divide between the two.

Moreover, this stagnancy is not without precedent. Alexie suggests as much later in his text when he describes an older tribe of Indians who have disappeared from their homes: “Those Indians disappeared with food still cooking in the pot and air waiting to be breathed and they turned into birds or dust or the blue of the sky or the yellow of the sun” (119). The wasted food is another lack pointing toward a broader loss of livelihood. And here, again, Alexie conflates tragedy with self-defeating references to nature and myth making, suggesting how impractical storytelling cannot really right the losses of the past. That pattern repeats often in the text: vague references to myth making or older spiritual stories are paired with

descriptions of emptiness, waste, and useless commodities. For instance, when faced with hunger on the reservation, Victor remembers “eating potatoes every day of my life[:] I imagined the potatoes grew larger, filled my stomach, reversed the emptiness. My sisters saved up a few quarters and bought food coloring. For weeks we ate red potatoes, green potatoes, blue potatoes” (151). Though this moment seems to carry the hope that imagination can grow in narrative space and contradict the poor space of the reservation, Alexie questions its feasibility a few lines later: “How do we imagine a new life when a pocketful of quarters weighs our possibilities down?” and offers a biting answer: “There are so many possibilities in the reservation 7-11” (152). While these stories remember older traditions, they also indicate how modernization weighs down on “imagin[ing] a new life” itself, because the modern *narrative* tools the Indians do have access to oppose cultural tradition and so cannot be wielded successfully. Those modern tools are also tainted – while the quarters represent a tool for survival on the reservation, that that tool is only useful at the 7-11 (a vexed space of repetitive, endless work in the narrative) and are dubiously useful at that, which challenges how much imagination and stories can alleviate the trapping mechanism of the reservation, a space where *neither* modernization nor tradition thrive. Thus, without progress beyond imaging “an escape,” these memories and narratives only emphasize how the unproductive space of the reservation traps those who inhabit it.

That sterility also reflects a cultural difference in expectations of production in *Mean Spirit*, where individuals cultivate and relate to land in vastly different

ways. For instance, even the rich Indians of *Mean Spirit* often use their income from oil allocations, which are controlled by the American legal system, to buy American-made, American sold items – including decorative baubles, clothes, and furniture – which indicates the way modern capitalism exploits and swallows their earnings. The juxtaposition between what Anglo settlers want of oil rich land and what Indians want in terms of their traditional relationships to land uncovers not only a telling vulnerability of tradition, but the deep legal lines drawn to efface those land-based traditions. Even without the promise of oil, white legislatures gauge land by their own standards of production; Belle's land "was 'without improvement,' as they called it when a person left trees standing and didn't burn off the brush or put in a fence to contain their property" (78). That legal distinction values land for capital production, and points to an even more insidious fact that Lettie uncovers: the sheriff's wall is lined with "geologist's yellowed maps of Oklahoma Indian territory where estimates of where oil might exist. Like prophecies, they were, like divining where one black stench of oil might flow into another" (143). If we recall Horse's position as the Indian diviner, this moment mocks the lack of power tradition holds in the face of the capital value of oil ridden land, a moment in which Hogan *again* reinforces the binary. Moreover, the maps that hang in the sheriff's office again reinforce the divide between modernity and tradition – his geologist's maps stand in direct oppositions to the geologic, yet spiritual, knowledge Indians like Horse and Lila have of the land. Meanwhile, Horse's recent failure to predict where water is and the geologists'

success finding oil register larger losses of individual and community belonging because modernity and tradition oppose one another.

The novel's depiction of landscape also connects the destruction of specific spaces to losses in community identity and cohesion. When the region is routinely described as worthless, barren, and damaged, it carries connotations of vulnerability and danger that suggest that not only the losses of individuals in the face of modernity, but community stability and affiliations as well. But again, the twinned losses of identity and land unveil a larger loss of community solidarity that further troubles the preservation of tradition through narrative as such. Without a stable community to remember past traditions and so craft safe spaces where culture can persevere, the potential blood memory has to maintain tradition fails. When Nola surveys her land, she realizes the toll even traditional practices now have on land that is diminished by allotments and subsequent fencing:

The land was bare. In only a few days, the buffalo had pulled the tall grass up by its roots and eaten the land down to nothing, and now they were standing on the desolate-looking earth and their own manure with their vacant eyes, eyes that had seen too much. They were on their way down in the world, were themselves fallen people, and they knew it and so did all the others who looked sadly on. the fields were becoming [barren], the burned forests, the overgrazed land, the core drillings, as empty as the dark, tragic eyes of the buffalo. (223-4)

Here, Hogan fashions the buffalo, representations of an older tradition that cannot find purchase in newer relationships with land, as the harbingers of decay that she feels modernization brings. The earth is desolate, marked with the curse of age rather than bolstered by the sustaining value of cultural practices or rituals. Moreover, casting the “dark, tragic eyes of the buffalo” on the succession of crises plaguing the landscape – barren fields, burned forests, overgrazed land, core drillings – renders the land now vulnerable to *both* older traditions and newer labor practices. Hence, the community that once advocated for these traditions is falling apart, both in terms of actual individual loss and more metaphorical losses of customs that once defined this tribe’s history. That dual vulnerability also reflects the lack of cohesion between modern and traditional uses of space. Without a stable community – which disintegrates during the novel, due to murder and relocation, like the land does as well – there can be no productive interweaving of modern and older practices and the fragmentation of that land.

That vulnerability and subsequent loss of history is also tied up in the novel’s murders, and that loss is particularized and made personal – older citizens of the tribe are the ones killed, as they hold the most oil rich land. The murders, therefore, indicate more than just the broad loss of tradition, but also the manner in which individuals play a role in preserving that tradition through cultural memory and personal recollection. In other words, when the modern practice of capital gain through oil threatens individuals, it reveals that individual recollection is surely a necessary component to survivance and blood memory, but also that it

must persist *alongside* modernity to survive. In Hogan's view, even the connections to landscape that individuals form are not able to provide sanctuary from the greed of oil barons, nor do they promote adapting to these circumstances and taking control of them. Hogan's first depiction of Grace's position in the tribe focuses on the need for tradition in order to pursue survival:

The Hill Indians were a peaceful group who had gone away from the changing world some sixty years earlier, in the 1860s. Their survival depended on returning to a simpler way of life Grace Blanket had been born of these, and she was the first to go down out of the hills and enter into the quick and wobbly world of mixed-blood Indians, white loggers, cattle ranchers, and most recently, the oil barons. (5)

Grace's decision is prompted by a message the Blue River tells her mother, who speaks to the river, which "never lied": "One day the Blue River told Lila that the white world was going to infringe on the peaceful Hill People." Yet Grace's murder for her oil rich land is only the first in the novel, which troubles the protection her mother's bond with the narrative of the river should have provided her. Moreover, this early moment foreshadows the destructive force oil has on the landscape, both physically and in terms of the cultural powers (including memory and narrative) it displaces. Here, Hogan early on sets up the division between modernization and tradition, outside of which the novel is unable to move.

The vulnerability Grace exudes parallels that of the space she inhabits. Not only is ownership and literal belonging to land threatened, but her cultural

practices as well. Owning oil rich land puts individuals in danger, which replaces *actual* survivance with mere survival, shifting the focus from the preservation of cultural and narrative traditions to the more basic, but more pressing, preservation of life itself. In this context, that survival means surviving on land and maintaining land ownership and control to do so. But surviving on land also means keeping the land itself healthy and out of the hands of those who would harm it, which the oilfields render impossible:

Up the road from Grace's sunburnt roses, was an enormous crater a gas well blowout had made in the earth. It was fifty feet deep and five hundred feet across. This gouge in the earth, just a year earlier, had swallowed five workmen and ten mules. The water was gone from the land forever, the trees dead, and the grass, once long and rich, was burned black. The cars passed by this ugly sight, and not far from there, they passed another oil field where pumps, fueled by diesel, worked day and night. These bruised fields were noisy and dark. The earth had turned oily black. Blue flames rose up and roared like torches of burning grass. The earth bled oil. (52)

The space of the crater is barren; no longer land that can produce anything of sustenance, it represents a darker reality that literally swallows the possibility of not only community survivance but also sheer survival. Here, digging for oil has compromised the land permanently, yoking the vulnerability oil brings to the land to the potential (and ultimate certainty for many) of losing life. The oilfield is now

a static space where nothing can grow, much like the Indians in the novel are stuck in stasis and cannot grow to adapt. Moreover, this “ugly space” is associated with another oil field nearby, which renders the first a foretelling of what will happen to the second. That second site is also already damaged, with “bruised fields” that are “noisy and dark” and “earth [that] turned oily black.” That damage, furthermore, is spurred by “pumps, fueled by diesel,” which turns the cause and effect of oil digging into a perpetual, unbreakable cycle. Survival itself thus becomes an impossibility.

The consequences of this decay of the landscape only increase as the novel continues: “Across the land, oil derricks numbered as many and as far as the eye could see” (319). This growth has seeped into the surrounding land and begins to destroy living space as well: structures of modernization act as a plague that destroys traditional space. Both exterior, ecological spaces and interior, domestic ones are threatened by the oil derricks and their waste. In addition to the river banks that are “black from oil seepages” and the “rusted oil drums stuck in stagnant pools,” the town itself is dirty and decaying: “The camp was an extension of the black and destroyed land, a scramble of structures stretched out a long distance behind the mesquite hills. The shacks and shelters had been put together in any way possible in order to provide cover from the rain, and most of them were covered with black tar paper” (271). These homes, “covered with black tar paper,” cannot escape oil’s destructive influence. Oil not only renders the homes inhospitable, but also brings illness and decay to the population as well. The

inhabitants of the town “[live] there in poverty and misery broken men and destroyed women who had once been singers and kind mothers. The scrawny brown children did not look full of a future.” Here, individuals have lost their identities because of the destructive force of oil. However, not only do present conceptions of self give way to this ruin, but the promise the future could hold also disappears. Oil is given the power to shape time as well as space. That is, if future generations lose selfhood early because of oil’s negative influence, then the chances of rescuing older cultural traditions from that influence correspondingly erode.

Even the younger generation of Indians who have not experienced the same poverty reflect a loss of respect for and knowledge of tradition. When auction day comes to the town, for instance, the younger Indians represent a new perspective on relationships to land:

The younger Indian men thought it was a wondrously funny thing that Indians who wound up living on the dry, untillable, scorched plots of land turned out to be rich with oil and gas. They sat on chairs in the front row, waiting for the auctioneer to begin. They were wrapped up in coats and blankets. They nudged each other, laughing about the large sums of money being spent on black oil that trickled beneath this worthless earth. This time, at last, they were coming out ahead. They thought it was about time. (145)

By this point in the novel, several Indians who own these oil rich plots have died under mysterious circumstances, yet the younger men here only find amusement in the fact that these dry lands hold oil. The flippancy of this younger generation exposes a deeper loss of community connection. The land is “dry, untillable, scorched,” yet their attention is on the auction starting up, not the state of their landscape, with which the older Indians of the novel are concerned. Moreover, their focus on the “large sums of money being spent on black oil that trickled beneath worthless earth” recalls what Stacey Red Hawk, the Indian investigator sent from Washington, observed of this region when he first began his investigation: “He’d heard about what Indians still called Indian Territory. It was where every outlaw and crook used to hole up and be safe from the law. Now there were new thieves, those who bought and sold Indian lands” (50). To the extent that there is a new tradition taking hold among the young, it is using illegal or dubiously legal means for capital gain – something the younger generation, ironically, contributes to when they attend and participate in the auction. The younger Indian men, mocking the older byways, thus seem little different than the Anglo settlers who used shady laws to obtain profitable lands in the first place. Hogan’s divide between older traditions and the younger generation thus foretells a divide in perspective that runs very deep.

Alexie too registers that divisive loss in his depictions of landscape and the relationships different generations have to the landscapes they inherit. Much of the younger generation in his text left the reservation for the city – at first,

seemingly a smart move – but that move actually brings only a loss of both personal and community health:

Urbans are city Indians who survived and made their way out of the reservation after it all fell apart. There must have been over a hundred when they first arrived, but most of them have died since. Now there are only a dozen Urbans left, and they're all sick. The really sick ones look like they are five hundred years old. They look like they have lived forever; they look like they'll die soon. (105)

Leaving the reservation “after it all fell apart” seems like a survival technique, but the consequences prove dire. Though Alexie’s reservation is an inhospitable space, his city is also toxic and brings a mysterious illness that prematurely ages younger Indians, literally erasing their futures. Alexie will only call this mysterious illness “a white man’s disease in their blood” (107).

One might also think that, by coupling this illness with ethnic markers is meant to suggest that, while the reservation is not a place of survival, the cultural tradition it represents might holds some kind of protection. It might seem that Alexie suggests that memories held by community could be tools of survivance, which would suggest that survival through narrative is possible. But examined more closely, the protections provided by narrative resembles a static preservation – like the reservation, story-telling may keep ethnic illness at bay, but its stagnancy freezes progress and similarly halts the future. Alexie’s description of the reservation, those who remain, and its survival rate suggests this: “At night it is

cold, so cold that fingers can freeze into a face that is touched. During the day, our sun holds us tight against the ground. All the old people die, choosing to drown in their own water rather than die of thirst. All their bodies are evil” (106-7). The cold conditions that cause “fingers [to] freeze into a face” represents a kind of numbness of identity that erases individuality and locks cultural history in time. Without the ability for forward progress, those on the reservation die a stagnant cultural death. And “our sun [which] holds us tight against the ground” indicates the binding, constricting force of the reservation. When read in tandem, these two passages suggest that no space is safe: the city carries illness while the reservation encourages a passive individual, community, and cultural suicide. Both urban and rural spaces exude toxicities that freeze and erase cultural traditions and future potential.

In these novels, therefore, space exerts a constricting and damaging force that, more often than not, ends in individual, community, and cultural death. The losses of community, culture, belonging, and identity take a back seat to the actual loss of life – in other words, the narrative of survival usurps the narratives of blood memory and survivance. Escaping these binds seems impossible. That outcome signifies an even larger gap between tradition and modernization that these authors routinely reinforce: when Indians own land under white laws, they still do not possess the capital to use those structures of modernization to their benefit –

either the *cultural* capital that would enable them to navigate those structures more effectively, or the financial capital that would give them more control.⁷

IV. ON CLASS

Social class – and particularly the failed promises of monetary gain and class mobility – also emerges as a factor that damages the individuals of these novels in ways that are both personal and communal. As Donald L Fixico recognizes in the introduction to *Native Pathways*, “Whereas before [native people] had depended on their natural environments for their livelihoods, the shift of dependency to a paternalistic federal government and an opportunistic mainstream re-educated American Indians in white ways and capitalism” (viii). In other words, contact in space with Americans and their structures of order changed Indians’ understanding of exchange from one largely based on systems of barter to one now based on capital accumulation, monetary gain, and consumption. Fixico argues, in fact, that this re-education is one American Indians had an active part in and understood; but in these fictional representations, as an element of modernization, class mobility turns out to operate much in the same way that transformations in space had: it only reflects and demonstrates the difficulty Indians have in adapting to modern structures. Moreover, examining the frustrations of class mobility demonstrates, again, the ways that the preservation of tradition enabled neither

⁷ For those Indians who do own oil rich land, most often their money is under the control of law appointed guardians who oversee and dictate how much money they get, when they get it, and how they use it.

productive adaptation nor resistance and survival. In Hogan's novel, for example, capital gain that should result in rises in value instead brings losses in value across multiple planes. Specifically, oil rich lands owned by Indians not only put their lives in danger, but also are accompanied by unfair land auctions, suspect legal rulings and life insurance policies, poor government payouts, and questionable land purchases initiated by the Americans of the novel and unquestioned by the Indians of the novel until it becomes too late. Ultimately, if land itself becomes valuable as capital, it actually ends up serving mainly as a tool of cultural, class, and legal dispossession – as Hogan puts it, “It doesn't matter anymore if there's oil under it; if it's land, someone wants it” (Hogan 261). By controlling the laws of capital in ways that subtly edge Indians out of those laws, white settlers can maintain control over land in ways that ensure class mobility and control for themselves. Money and the legal and political issues that come with it render individuals and the larger ethnic community of which they are a part vulnerable to a systematic erasure of identity on multiple fronts. Scenes that orbit class issues project the same stasis, frustration, vulnerability, and danger found in other parts of the novel and so reflect these larger issues and their impact on those in the novel. Moreover, that stasis and immobility traps Indians in the unproductive relationship they have with white systems of capital. The Indians of each novel slowly lose cultural identity even as they attempt to recover it through traditional practices, stories, and references. Once again, class mobility and capital acquisition

only propel the Indians toward a variety of losses that sap the resources of community, familial, and individual stability, safety, and livelihood.

Early in her novel, Hogan contextualizes these losses with her description of the Dawes Act and how it affects the novel's protagonists, which accentuates both the individual and the communal cost of capital gain:

in the early 1900s each Indian had been given their choice of any parcel of land not already claimed by the white Americans. Those pieces of land were called allotments. They consisted of 160 acres a person to farm, sell, or use in any way they desired. The act that offered allotments to the Indians, the Dawes Act, seemed generous at first glance so only a very few people realized how much they were being tricked, since numerous tracts of unclaimed land became open property for white settlers, homesteaders, and ranchers. Grace and Sara, in total ignorance, selected dried up acreages that no one else wanted. No one guessed that black undercurrents of oil moved beneath that earth's surface.

When Belle Graycloud saw the land Grace selected, and that it was stony and dry, she shook her head in dismay and said to Grace, "It's barren land. What barren, useless land." But Grace wasn't discouraged. With good humor, she named her property "The Barren Land." Later, after oil was found there, she called it "The Baron Land," for the oil moguls. (7-8)

Much like the failed Homestead Act, the Dawes Act promises to lend the Indians who benefitted from it a degree of agency and power, but those who truly benefit from the Act are the “white settlers, homesteaders, and ranchers” who later become the oil moguls Grace names her land for after the discovery of oil. Moreover, those barren stretches of land Grace and Sara buy “in total ignorance,” coupled with naming the plot “The Baron Land” and rhetorically giving it to those who ultimately commit her murder, gesture toward a lack of knowledge of place that class mobility entails. That lack is only deepened by Grace’s new purchasing habits: she buys “crystal champagne glasses that rang like bells ... a tiny typewriter that tapped out all the English words she learned in school, and a white fur cape” and “enjoy[s] the pleasures money could buy” (8-9). Grace’s purchases are Euroamerican and effectively replace her Indian culture with the white culture that values land for the capital it can make, rather than the traditions it carries. In addition, her purchases are decorative and luxurious, unnecessary objects that do not provide sustenance. This exchange of tradition for modernity does not confer power, however, because it does not interweave the two, but rather suggests that the two cannot coexist. Grace is thus not productively using the structures of modernity, but – as these two actions demonstrate – is just “buying” into them without enlarging her power or autonomy—quite the opposite.

At the same time, Grace’s ignorance about her own land and her decision to name it after the oil moguls themselves signifies a larger loss of class power and mobility that owning such profitable land brings about for Indians of the novel.

While she uses capital to buy luxuries that she enjoys, these luxuries only decorate her house but do not secure her place in it: modernity for show is not productive-- instead, it foretells danger. When Grace is murdered soon after, Belle muses “it was a plot since Grace’s land was worth so much in oil. All along the smell of the blue-black oil that seeped out of the earth smelled like death to her” (28). Here, the new “place” provided by her upward mobility is not only dangerous, but the oil itself, which enabled her to buy such luxuries in the past, effectively also bought her death. Before her murder, Grace’s purchases and naming her land “The Baron Land” thus hand the power of her land over to those who then kill her for it. Other Indians who own oil rich land suffer the same outcome:

It was hard for the newly rich Indians to take their wealth seriously and most were more than happy to buy any and all of the gadgets the scalpers sold from their rickety tables and stands, no matter how much the prices had been marked up. The women bought red and pink satin ribbons, black patent leather shoes, and expensive jeweled watches they pinned on their dresses. The men bought bow ties and Gillette razor blades, and carried bags full of trinkets to the children back up at the camp. (55-6)

Again, class power initially becomes buying power, which only decorates and superficially demonstrates wealth. And again, these purchases are Euroamerican goods, a fact which divorces those Indians who purchase them from the more traditional goods they once valued. By contrast, Moses aims for new stability for

his family. We learn that he, “who received his money from grazing leases, not from oil,” gets a “minimal” payment of only “two thousand dollars, but it was a decent income. It kept his family in food and supplies” (57). Moses’ source of income, he hopes, will not only separate him from the class politics of oil, but also save him from the loss of cultural tradition and knowledge that the Indians earning money from oil land suffer from. Here, Moses’s conscious decision to participate productively in capitalism without losing his tradition indicates that seeing the two in total opposition to one another is an unsupported but dangerous trap. His income might be “minimal,” he thinks, but his land practices and that income reflect a productive interweaving of modern capital and traditional practices. Though he does not enjoy outward signs of the upper class, he also does not suffer false delusions of class status and mobility that ultimately do not offer the security such power should provide. Nor do his cultural traditions become too static to adapt to modernization.

Yet the vulnerability that those who flaunt their purchasing power suffer affects all those who benefit from government payouts for land, which ties the supposed “legal system” to the changing shape of class domination. That, in turn, makes corruption possible. During payment day, that vulnerability comes into particularly clear focus when Moses discovers not he, nor any other full blood Indians, will actually receive their entire payments. As the pay clerk tells him, “They changed the regulations....Full-bloods only get part of their money. You’re getting ten per today....We don’t have any say in the matter....The Indian

Commission changed the rules....There's nothing we can do here. I'm sorry" (59).

Subject to the decisions of a distant government, the Indians are actually punished for their ethnic identity, and that punishment registers as cultural, legal, and monetary dispossession. That even Moses, who seemed to balance modernity and tradition, has his payout cut indicates that the novel doubts the viability of ethnically "othered" Indians receiving fair treatment at the hands of those with capital and power. By showcasing that doubt, Hogan suggests that there is no way to intertwine Anglo modernity and Indian tradition productively, which is historically inaccurate and displaces Indian influence on modernization

Ultimately, in Hogan's novel, these governmental financial decisions have a profound impact on the collective mood of those at the pay office that reflects a kind of surrender that again positions survival as the most important pursuit:

"They might be cheated, but they still had life, and until only recently, even that was guaranteed under the American laws, so they remained trapped, silent, and wary" (61). Tying together ethnicity, capital, and legality, and linking these elements to corruption and the survival that must ensue despite that corruption, Hogan thus uses this scene to suggest that class mobility is not only an unstable lure but is only truly possible for those who possess white-ethnic capital as well as economic capital. In other words, certain kinds of power beget others, while other kinds – for instance, the more traditional cultural power many full blooded Indians of the novel possess – limit deriving power from spheres associated with other cultures. But that divide further dispossesses Indians from their own position in

modernity and renders tradition vulnerable to its practices: as Ruth, Moses' sister, reflects in frustration at another auction day, "We gave up our better ways for this oil business" (146).

Losing those old traditions to superficial capital gains has an impact on individual lives in ways that point to deep rifts in family relationships and intimacy. Those rifts indicate that the loss of culture is not only a communal experience, but a personal one too that superficial displays of class mobility only exasperate. As Nola and Will's marriage fractures, for instance, that fracture is reflected in their differing capital priorities. Nola "continued to furnish the house with glass and crystal. It was her desire to put everything in its place. She wanted things in order and permanence, yet she felt desolate; every glass filled room looked fragile and breakable no matter what she added, no matter how solid and dark the furniture" (192). By contrast, Will buys "arrowheads ... and small pots painted with spirals and birds [and] a trumpet made of human thighbone from Tibet." This is certainly a curious reversal, given that Hogan identifies Nola as one of the most spiritually and culturally connected Indians of the novel and Will is a white lawyer's son; Nola even worries that, to Will, "as an Indian woman [she] represented something old and gone to him, something from another time." But the point may be that Nola's obsession with fragility merely mirrors the vulnerability of not only her marriage and family (and also recalls the early familial vulnerability captured in her mother, Grace's, death), but her identity as well. She sees herself disappearing in her husband's romanticized view of cultural history –

his purchases not only accentuate her own ethnic ties, but also indicate a fetishizing of Indian culture of which his wife is a part. In deliberately cutting her ties to her heritage, Nola is thus encouraging Will's unhealthy relationship to it; he even buys his artifacts from "Looters" who raid traditional grounds and graves for goods from which they turn a profit. Moreover, their individual obsessions with each other's cultures only widen the gap between them, again indicating that Anglo modernity and Indian tradition do not mix. Cultural loss, again, indicates other losses that are more poignantly felt on individual levels and indicate a number of declines in multiple value systems – here, the system of family.

But vulnerability is not the only force of loss at work in the novel, especially not surrounding issues of capital. Stagnancy emerges as another predictor of loss, and to foreground this element, I turn again to Sherman Alexie's text. Alexie links loss of purchasing power to stagnancy in his first short story in a passage which hones in on the destructive power of capital loss and acts as a telling counterpoint to Hogan's representations of capital gain and purchasing power:

Just the week before, Victor had stood in the shadows of his father's doorway and watched as the man opened his wallet and shook his head. Empty. Victor watched his father put the empty wallet back in his pocket for a moment, then pull it out and open it again. Still empty. Victor watched his father repeat this ceremony again and again, as if the repetition itself could guarantee change. But it was always empty.

...Victor and his parents would be sitting in Mother's Kitchen in Spokane, waiting out a storm. Rain and lightening. Unemployment and poverty. Commodity food. Flash floods. (5)

Here, waiting out the storm with "commodity food" becomes a kind of class *immobility* that traps Victor and his family in the pattern of unemployment on the reservation. Moreover, the "commodity food" evokes the multicolored potatoes and purchases from 7-11 that indicate the limits of purchasing power on reservation space. "Commodity food" is also in contrast to the more traditional foods the reservation could have provided, suggesting that tradition provides sustenance that modernization cannot. Alexie's characters are thus doubly bound by failed class mobility and the landscape itself, as both exert insurmountable challenges that threaten survival. When we read this scene alongside Hogan's episodes of money's purchasing power and the unwise and meaningless decisions "newly rich" Indians make with that power, ironically both the lack *and* the possession of capital become sources of stagnancy: one encourages empty repetition and empty stomachs, while the other encourages useless purchases that superficially represent, but actually efface, the power wealth should bring.

In Hogan's novel, when Benoit is wrongly arrested for his wife Sara's murder and then jailed, for instance, his difficulty finding a lawyer and managing his affairs arise from capital restrictions that the Anglo laws have placed on Indians, leading not only to personal stagnation but the lack of legal recourse. Here, modernization is deliberately used to usurp ethnicity and tradition, which

troubles the potential for Indians in the novel to make modernity work for them. Broadly, Indians are barred from filing claims or accessing their money legally because of ethnic status – they are not considered full citizens by Anglo run courts. Lettie finds out that “someone put in a claim for Sara’s money” that she earned from oil found on their land (Hogan 82). When Lettie tries to discover who filed the claim by filing one of her own, she’s told “You’re an Indian. You can’t file a claim. Indians are not citizens and this claim would go through a United States court of law.” And when Benoit wants to hire his own lawyer, Lettie tells him “You can’t. Your money’s tied up until you are acquitted A husband suspected of murdering his wife can’t lay a finger on their property. Besides, we’re not legal, Benoit. The law doesn’t apply to us.” Sara’s money is thus a source of immobility rather than mobility; here, it is not only kept from Benoit, but is the primary motive the sheriff imagines he has for murdering his wife. Moreover, capital flexibility depends on national belonging and civic identity, which here serve as another set of tools for ethnic dispossession. Benoit’s life is thus frozen both financially and personally, restrictions that ultimately lead him to suicide when these legal, capital, and personal issues dovetail and overcome his individual identity. The opportunity for a wider, fuller citizenship and “personhood,” in this instance, is overwhelmed by capital access; the intersection of finance and legality thus renders civic identity – justified by capital – more relevant than cultural or ethnic identity. The same happens during the Fourth of July picnic, when those in attendance feel that “They were in a trap, a circle of fear, and they could not leave.

Money held them. It became a living force” (289). But Hogan’s decision to represent this history as such in this case questions how effectively the Indians in *Mean Spirit* can forge their own identities in an ever-changing landscape. In other words, what does it mean that Hogan’s focus on ethnic dispossession here is to such an extent that Indians seem to have no ability to defend their identities, and therefore their lives, against the intrusion money represents?

Casting money as “a living force” thus signifies the growing challenge characters in the novel face to find productive identities. Money lends particular people power and divests others of it; this dichotomy creates deep rifts in both their “routes” upward and their “roots” to tradition. But the answer to my question above thus becomes two-fold: Indians are faced with wholly unfair and wholly controlling circumstances *but*, at the same time, those circumstances very often result from a reluctance to make modernization work for them until it is too late. For instance, one afternoon, Rena and Nola take a trip down to the creek and discover oil on Belle’s land:

Rena smiled with pleasure and excitement. “Oh my God,” she said, “It’s oil.” She was, they were, going to be rich. Her grandmother would have a new stove. They would buy back their cattle and horses. They would no longer talk of selling the Buick. But [the watchers] began immediately moving stones over the place, trying to cover up the source of the oil seep. Rena didn’t understand. They did

not want such good fortune. They didn't want to be around the earth's black blood and its pain.

Rena cried herself to sleep that night, her small body wracked with sobs. Her happiness over the oil turned to fear. Floyd and Moses had spent the day at the water covering the seeping oil as best they could, their faces grim and set against everything.... (226)

Here, Grace's land and creek break open to reveal oil; Rena's initial happiness reflects the potential money has in the novel to impart class mobility on those who have it. But even the things she imagines they can do with the money – buy “a new stove buy back their cattle and horses” and keep the Buick – are all superficial desires that indicate how money can distort cultural values and traditions. Indeed, the watchers immediately recoil from the oil and start moving stones to cover up where the oil comes from. Their actions change Rena's perspective, indicating this novel's overwhelming insistence that modernity is harmful to the stability found in traditional ways of life. Thus, the divide between modernity and tradition is evident, both in the Watchers' actions and Rena's initial superficial capital desires. However, it is important to notice that Rena only imagines the things she could buy with the money from oil, not how to *manage* the discovery of the oil or the money — not, that is, to see money as “capital” or a community resource. Rena thus exemplifies the Indians' obsession with buying the “things” of modernity – as we saw in the newly rich Indians and Nola – but also an ignorance of how modernization (the accumulation of capital and power) works. Whether this

ignorance is the fault of the Indians or the Anglo Americans or both is unresolved. But I argue that we are left feeling that if the Indians of the novel were able to “make modernity work,” they would approach its new structures in their lives from a different direction. Wholeheartedly celebrating or hiding the oil in fear only responds to existing patterns; neither approach considers how to proactively use the discovery to change or participate in those existing patterns (which Hogan does not represent as possible).

On the other hand, desire to hide the oil and its source – first the Watchers’, and then Moses and Floyd’s – is also a desire to hide the rift in the earth that revealed the oil, which symbolizes the rift in Indian culture the oil caused. “The earth’s black blood and its pain” is, on the one hand, the result of the literal and metaphorical cracks in the earth that drilling for oil causes, but it also represents a loss to these routes to and roots of identity; when the security of the earth is cracked, so is security of the self, as I explored earlier. Here, the oil’s presence in the river thus becomes doubly important. Throughout the novel, water is associated with myth telling and predicting the future – Hogan claims early that “A river never lied,” Michael Horse reads water to predict the weather and the future, Grace’s mother, Lila, was a river prophet, and Nola is described as “the river’s godchild” (5, 9). That the river is now the source of oil shakes the ground upon which the tradition of trusting water stood, rendering its link to identity unstable as well, specifically because of the seductive power of capital. The river’s rootedness in both the earth and Osage culture renders its rift and staining by oil

especially dangerous as that damage represents and produces similar damages in the roots of Osage culture identity based on place. Hiding that break is thus a tactical move that pursues survival; however, this is not survivance or blood memory rooted in narrative space, but rather basic survival rooted in sealing or closing space because of the financial and thus personal danger that space now represents.

Much as money comes to indicate and cause stagnancy, it also foments the closure of ethnic identity. Money and the desire for it causes many of the deaths in the novel; beyond that, however, money also closes off the roots of cultural and traditional identity and opens other routes, which rest on American ideals of capital gain and socioeconomic success. These routes are figured as dangerous to individual survival, which again suggests that modern capital cannot exist alongside cultural and traditional Indian identities. Hale, a white American oilman who used to be a rancher in Osage territory and was once a friend to the Indians, begins taking out life insurance policies on Indians who own plots of land rich with oil – Indians who later mysteriously die. As Benjamin Black, the region's doctor, muses one night when Hale comes in for a check up,

He looked at Hale, then looked out the window at the crowds of people on the busy street, the fast business of oil money changing hands, hawkers selling Indian people useless baubles, and white men collecting on their debts. He didn't like any of it. He'd written a letter to Washington. The last two Indians who died had insurance

policies. One of them named Hale as beneficiary. And Hale had a lien on the property of the other one. But in D.C. they told him there wasn't enough evidence. And it was outside their jurisdiction. (64)

Here, Doctor Black's distaste is for actions related to the interaction of Indians and money – interactions that take them far from their culture and traditions and instead fill their time with consumerist quests for money or goods that will define their identities. But he does not disparage the Indians for their wealth and misguided use of it – rather, he mourns the losses they experience as a result: “the fast business of money changing hands, hawkers selling Indian people useless baubles, and white men collecting on their debts” accentuate how every action on the “busy street” concerns economic exchange, indicating that the citizens of Watona – Osage land – have shortchanged their region's, and thus their own, identity. Crafting a new identity thus would not link them to cultural tradition, but rather to capital itself – and again, it is as if one cannot exist alongside another. Moreover, naming Hale early as the sole individual linked to the murders of wealthy Indians (though we learn later that others are involved as well, under Hale's direction) grants him enormous capital power in the novel. From this moment on, he becomes the force of corruption driven by capital gain and desire itself; moreover, the power he derives from the allure of money gives him control over cultural belonging. That control uses individual wealth to define what people are worth and so effaces cultural traditions and belonging.

We see this control over identity in sharp focus in Hale's dealings with John Stink, an older Indian who dies from a heart attack that some believe was the result of poisoning. In this case, it comes to light that Hale's power is not limited to those who are living – he interacts with and controls a dead John Stink in ways that benefit him financially. This action not only colors him with an overwhelming, otherworldly power, but also hands him the cultural power Osage associate with the dead. He uses that cultural power to reinforce his capital power, thereby displacing the Indians' sources of both cultural and financial agency. Ironically, Hale is thus the only character to interweave cultural and traditional knowledge and modernity to his benefit, but in horribly manipulative and unethical ways. When Stink dies in the novel but resurrects himself (or becomes a ghost – the novel intentionally accentuates the mythic side of the occurrence) and wanders around town, the Indians of the town will not acknowledge him. But Hale sees his potential as an investment and convinces his girlfriend, China, to marry him:

Stink was one of the richest Indians in the territory, but few people knew it. And, if any of the crooked white people had thought he was dead and a ghost, they would have laid claim right-off to his money and his land, but the news had somehow managed to escape them. But Hale's plan was clever. He thought John Stink was crazy. Years before, Stink had given his father's Arabian thoroughbreds away, and now he refused to accept oil payments or live in a regular house.

Hale thought it was a cinch that John Stink would marry [China], and he was sure Stink wouldn't be any trouble after the wedding, since the old man had no use for money, no concept of it even. (165-6)

Here, Hale is the only "crooked white person" who recognizes that Stink is no longer alive and that recognition separates him, by way of cultural insight, from other American oilmen who may have taken similar advantage of the situation. That cultural insight marks him as insidiously in touch with the Indian community, which suggests that the Osage cultural tradition is a weakness of the tribe that others can exploit once they learn about it. At the same time, however, this event indicates that the power of capital – which should bring class mobility and power – fails the Osage and, as it is here, is taken from them through culture. Stink is "one of the richest Indians in the territory" but he "refuse[s] to accept oil payments or live in a regular house," choices that gesture toward the uneven relationship Osage Indians have with their own money. Moreover, while Stink's unwillingness to use his money in any way that might benefit him could be read as an empowering move that removes him from Anglo American structures of class: for instance, we learn that he "liked nothing more than to pick up the golf balls white golfers lost and resell them" (165). Here, he engages with Anglo culture and, instead of subverting its systems, participates in both its class and cultural systems by collecting and then reselling golf balls at a minimum to wealthy Anglo Americans. Hale's plan thus exploits Stink's engagement with Anglo culture and

disengagement from class, which again points toward the vulnerability and stagnancy the entire tribe faces. Moreover, reading Stink's financial situation alongside Hale's manipulation of culture and modernity suggests that tradition and modernization cannot exist in tandem without poisoning one another and leading to ruin.

Hale abuses the legal system for capital gain at the cost of other Indians as well, a fact which comes to light during his trial at the end of the novel and accentuates his manipulations throughout. Moreover, Hale's legal maneuvering often draws on cultural knowledge. Prior to the trial, Hogan depicts many of Hale's actions as legally legitimate but culturally exploitative. For instance, when Belle finds a man who works for Hale on her property erecting a buffalo fence and questions him, she learns that "Hale leased this land from the Indian agent" because Belle "didn't improve it" according to Anglo expectations of land use (210). Unlike Osage traditions of living with the land as benignly as possible – for instance, Michael Horse writes "Honor mother sky and father earth. Look after everything Live gently with the land" – those who enforce and those who benefit from the American legal system expect land to be used aggressively for production (337). Here, Hale's awareness of that dichotomy enables him to essentially steal land – he leases Belle's land "for a payment of only twenty-five cents a year" – and uses it for not only his own capital gain and legal power over the Indians (210). Later, when Belle discovers that Hale has leased even more of her land and goes to argue against it with the Indian agent, he apologizes and

reveals his own inability to intervene: “So sorry, Belle, Moses. It’s not me doing it. It’s not even the leasers. It’s what’s legal” (302). Effectively releasing Hale, as the man who leased her property, of responsibility in this statement and deeming his actions as legal, the Indian agent, somewhat reluctantly, perpetuates a cycle of exploitation and endangerment and reinforces its basis in legalized action. Belle articulates this cycle with her response, which recalls the law’s participation in the dubious life insurance policies and murders as well, as we learn later that the sheriff was part of the plot to murder wealthy Indians: “Why is it that so many crimes are backed up by your laws?”

The events at the end of the novel, especially Hale’s trial, tie crime and legality to money in ways that further dispossess the Osage and highlight the danger capital gain represents and causes for some and the power it gives others. Even though he is eventually found guilty (but only after a second trial) and the evidence against him is more than significant, Hale’s demeanor at the outset of the trial is jovial:

He was all friendly business. He smiled and shook hands with several of his friends and business associates before he sat down he looked calm and collected. He looked, in an odd way, handsome and untouched by the weight of events. Hale sat tall, almost self-righteous, his circle of stolen money and power had built him far beyond human feeling and, it seemed, far above the law. He leaned over to whisper to his attorney. His every movement and expression

seemed calculated to his advantage, as if he were playing a game of chess, thinking of which pieces and plays supported his holdings.

(321-2)

Hale's expression of security and lightheartedness, reflecting his own quest for class mobility and status, is in direct contrast to the demeanor of Indians – which again indicates the distance between tradition and modernity – who come to the trial and “stand in the back of the room, against the wall, their arms folded across their chests. They were dressed in traditional clothing. They stood ready to listen. They eyed the neat stacks of paper on the tables” (321). Hale's entrance seems not only contrived but excessive and absurd. His attitude, thus, indicates that he wants those in the court to know how flippant he considers the charges against him, and so how confident he is that he will beat them. Moreover, when he enters he was all “friendly business” and shakes hands with “friends and business associates,” accentuating the capital threads of his case and reminding the reader that his financial connections give him a certain degree of power over those who do not enter in the same humor. “His circle of stolen money and power” thus not only boosts his mood in this scene and allows him to act with calculation, “as if he were playing a game of chess,” but also reflects the outcome of the trial and how much it depends on capital power. Whereas Hale remains in charge and dominates the first trial through capital – he gives his lawyer money to make witnesses disappear and bribe government agents to coerce confessions to crimes that Hale committed from others – the Indians stand in the back and, during the

trial, leave in disgust or hopelessness and speak of “danger and giving up” (327). Hale’s manner emphasizes the powerful role of capital in not only shaping cultural identity but civic identity, living habits, and larger community actions as well. In other words, the Osage lose their civic and cultural identities because of Hale’s financial power and the legal leverage it can buy. Monetary gain and upward mobility is thus turned into a liability that causes class damage and actual stagnation.

And that these actions are all under the guise of legality call into question the stability of the modern legal system in the novel as a whole. The trial itself, especially the testimony of Mardy Green, discloses the extent of Hale’s careful orchestration of the entire plot and by extension the Indians’ vulnerability to the specific capital maneuvers Hale plans. The references throughout to the Indians’ awkward and often ill-defined relationship to money, in light of Mardy’s testimony, take on a particularly dark hue:

His long testimony unraveled much of the complicated plot involving Hale and the sheriff: Hale could not kill both Benoit and Sara because the money had to go through Benoit. They were certain that the sheriff would later find a way to marry Lettie. Then they would claim money through her. Palmer had kept the store records and was always a witness when a lien was filed against an Indian’s property, so he too was implicated, but he’d been another citizen the Indians knew well and liked. It seemed as if everyone

was involved, Palmer and his books, the banker, the dead cowboy and roper Fraser who knew too much, and a large number of the attorneys who were guardians for oil-rich Indians. (347)

Here, Mardy's testimony mimics a narrative of survival because it recalls the wrongs of the past in an attempt to right them. However, Mardy's revelations of Hale's corrupt but well calculated manipulations of the Indians only further amplify that Indians and modernity do not mix. Likewise, when the trial ends Hale is acquitted, despite the mountain of evidence against him; as a narrative that should encourage survival, the trial does the opposite and lets Hale loose to pursue his plans and commit more murders. Mardy's testimony reveals how Hale *and his associates* wielded capital as a powerful tool of corruption and community erasure through control over individuals. Thus, Hale's "group" survives as a community while the Osage community fractures. And those involved in the plot were, very often, those the Indians liked and trusted in their community – Hale, Palmer, Jess (the sheriff), the list goes on – which renders their community unsafe because of the presence of money. All those involved in the plot had ties to places of capital gain, as is the case with Palmer and his store, political power, like the sheriff Jess, or a powerful mix of both, like Hale, whose money controls political decisions and those who make them. That the Indians initially trust these men gestures toward a deceit in relationships among members of the same community. That deceit in turn indicates an ethnic divide based in modern capital – a divide particularly evident when Nola, fearful of her white husband Will, kills him in a panic.

But Will's death is unlike the others in *Mean Spirit*. Whereas the Indian murders are for capital, Will's death is because Nola believes she is protecting herself, her unborn child, *and* her wealth – though Will is not involved in the scheme to kill Indians for their oil money. When Michael Horse comes to watch over Nola following the murder, he notes that “everything had turned around, had swirled into an ever-tightening circle of danger. Fire, which had meant warmth and light, had come to mean death. Wealth meant poverty. And for Nola, love had turned to loss” (355). Will's death not only thus reflects the various losses in the novel, but specifically how those losses are tied to capital. Nola, in her act of killing him, has become no better than Hale and his constituents, and while she suffers because of his murder, she remains financially intact and ultimately finds cultural and individual wholeness. Nola, the novel makes it seem, is able to interweave Indian cultural tradition and modernization to her benefit. Yet, I ask, at what cost? The losses of security, community trust, family, and individuality that Will's murder implies go largely unremarked upon and unexplored in the rest of the novel, which reveals a sort of ethical blind spot: why doesn't Will's death matter? Is it because, though he is a protagonist, he is white? Or does it have more to do with his associations with modernization?

More likely the latter. Will's father, we discover halfway through the novel, is a lawyer involved with Hale and his purchases of oil-rich Indian land and has invested Nola's family money in Hale's business. When Will protests that his father should not use Nola's money without asking him first because she is his

wife, his father's response reveals one area where tradition and modernity do intersect, though dubiously:

“She's your paycheck. Now she is the one who pays for your good suits and hats.”

Will himself had thought it an embarrassment to have no livelihood of his own, which was why he had taken an interest in helping to manage Nola's royalties and holdings. But now, dismissed by his father, he felt ashamed of his own lack of legitimate work. (189)

After this moment, Will is haunted the rest of the night by comments that focus on the “business” of his marriage. Throughout the novel, Hogan has portrayed marrying an Indian woman as a get rich quick scheme – once married, their husbands controlled their finances: “The women were business investments. Another white man, when asked what he did for a living, said by way of an answer that he'd married an Osage woman, and everyone who listened understood what that meant, that he didn't work; he lived off her money” (33). While this is an ethically unsound practice that renders Indian women financial objects, Will's reaction to his father pointing out his role in this system, and his similar reactions the rest of the evening, reveals a more complicated issue. If, as Colleen O'Neill suggests, “privileging ‘culture’ ... conflates class with ethnic and racial identity,” then the novel's reliance on culture and tradition for character identification identifies Will ultimately as a white man who participates in the “business” of marrying a wealthy Indian woman (8). Despite his discomfort with not having a

business of his own, and despite his final plea, after Nola shoots him – “I loved you. I loved you....Why? Why did you do this?” – Will’s racially based class identity and attachment to the modern business of profiting off an Indian wife effectively erase him from the novel. After Horse’s final sentiment about Nola’s love turning to loss, Will’s name is never mentioned again.

V. ON THE ABSENCE OF MODERN LABOR IN THE AMERICAN INDIAN NOVEL

Despite his removal from the narrative, Will’s shame about not having “legitimate work” raises the question of labor in the novel. Namely, and to put it bluntly, where is it? While Hogan mentions labor a few times, these instances can be easily sorted into two descriptive and analytic categories: modern capital-driven white labor, like work in Watona’s stores or on the oilfields, or traditional Indian labor, like Belle’s work in her garden or Lettie’s labor digging holes on Belle’s property. As in all three of my novels, these two types of labor are clearly contrasted largely by their cultural, ethnic, and class associations. The oilmen work “in their steel-toe boots as they pulled the great chains back and forth and, inch by inch, drove the pipes down into the earth. The sound of metal grated against metal out there. Gas rumbled under the ground like earth complaining through an open mouth, moaning sometimes and sometimes roaring with rage” (145). Belle, on the other hand, tells her family, “The earth is my marketplace ... and they understood what she meant, for they ate the fruits of her labor” and “worked in the fields daily and without fatigue. When she was not with the corn,

she was cutting wild asparagus from along the roadways and taking watercress home for dinner” (16, 207). The difference between the two depictions is palpable: the oilmen are ruining the earth to pull profit from it, whereas Belle gently engages with the earth to maintain her and her family’s sustenance, much like the differences in labor in *The Surrounded* and *Life Among the Piutes* I opened with. These labors rest on the divide between tradition and modernity: neither Belle nor the oilmen would be caught doing the labor of the other, nor would either find the others’ labor productive.

But as is the case in *Mean Spirit*, neither of the novels I opened with offers more sustained, or even more, depictions of labor, either. *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *The Bird is Gone* suffer similar blind spots that, on the one hand, point to ways in which reservation and post-reservation life changed patterns of more traditional labor for American Indians. In *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Alexie’s Indians either work in low wage, service jobs – like at the 7-11 or in the cleaning service – or don’t have jobs and spend their free time drinking. And *The Bird is Gone* takes place largely in a bowling alley – seemingly the only place of work in the novel’s imagined Dakota Indian Territory – yet the novel is almost entirely devoid of representations of work there; instead, Jones, for the most part, depicts his employed Indians sitting around chatting, drinking, and sometimes discussing the tourists who have gone missing in the novel. One character, LP Deal, keeps a meticulous set of notebooks wherein he records his manifesto, but that work is never depicted as “work” in the novel. On

the other hand, these apparent blind spots suggest that modern Indians cannot forge productive relationships to the structures of modernity because they literally have nothing to forge with – they have no labor, and so no product, to use as a cultural olive branch to modernity. Even Belle’s declaration that “The earth is my marketplace” reinforces the lack of connection between traditional Indian labor and the labor and structures of modernity: Belle does not sell the produce she gathers for profit.

But why doesn’t Indian labor exist in these novels? I doubt that making such a move, delineating moderns forms of productive labor in detail, would erase the reader’s sense of the horrors of acculturation or assimilation or in some way make them appear ultimately beneficial. For example, historians I referenced earlier in this chapter prove this by careful critical work that downplays neither the benefits nor the costs of modernization on Indian populations, culture, traditions, and ways of living. On the contrary, by acknowledging both, these historical narratives recover a more pluralistic view of Indian life when their culture and Anglo culture came into contact. These narratives are not Pocahontas type tales of seamless cultural amalgamation, but rather complicated narratives of how Indians took both the damaging and advantageous elements of modernization and manipulated them in order to preserve cultural identity. So why doesn’t literature reflect the same situation, and what does this omission say about literature’s relationship to history or Indians’ historical connections with modernity? To what extent is it a reflection of what happens when literary texts

position modernization and tradition as antithetical to one another, as all my novels here have?

To begin suggesting answers to these questions, I would start by asking another, which I previewed in my introduction: What *takes the place of labor* in these novels and why? If I had to formulate an answer, I would say that ethnicity becomes the dominant focal point in these novels: preserving it and the cultural history that accompanies it consumes these novels' energy – for instance, in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Alexie pairs scenes of characters' stasis (or lack of work) with stories of cultural remembrance – moments of blood memory and survivance. Hogan and Jones' texts make similar moves – when Indians cannot do anything, they recall the past, either through dialogue or narration. For instance, Horse writes about the loss of Osage tradition the evening after Hale's first trial in *Mean Spirit*, and sections of LP's memoirs that cover cultural recovery are reprinted in *The Bird is Gone* on particularly slow or unproductive nights at the bowling alley. In these cases, ethnic remembrance takes the place of profitable labor, which again showcases the gap between tradition and modernity. And I argue that that replacement occurs because the overwhelmingly negative force of modernization in these novels forces the stories in particular directions – here, toward rescuing and preserving an “authentic” Indian identity while modernization tries to efface it.

As a result, however, as I've shown, there is simply no space for labor – which, when investigated further, comments in curious ways to these novels'

relationships to history and the messages they carry about Indians and modernity. In these novels, modernized labor and other systems of modernization do not help these Indians preserve their ethnic identity, unlike how Deloria and others argue it did, but their presence rather challenges cultural and traditional ways of living. These authors instead use modernity as a counterpoint to ethnicity, which replaces physical labor with the labor of maintaining ethnic identity – an enterprise they complete with varying success. When successful, this “labor” is a source of pride and when unsuccessful, it often portends danger and loss. Either way, however, it positions tradition and modernity against one another in ways that efface the complicated middle ground on which the meeting of the two actually landed and negotiated. Recovering of ethnic identity, thus, is a complicated set of maneuvers that should seek to incorporate current conditions into tradition; focusing on class, labor, and space in these novels reveals not only how much that does not happen, but the devastating effects of maintaining a fissure between the old and the new. With that fissure in place, Indian identity, agency, and culture seems to have no place in modern society, which displaces whatever influence these elements historically had. Though literature is under no obligation to align with historical record, Hogan’s novel is historical – yet its history stands for more than the single event it represents, especially given the lack of American Indian novels that take a strong interest in class, labor, and space. And since ethnic minority literature often suffers the burden of also acting as historical memory – and, by extension, future prediction – that literature must record not only singular events,

like the Osage oil crisis, but must also reflect historical trends. In this case, American Indian literature would be well advised to do as history has – to not only reflect the damaging effects of American expansion, but also to acknowledge the ingenious ways American Indian populations navigated the consequences of that expansion and used such to create opportunities for their own communal, individual, and ethnic salvation.

In retrospect, that has been the theme of my texts throughout this dissertation – how individuals adjust the labor practices that craft their identities to new conceptions of space, new class lines, and new uses of capital in the American West. Therefore, I return to my Introduction’s original equation – that class is a function of labor in a particular space. Losing traditional or older forms of labor is a challenge in nearly every novel I have examined. And each particular novel’s way of handling this challenge speaks to the literal and figurative “investment” of capital in specific historical moments—including when it is *disinvested*. Very importantly, in fact, the money to be made from the loss of working traditions also had a strong impact on how those labor patterns evolved or were memorialized as time passed. For instance, as Nancy Cook has pointed out in her essay “The Romance of Ranching” in Susan Kollin’s edited *Postwestern Cultures*, cowboy labor has been memorialized as nostalgia about the American West to the point where a version of it still thrives in popular culture even as the labor itself has nearly vanished. And American Indian labor has suffered from a similar nostalgic trap that contains traditional labor within county and craft fairs.

In both cases, a mythic history sells – cowboy hats, old style riding whips, carefully woven straw baskets, and hand beaded dream catchers find their way into American houses and hands by the thousands every year—but it is a history, largely, of dispossession. This is not only exploitative – you lost your way of life, let's profit on that! – but it is also a way that we, as consumers, impose an aesthetic judgment on history. We like these things so we're not willing to let them go – well, not *quite*.

And though we think we know the story about how history commonly becomes memorialized, the particular story I've tried to tell in this dissertation is a little different. This time, we aren't memorializing the winners, but the losers. The workers of the Dust Bowl laid the foundation for union labor parties out West but often didn't profit much from those campaigns. And Burton's Californios lost their ranch empires in ways that damaged an emergent Chicano identity for years to come. And even the small cross-section of skilled workers who became unskilled, manual laborers like McTeague, offer a reflection on the often- regimented labor laws that supposedly protected national interest – here, health associated with dentistry – but damaged many individual lives. In retrospective acts of often- insincere generosity, we prefer rescue Dorothy Lange photographs and early glass medical bottles and instruments, in order to display the roots of America's national identity we would like to believe in: identities rooted in labor. These nostalgic purchases serve to reaffirm our already nationalistic faith in the image of the hard-working American pulling himself up by his bootstraps. Our national

reactions to those who lost their identities and histories , therefore, is to seamlessly slide them into ours, smoothing over any cracks that mar the new portrait of American achievement.

The importance, then, of reading the novels of this dissertation is threefold: we must not only recognize but also not necessarily reconcile the dark stains these stories put on American history, *and* we must also work to integrate stories of those who lost ways of working, ways of believing, ways of life, into the broader portrait of American culture. And finally, if these stories all represent moments of American history — not only, after all, the history of the American West – then we must seize those stories and re-tell them alongside easier-to-digest ones. Only then can we represent how we made the West and its identities – and how those labors helped make our present America.

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