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University of Alberta

Writing on the Frontier
Western Novels by Women, 1880-1920

by

Victoria Elizabeth Lamont

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

Edmonton, Alberta
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Writing on the Frontier: Western Novels by Women, 1880-1920" submitted by Victoria Elizabeth Lamont in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Sept. 18. 1995

Abstract

Like Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and the motion pictures of John Ford, the Western novel in America is part of a wider array of cherished mythologies associated with ideals of self-determination in American democratic society. The diversity of the genre, however, is not reflected in dominant versions of its literary history. Women's Western writing in particular has been all but erased from the American literary canon. Building on feminist revisions of the Western American canon proposed by Annette Kolodny, Jane Tompkins, and others, this dissertation focuses on women's frontier writings produced between 1880 and 1920--a pivotal period with respect to both women's and western writing because these decades saw both the rise of the woman suffrage movement and the emergence of the 'classic' Western mythology associated with such figures as Owen Wister, Frederick Jackson Turner, and Theodore Roosevelt.

Reading the western as a genre which defines American democracy and identity (discussed by Richard Slotkin, among others), this project will challenge the assumption that Westerns originated as an exclusively masculine form. Although the 'classic' Western, beginning with Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902), constructs definitions of America which exclude women from the project of democracy, within this seeming homogeneity authors such as Mary Hallock Foote, Frances McElrath, B.M. Bower, and Mourning Dove have produced both 'highbrow' and popular westerns which suggestively challenge the genre's masculine

hegemony. My project traces the connections between novels by these writers and broader debates about the political status of women in American culture during the decades leading to the woman suffrage victory in 1920.

This project supplies a model for future feminist recovery work in the field of Western American literature, which currently emphasizes women's personal narratives and the few women authors with established literary reputations--especially Willa Cather, Mary Austin, and Dorothy Johnson-- but continues to overlook the recovery of forgotten writers.

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Introduction: Situating Women Writers in the Field of the Western American Novel

i. "I didn't know women wrote Westerns."

Like Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and the motion pictures of John Ford, the Western novel in America is part of a wider array of cherished mythologies associated with ideals of self-determination in American democratic society. Although criticism of the Western novel figures prominently in the broader study of Western American literature as well as in interdisciplinary analysis of the relation between the American West and American culture, women writers are persistently excluded from, or marginalized in, general discussions on the subject. Most discussions of the Western novel-- even those produced by feminists or by scholars at least sensitive to the concerns of feminist theory-- assume that this particular literary mode belongs primarily to male writers, is concerned with masculine topics, and is read by male readers.

Mary Hallock Foote's literary reputation has evolved in a way which exemplifies the fate of many women novelists in Western American literary history. Throughout the 1880's and 1890's, Foote was considered a leading Western author, comparable in stature to Hamlin Garland, Bret Harte, and Owen Wister. By 1920, however, most of Foote's novels were out of print, and, although she was still a productive writer, virtually all of her efforts were rejected by publishers. During her late period, Foote corresponded frequently with her long-time publisher, Houghton Mifflin, about the possible publication of her autobiography, *A Victorian Gentlewoman in the*

Far West. Having few illusions when it came to negotiating the vagaries of the literary marketplace, Foote did not expect to publish the autobiography in her lifetime, but she still believed it had value. "Will you look upon it as a book you would undertake?" she asks in a letter of 1923, "and if so would you rather wait till I am dead so to speak? There is no need to be delicate about it--I am talking from a business point of view and I really do expect to die some day."[1] Foote's autobiography was in fact published posthumously, in 1972, but not exactly in the manner Foote had anticipated. During the 1960s, Western author and literary critic Wallace Stegner became aware of the autobiography while supervising a graduate student working on Foote. Intrigued by the details of Foote's life in the far West, Stegner obtained permission from Foote's descendants to use her autobiography as the basis for a novel, promising them that Foote would not be recognizable as the subject of the work. Unfortunately, Stegner did not live up to the spirit of his promise. Mary Hallock Foote was immediately recognized--both by friends of the Foote family, and by scholars familiar with her life and work--as the subject behind Susan Burling Ward, the central character in Stegner's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Angle of Repose*, published in 1971. When *A Victorian Gentlewoman in the Far West* was published the following year, Foote's identity as the subject of *Angle of Repose* became common knowledge.

Given the fact that *Angle of Repose* uses Foote's plot structure and characterization, paraphrases extensively, and even 'borrows'

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[1]Mary Hallock Foote to Ferris Greenslet, May 6, 1923 (Houghton Mifflin Collection, Harvard University).

entire passages almost word for word, it represents the first occasion upon which Mary Hallock Foote's autobiography was made public, issued in a man's name, and revised in various unflattering ways. Among the most problematic of these revisions is an episode in which Susan Burling meets secretly with her lover, a close friend of her husband. During their tryst, Susan's infant daughter--left unattended--is drowned. This event is a distorted conflation of two unrelated topics in the autobiography: the death of Foote's youngest daughter, Agnes, of appendicitis in 1904, and Foote's friendship with a close friend of her husband. Stegner transforms this fondness into infidelity, and interprets the death of Agnes as a form of punishment for it. These distortions go hand in hand with a narrative framework which suggests that Foote's own narration cannot be trusted: *Angle of Repose* is told from the perspective of Susan Ward's grandson Lyman, a wheelchair-bound historian obsessed with writing his late grandmother's biography. The novel focuses on his attempts to decipher his grandmother's deceptive letters, exposing in particular her shortcomings as a wife and a mother[2]

That Foote's own autobiography remained obscure while Stegner's version of it garnered a prestigious literary prize

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[2]Stegner's discovery and revision of the manuscript are documented in Mary Ellen Williams Walsh, "*Angle of Repose* and the Writings of Mary Hallock Foote: A Source Study." As Walsh points out, critics even praised Stegner for passages written by Foote. Stegner's narrator, considered the novel's most original creation, also bears uncanny similarities to a character appearing in one of Foote's unpublished stories. Because Stegner named his characters using names from Foote's family tree, his sources were transparent to those acquainted with the Foote family. In a letter to Walsh, Foote's granddaughter wrote, "People who had barely known M. H. Foote would stop me on the street and say, in essence, 'I never knew your grandmother did *that!*' Even though some of them listened politely to denials of all these evil doings, it was only a matter of time until a man in our local book store said to my brother-in-law, 'Don't worry--there's one in every family!'" (208).

epitomizes a broader relation between women writers and the Western American novel. Existing criticism of the Western American novel commonly assumes that this 'masculine' mode has never held much appeal for women writers, yet Foote's example locates this exclusion within the material conditions of cultural production, not psychic differences between men and women writers. Foote's relative lack of status as an author constituted a barrier to the publication of her autobiography, even though Wallace Stegner later found much of its material 'good' enough for use in the version he would claim as his own. Foote's lack of status thus undermined her capacity to tell her own story in the way she had originally intended, and dispossessed her of due credit for the material Stegner used in *Angle of Repose*. Foote's example is not unique: Although women writers have influenced the development of the Western novel since its inception, they rarely receive credit for the ways in which their literary activities have determined the course of its history.

i. Criticism of the Western Novel: An Overview

Since 1950, the amount of research on the Western American novel has risen steadily in the form both of entire monographs devoted to the genre, and studies of the novel included in larger volumes on a more broadly conceived "Western Myth" which also attend to film, performance, journalism, television, and so forth. Understanding the variously theorized term 'myth' as a set of widely dispersed narratives, the pervasiveness of which transcends particular texts and authors, researchers turned to the novel in particular because of its mass-production and circulation. The fact

that motion pictures became the dominant vehicle for producing Western mythology in the twentieth century did not dissuade this line of inquiry, because the nineteenth-century Western novel was considered the direct predecessor of the twentieth-century Western motion picture. Despite a lineage derived from popular culture, the category "Western novel" is variously defined, and can include novels written by Western writers, novels about the West, or novels which deploy a particular generic formula known as the "Western."

Although analysis of the representation of gender has figured prominently in texts on the Western novel produced since 1950, the works of women writers have rarely been discussed. Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950) remains an important moment in the history of Western American literary historiography because Nash Smith was able to argue persuasively that Western American writing was not a trivial subject (Etulain, "American Literary West" 137-152). Before that time, the association of Western writing with popular culture, regionalism, and America's colonial past, were qualities inconsistent with prevailing canons of American literature, which valued elitism over populism, nationalism over regionalism, and which, in keeping with America's rise as a world power, asserted the 'universal' relevance of its literary heritage (Lauter passim). To legitimize Western American writing as a serious research field, Nash Smith moved outside the boundaries of his discipline, using a historical line of inquiry to articulate the links between Western American literature and America's identity as an expanding, frontiering nation. He was the first scholar to take seriously the period of the dime novel as an important phase in America's cultural

history, although careful to distance himself from any claim that the dime novel constituted good literature. He paid specific attention to the representation of female characters in the dime novel and its literary predecessors, James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales:*

> Everyone is aware of the awe-inspiring gentility of Cooper's heroines. Lowell's remark that they were flat as a prairie and sappy as maples does less than justice to the address and energy which some of them could display on occasion, but it is nevertheless truth that no lady in Cooper was capable of the remotest approach to indelicacy of though, speech, or action. The escape of the Western story from the canons of gentility had greater consequences for the women characters than for the men, because the genteel female had been the primary source of refinement in the traditional novel. (112)

Nash Smith argues that the evolution of femininity in the dime novel, particularly the trend toward unrefined, rebellious women a la Calamity Jane, marks the "progressive deterioration in the Western story as a genre" (119), because the "genteel heroine" was no longer a "pivotal center of plot construction." Whereas female characters in *The Leatherstocking Tales* signified the arrival of civilization in the wilderness, and were therefore pivotal in defining the *social* significance of the frontier in American culture, dime novels reduced the difference between frontiersman and heroine in ways which nullified the social significance of the Western story. "The heroine . . .

developed at last into an Amazon who was distinguished from the hero solely by the physical fact of her sex" (119).

Nash Smith's work established Western American literature as a legitimate field, leading to the publication of several major works on Western literature during the 1960's. Edwin Fussell's *Frontier: American Literature and the American West* (1965) situates canonical male writers (Cooper, Hawthorne, Poe, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman) in the context of the literary history of the American frontier. Leslie Fiedler's *Return of the Vanishing American* (1968) analyzes the role of Native figures in Western mythology. G. Edward White's *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister* (1968) is an interdisciplinary study of the ways in which Western mythology helped redefine class elitism in turn-of-the-century America. In 1966, the journal *Western American Literature* was founded, devoted exclusively to scholarship on the literature of the West.

Scholarship in the 1950's and 60's passively excluded women writers without necessarily making explicit claims about the gender of the Western novel. By the 1970's, however, scholars became more interested in articulating its 'masculine' qualities, shifting their focus toward the popular Western. John G. Cawelti's *The Six-Gun Mystique* (1971) was an early attempt to take the formula Western seriously as an art form. Arguing that formula fiction exists to perform particular social and psychological functions, Cawelti is particularly interested in the cultural significance of the six-gun hero:

> The American tradition has always emphasized individual masculine force; Americans love to think of themselves as pioneers, men who have conquered a continent and sired on it a new society. This radical discrepancy between the sense of eroding masculinity and the view of America as a great history of men against the wilderness has created the need for a means of symbolic expression of masculine potency in an unmistakable way. This means is the gun, particularly the six-gun. (58).

Cawelti's work gave new legitimacy to the popular Western, inspiring Richard Etulain and Michael T. Marsden's collection of essays, *The Popular Western: Essays Toward a Definition* (1974), as well as James K. Folsom's edited volume *The Western: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1979). With the exception of an article on Bertha Muzzy Bower appearing in the Etulain and Marsden collection, both of these volumes focus on male authors--Owen Wister, Zane Grey, Jack Schaefer, and others--who had already been singled out by Cawelti as important figures.

Because more feminist recovery work had been done by the 1980s, Loren Estleman, in his study *The Wister Trace: Classic Novels of the American Frontier* (1987), was more explicit about his grounds for excluding women authors:

> Feminists will object to the absence of books by women authors, but as of this writing, three alone have attained deserved prominence in a genre dominated (as was the frontier itself) by men: Willa Cather, Dorothy Johnson,

> and Mari Sandoz. Of that trio, only one has published a full-length novel worthy of note set in the West. However, Cather's towering *Death Comes for the Archbishop* falls so far outside the genre as it is commonly perceived that it scarcely requires illumination here. (14)

Estleman's justification for excluding women writers perpetuates a long-standing tradition within the academy of defining the Western novel in ways which exclude women writers. By the 1980s, however, the influence of feminism was such that this exclusion at least required some form of justification.

iii. The Western and Feminist Critique

Recently, it has become routine for critical anthologies to include some form of feminist scholarship or attention to women writers, but this work is still marginalized within the academy. The first major work of feminist literary criticism on Western American literature, Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975), argues that dominant representations of the frontier have, since the earliest arrival of Europeans in North America, constructed its landscape as feminine, virgin land available for colonization. Working during a period in which extant major studies of Western American writing by Nash Smith, Fiedler, Fussell, Slotkin, and Cawelti, ignored women's writing entirely, Kolodny used *The Lay of the Land* as a ground-clearing project which enabled her subsequent study of women's writing about the frontier, *The Land Before Her.* In this volume, Kolodny both recovers a number of forgotten women writers, and

situates their work in relation to the dominant, masculine myth of the West, arguing that nineteenth-century women writers collectively created an alternative to the "male myth." Whereas the latter--by representing the landscape itself as a feminine body--excluded women from the frontier, women's "domestic fantasies" opened a space for women's voices by identifying them as Eve in the garden, charged with the task of domesticating the wilderness. Certainly, *The Land Before Her* recovered a number of important women writers, but by placing them in a separate and marginal position relative to their male counterparts, Kolodny did not challenge the paradigm which ascribed agency in Western literary history almost exclusively to male writers.

Kolodny's work coincided with a trend towards further feminist critique of Western American writing, as well as further recovery of Western American writing by women. Two important essay collections-- *Women, Women Writers, and the West* (1979), edited by L.L. Lee and Merrill Lewis, and *Women and Western American Literature* (1982), edited by Helen Winter Stauffer and Susan J. Rosowski--attempted to make sense of what was still a fragmented and vaguely defined research area. Lee and Lewis' 1979 collection was the end product of a call for papers for the 1975 meeting of the Western Literature Association under the topic "Women, Women Writers, and the West." In their preface to the collection, Lee and Lewis explain that so little work had been done in the field that it was not clear to them how to structure the volume in order to ensure "full coverage" of the subject. They stress that their "arrangement of the essays has an arbitrary element about it" that only tentatively

maps out the field (vi, iix). Nevertheless, they were aware of a pervasive assumption that the masculine character of frontier society "has been so much taken for granted that it has hardly been questioned, let alone analyzed" (v). Indirectly, they argue, this emphasis on gender constitutes the validity of an explicitly feminist line of inquiry, for "questions of masculinity cannot be separated from questions of femininity" (v).

Stauffer and Rosowski approach their project with more certainty, explaining that their 1982 collection is important, not only for the answers it provides, but for the questions it poses: "do common images, metaphors, and perceptual patterns run through women's writing of the land, and, if so, do these images, metaphors, and patterns differ significantly from those employed by male writers?" (ix) The Stauffer/Rosowski collection defined more clearly the relationship between feminist research activity and mainstream academic inquiry in the field of Western American literature. "Women have been--and still are--largely excluded from discussions of literature of the American West," they explain, an especially "serious concern . . . in view of the West's enormous influence in shaping American thought" (v).

While their work has been valuable in establishing "the woman's West" as a field, Kolodny, Lee & Lewis, and Stauffer and Rosowski, all frame their inquiries in ways which assume that women's writing on the American West is determined by male dominance in the field, an assumption which implies that women's capacity as cultural *producers* is limited. This strategy may well have been necessary given the minority status of feminism in

Western American literary studies. In order to prevent their work from being trivialized, these researchers had to reckon with prevailing, male-centered paradigms. There are some limitations to this strategy, however, because major studies of the Western American novel, as well as research on the more broadly constructed relation between frontier mythology and American culture, continue to assume that women writers need not be accounted for.

Western literary scholarship in the 1990's has taken a more critical stance toward Western American mythology, interrogating its constructions of race, class, and gender, questioning its justification of violence, and attending to the local cultures of Western American communities. Jane Tompkins' West *of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (1992) reads the Western for the insight about twentieth-century American culture, asking "what the Western hero has meant for the way Americans living in the twentieth century have thought about themselves, how the hero's aspirations have blended with theirs, and how his story has influenced people's beliefs about the way things are" (6). Forrest G. Robinson's *Having it Both Ways: Self-Subversion in Popular Western Classics* (1993) accounts for the enduring popularity of Westerns by exploring the way in which they function "as sites for the negotiation of competing perspectives on the issues of race and gender (2). Like Robinson, Scott Emmert contests the assumption that popular Westerns merely reproduce hegemonic social values. In *Loaded Fictions: Social Critique in the Twentieth-Century Western* (1996), Emmert studies the ways in which the Western has been used as a vehicle for social protest and resistance. As opposed to the fascination of all of these scholars with

the image of the cowboy in popular culture, Blake Allmendinger's interest is in the images cowboys create for themselves. His *The Cowboy: Representations of Labor in an American Work Culture* (1992) analyzes cowboy poetry, prose, art, and ritual, demonstrating that "cowboys have been responsible, in the last hundred years, for producing a vast amount of oral and written poems, prose work, and art" and that "cowboy texts and art objects engage, voice and criticize issues that scholars of high and low culture don't give cowboys credit for dealing with" (13).

The social construction of gender, particularly masculinity, is an important line of inquiry in all of the above texts, as well as the exclusive concern of Lee Clark Mitchell's Westerns*: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (1996). The recovery of women's writing, however, remains marginal insofar as most of it is still published in journals and anthologies rather than in major book-length studies. Indeed, it has become almost a commonplace to include articles on women writers in revisionist anthologies such as *Reading the West: New Essays on the Literature of the American West* (1996), edited by Michael Kowalewski, and *Wanted Dead Or Alive: The American West In Popular Culture* (1996), edited by Richard Aquila. An exception to this trend, Norris Yates' *Gender and Genre: An Introduction to Women Writers of Formula Westerns, 1900-1950* (1995) categorizes women's Westerns as a "sub-genre" of the Western (139), an approach which marks off women's writing as a separate field which constrains women more than it enables them, and which reinscribes the pervasive classification of women as marginal or non-participants in the production of Western American mythology.

Jane Tompkin's West *of Everything* is a particularly important text with respect to renewed interest in feminist issues because of the way in which it takes up an assertion of earlier feminists--that the analysis of masculinity in Westerns cannot be undertaken separately from the analysis of femininity because these two categories are mutually determining. In articulating her argument, however, Tompkins assumes, citing Annette Kolodny's research as evidence, that women in the nineteenth century did not write "Westerns" (41-2).*West of Everything* is still a ground-breaking text, however, because it clarifies the culturally productive aspects of women's literary activity, arguing that Wister's *The Virginian* and the tradition it initiated reacts specifically to the cultural authority of the sentimental novel, and that the Western's thematic and formal characteristics were therefore fundamentally *determined* by women's literary activity.

The assumption that the Western novel is foreign to women's experience is tied to a particular definition of the genre which links it to a more broadly defined "Western myth," characterized by male violence and heroism, Western expansion, Native dispossession, and the ideology of individualism. Certainly, from the colonial period to the present, individualism and the 'pioneer spirit' have commonly been constructed in ways which equate individualism with masculinity (Kolodny, *Lay of the Land* passim). Existing research has overlooked, however, the status of the novel as a *feminized* form during the early history of the Western. Thus James Fenimore Cooper's preface to *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) anticipates that the text will inevitably circulate among a discourse community

associated with sentimental fiction. Assuming that this same audience is likely to misread his own novel, Cooper supplies historical background as well as an explanation of the generic status of the text, which "may not be universally understood, especially by the more imaginative sex, some of whom, under the impression that it is a fiction, may be induced to read the book" (1). After defining his use of history for the benefit of feminine readers, Cooper "commits his book to the reader" with a word of warning:

> As, however, candour, if not justice, requires such a declaration at his hands, he will advise all young lades, whose ideas are usually limited by the four walls of a comfortable drawing room; all single gentlemen, of a certain age, who are under the influence of the winds; and all clergymen, if they have the volumes in hand, with intent to read them, to abandon the design. He gives this advice to such young ladies, because, after they have read the book, they will surely pronounce it shocking; to the bachelors, as it might disturb their sleep; and to the reverend clergy, because they might be better employed. (4)

The publication of *Last of the Mohicans* coincided with that of some equally popular frontier novels by women, Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824) and Catherine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827). Neither of these novels features the backwoodsman hero; rather, they depict rebellious women who, because of their frontier location, are able to resist both autocratic patriarchies and restrictive codes of female conduct. Mary Conant, heroine of *Hobomok*, retreats to the

wilderness to escape her tyrannical father, who forbids her from marrying the man she loves. Conant marries a Native American, Hobomok, and bears a son, but subsequently divorces Hobomok and returns to her repentant father, who gratefully allows her to marry her original lover. In *Hope Leslie,* the eponymous heroine is instrumental in the novel's various main and sub-plots, including the rescue of a Native American woman, Magawisca, from persecution by the Puritan patriarchy. Although Cooper is regularly singled out as having established the central concerns of the frontier novel in the nineteenth century, his female contemporaries are virtually ignored even though Cooper himself was keenly aware of his own participation in a literary culture dominated by women, perceiving literary authority in the field as something he had to struggle for, as critic Nina Baym observes: "Responding to *Hobomok,* and responded to in turn by Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie, The Last of the Mohicans* is a node in a literary network wherein white authors debated each other on the topic of male and female as well as the topic of whites and American Indians" (22-23). The exclusion of women writers from this critical heritage has had a bearing on the way in which interdisciplinary research on the broader relations between the frontier and American culture is carried out, because this form of research tends to rely on texts already singled out by literary historians as important.[3]

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[3]I am thinking of Richard Slotkin's three exhaustive volumes on frontier mythology. To be fair to Slotkin, I should mention that he does discuss important woman authors including Lydia Maria Child, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, and a few others, but his analysis nevertheless reflects the general lack of attention paid to women writers whenever discussions of the Western engage its broader cultural and historical relevance.

Women novelists continued to influence the cultural production of Western American mythology during the Progressive Era, the period upon which I focus my project. I have selected this period because, in the years between 1880 and 1920, the Western novel underwent various fundamental paradigm shifts, responding in particular to the 'disappearance' of the frontier (Bold 37-75). The publication and tremendous success of *The Virginian* in 1902 is considered a moment of rebirth in literary histories of the Western American novel, marking the recuperation of the Western story from the dime-novel ghetto, and initiating a tradition that has produced a steady succession of cultural icons, from Tom Mix to John Wayne to Clint Eastwood. Wister's most important achievement is the cowboy hero he created, considered the prototype for similar figures in popular fiction and film.

The activities of women writers during this period have not been considered fundamentally relevant to the genealogy of this mythology; if anything, the emphasis on masculinity associated with Wister's influence has led to the assumption that the tradition he initiated was completely alien to women's experience. Wister is associated in particular with historian and U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt and artist Frederic Remington, who accompanied Wister on several western trips to produce illustrations for his periodical fiction. All three were friends who came from similar, upper-class, eastern backgrounds, and collectively produced a mythology of the "Western experience" which articulated the concerns of the elite, urban, industrial class to which they belonged.[4] They also shared the

[4]The Roosevelt-Remington-Wister connection has been discussed by Christine

concerns of historian Frederick Jackson Turner, who, in his 1894 thesis, argued that the 'American character' was predicated on a history of continuous Westward movement, and was now in crisis because of frontier closure. But Wister was also closely associated with two women writers in particular. One, Mary Hallock Foote, actually constituted the field Wister later occupied as an author; the other, B.M. Bower, succeeded him as an author of cowboy fiction in the pulp fiction press. When, in 1893, Wister was commissioned by *Harper's* to travel and write in the West, he was actually following a model of the Western writer initiated by Mary Hallock Foote, who had already become the writerly equivalent of a Western scout, producing both fiction and illustrations of the West for *Century* magazine. Following the tremendous success of *The Virginian*, which consisted of several already-published short stories woven into a novel, Wister did not produce additional Western novels. The work of entrenching the narrative structure of *The Virginian* as a genre was carried out by a succession of popular authors, among them Bertha Muzzy Bower, who produced a steady succession of stories and serialized novels for *Popular Magazine* between 1904 and 1941. Although both authors receive sporadic attention from present-day critics, they are routinely excluded from broader discussions of the Western American novel.

Bower and Foote are among the four authors considered in this study, which not only recovers the culturally productive activities of

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Bold in *Selling the Wild West* (37-69); Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation* (passim); and Marcus Klein in "The Westerner: Origins of the Myth" (65-82). For a full-length treatment, see G. Edward White, *The West of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister.*

women writers, but also challenges prevailing literary histories which either ignore them altogether, or label their activity as marginal or subversive simply because they were women. Through "thick descriptions" of the historical, social, and material conditions in which a select group of women positioned themselves as Western writers, this project foregrounds the various contingencies which constituted the Western novel as a fundamentally unstable discourse, available not only to women writers, but also to feminist positionings. Each author in the study has been selected, not on the basis of her representative status with respect to women's Western writing in general, but in order to generate a sense of the ways in which the field of the western was inflected by gender, class, and racial categories which both enabled and set limits around women's reproductions and reconfigurations of American frontier mythology.

Over the course of researching this project, I became convinced that recovering Western American writing by women required theoretical strategies which depart in various ways from those deployed in available studies of the Western American novel in particular and Western American mythology in general. I deliberately avoid accommodating women writers by producing a revised--and implicitly more "true"-- taxonomy of the Western American novel, because it has become clear to me that this very practice is a major part of the problem: Whatever their orientation or theoretical allegiance, generic definitions have in common the effect of excluding far more material than they include. These exclusions go hand-in-hand with the assumption, underlying any attempt to define a particular genre, that its definition is somehow already *there*

awaiting discovery by an academy which passively reproduces knowledge of what already exists in the broader culture. This model occludes debate about the productive role of the academy in defining literary genre, movements, traditions, and so forth.

Generic taxonomies also produce artificial boundaries between literary categories such as the popular and literary Western, or between the Western as genre and as formula, encouraging researchers to privilege certain relationships while overlooking others. For example, scholarship of the popular Western novel has been greatly influenced by a "trickle down" model of the relationship between literary and popular fiction: visionary authors such as Cooper and Wister are credited with articulating various fundamental ideas which are then reproduced by the "fiction factory" in ways which may be improvisational to some degree, but do not obtain status as paradigms for others to follow. Yet, as recent studies of modernism, realism, and other "highbrow" movements have shown, the reverse is just as likely to be true--that elite fields of literary production and reception are constructed in relation to popular or "lowbrow" fields in ways which determine the value, meaning, and formal properties of 'literary' work[5] Indeed, the categories "highbrow," "middlebrow," and "lowbrow" are relational and cannot be understood apart from some discussion of the broader system within which these distinctions become meaningful.

I recover Western novels by women, not by producing "the woman's Western" as a discrete genre separate and distinct from "the

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[5]See Suzanne Clark's *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* for a discussion of modernism as a response to "lowbrow" traditions of women's writing.

Western," or by redefining "the Western" in a more inclusive way, but by conceptualizing Western writing as a field comprising a complex array of institutions, cultural authorities and producers, audiences, forms of symbolic capital, literary practices, and social positions. I find this relational model, based on the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, particularly useful for recovering and articulating the culturally productive aspects of women's literary activity, without minimizing the barriers women faced in their positions as Western writers. Bourdieu argues that the field of cultural production is a political arena in which subjects struggle for power over representation. This power is manifest as symbolic capital, a term Bourdieu uses to redefine artistic recognition as a form of power for which cultural producers struggle. The recognition, or symbolic capital, a cultural producer acquires depends upon his or her social position within the field, which agents occupy through the work they produce.[6] For example, a pulp-fiction novel is the manifestation of a certain position-taking which signifies the relatively low status of its author within the field: pulp-fiction authors usually receive less recognition for the work than the institution that owns the technology for publishing it, and they are often subject to rigid editorial control. 'Literary' works, on the other hand, signify position-takings which aspire to public recognition of the author as a producer of valuable art. The way in which power is produced in the field of cultural production tends to serve the

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[6]This brief synopsis of the major tenets of Bourdieu's methodologies is based on translations of his work collected in *The Field of Cultural Production.* especially his essay "The Field of Cultural production, or: The Economic World Reversed" (29-73).

interests of the most powerful groups in the broader society, because symbolic capital is defined in an inverse relation to material capital--that is, the higher the value of the work as a commodity, the lower its value as symbolic capital. This relation tends to privilege cultural producers of higher social status, who can more readily afford to devote their energies to activities which do not produce material capital, and are therefore more likely to produce representations that are sanctified within the broader culture. At the same time, however, Bourdieu's work does not occlude the possibility of resistance and change because marginal groups still *belong* to the field. "The dominated," Bourdieu insists, "can always exert a certain force, inasmuch as to belong to a field means by definition that one is capable of producing effects in it (if only to elicit reactions of exclusion on the part of those who occupy the dominant positions), thus of putting certain forces into motion" (qtd. in Wacquant 36).

Although Bourdieu is not explicit about the way in which gender relates to the field of cultural production, feminists have found his model particularly useful because it enables analysis of gender as a position which intersects with other positions--for example, positions determined by race and class--in a way which enables researchers to discuss femininity as a variable category.[7] This model also resists the tendency to equate the marginal with the trivial--to assume, in other words, that because women writers wrote less than men, or wrote differently, or received less recognition, or were less powerful, that their work need not be

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[7]For example, see Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (im)positionings.*

accounted for in major studies of the Western novel, in survey courses of Western American literature, or in interdisciplinary research on Western American mythology. A materialist analysis of women's positions within the field of Western American writing enhances understanding of the field itself, constructing the discussion of women writers as something more than an inconvenient detour required to appease feminist critics.

Bourdieu's work also includes textual analysis as a key avenue of inquiry, because the work itself constitutes the producer's position-taking within the field. Discussions of the mode of production and circulation of the work, therefore, should not be undertaken apart from immanent readings of the text, because the text articulates the power relations which determine the author's position, the strategies engaged by the author to negotiate her position, and what it is that this position enables her to do. An approach which uses both immanent textual readings and discussion of the mode of production of the work avoids what Bourdieu has called "the short-circuit fallacy," which reads the text as a simple and direct expression of the social group to which the author belongs (qtd. in Wacquant 34).

My analysis of the material conditions under which women writers worked intersects with readings of their interventions in the cultural production of Western American mythology, using a concept of mythology which combines Roland Barthes' theory of myth with Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Barthes defines myth, in the context of modernity, as a specific kind of language which appears to describe a particular historical event, but actually produces beliefs

about that event which have more to do with cultural fantasy than they do with the event itself. It is a metalanguage which both naturalizes and validates power relations determined within historically specific social situations. Thus, for example, nineteenth-century histories of Native-American conquest used the term 'savage' to refer to a specific historical group, but the term actually effaces the specificity of Native Americans in ways which validate Euro-American conquest, obscuring, rather than elucidating, the historical events it purports to describe. Mythological language produces cultural dominance by generating consent specifically from those who are not in power, who internalize belief systems which represent their subordinate status as natural and legitimate. The fact that consent of the dominated is involved, however, means that cultural dominance is inherently unstable. Birmingham school theorists adopted the term hegemony from theoretical work carried out by Antonio Gramsci in the 1920s to articulate cultural dominance as a provisional form of power which must always be struggled for and reproduced[8] I use the term hegemony in a similar way, but I try to situate this "struggle for possession of the sign," as specifically as possible, within the material conditions negotiated by the author, because the relation between the text and the broader culture is always mediated by the field of cultural production (Hebdige 367).

The power to produce representations of the American West is a particularly salient form of cultural power in the American setting because the American West is linked symbolically to the history and

[8]The taxonomy of myth theory derived from Gramsci and Barthes is explained by Birmingham School theorist Dick Hebdige in his essay "From Culture to Hegemony" (366-67).

identity of America as a nation, and because capitalist expansion in the United States is underwritten by the desire for an unlimited pool of exploitable resources. During the period in which a Western frontier existed as a geographic space, it was widely believed that American democracy depended upon the nation's continued Westward expansion. Unlike its European counterparts, who still labored under the restrictions of a class system, the United States had access to the resources necessary to underwrite the social equality of its citizens. The availability of these resources was signified by the frontier between the nation's borders and the wilderness. This belief in 'American exceptionalism' rationalized the contradiction between the identification of America as a democratic society, and the social reality of its class system: those who were dispossessed had only themselves to blame, because they had, in theory, the option of taking out a homestead. After the National Census of 1892 announced that the frontier had officially closed, the emphasis of this mythology shifted toward the production of revised versions of frontiering, such as industrial or imperialist expansion, technological innovation, the transformation of unproductive land into productive land, space exploration--any activity that could justify blaming social inequality upon the individual rather than the social structure (Wrobel passim).

My project does not mark off women writers from this discourse. That is, I do not assume that, by the very fact of being a woman, an author is committed to resisting this hegemony, is somehow participating in a separate field, or is unable to speak in "her own" voice. Rather, I try to articulate the conditions which made

it possible for women to take up positions as authors of Western American fiction, the reasons they might choose this mode of writing over the other choices available to them, and the various ways in which gender, race, and class inflect their writing. My selection of authors is by no means representative, but my choices do signify a strategy. I have deliberately selected authors who occupied very different positions within the field of cultural production, achieved different levels of recognition, and have been constructed differently as Western authors within the academy, in order to elucidate a concept of the Western American novel as a relational and fluctuating category.

Chapter One recovers a text which raises intriguing questions about the origins of the generic formula we now recognize as "masculine." Like Wister, Frances McElrath was an eastern writer who traveled in the West. Like Wister's *The Virginian*, her novel *The Rustler* appeared in the spring of 1902. However, unlike *The Virginian,* Frances McElrath's *The Rustler* uses the discourse of maternal feminism to draw various links between the frontier landscape and the public sphere, suggesting that frontier closure requires forms of management associated with "women's work." Like *The Virginian, The Rustler* is based on the Johnson County Rustler Wars of 1892, a crisis with roots in the ongoing tensions between large cattle companies and the local cowboy population. The similarities between these two texts with respect to setting, generic vocabulary, and plot structure, challenge the gendered boundary between men's and women's writing that often frames readings of the origins of the popular Western.

My reading of *The Rustler* is an attempt to recover the struggles and debates through which Western American myths are constructed. But because *The Rustler* did not circulate beyond its first and only edition, while *The Virginian* was a runaway bestseller, it is problematic to read *The Rustler* as evidence for a broader cultural phenomenon. Chapter Two addresses this question by accounting for the ephemeral status of *The Rustler.* Unlike McElrath, Mary Hallock Foote acquired substantial recognition as both an author and an illustrator of authentic representations of the West. To achieve this recognition, however, Foote distanced herself from popular, 'feminine' literary modes such as the maternal-feminist discourse engaged in *The Rustler.* Together, these first two chapters recover women's writing in a way which also draws links between ephemeral and 'literary' forms of women's writing about the West.

The field of the popular Western is most often associated with masculinity in criticism of Western American mythology, and is rarely considered a possible site of resistance for women writers. Through a case study of Bertha Muzzy Bower, possibly the most popular woman author of Western fiction in American literary history, Chapter Three argues that women writers were excluded from the field of the Western during the 1920's precisely because they had become active within it. At certain moments in American literary history, forms of Western American fiction were privileged for mass distribution because of their identification with nationalism. In the same way that women were not recognized as citizens of the nation until 1920, they were also excluded from the national audiences constructed through the marketing techniques of popular

fiction producers. B.M. Bower's position as an author of popular Western fiction challenged this exclusion. My readings of her work identify formal devices in Bower's fiction that are similar to those engaged by 'literary' and 'regional' women Western writers, to argue that Bower opened a window of opportunity for women writers in the mass market for Western fiction--a window closed in the 1920's by publishers and film-makers, who responded to the activity of women writers by reasserting the masculinity of the genre.

Chapter Four discusses the one and only novel produced by Salishan author Mourning Dove. *Cogewea, the Half Blood*, has been a subject of consternation to many critics of Native American literature because of editorial interference by amateur anthropologist and activist Lucillus McWhorter. Because Mourning Dove's original manuscript has never been located, we can only speculate on the extent of McWhorter's revisions, although scholars agree that they must have been considerable given the fact that available samples of Mourning Dove's unedited writing are quite different from the prevailing style in which *Cogewea* is written. I analyze the conditions under which Mourning Dove's 'ownership' of *Cogewea* became problematic, situating the text in relation to a homology between the material and cultural dispossession of Native Americans.

While these case studies do not supply an exhaustive account of the broader arena in which these women worked, they do supply a sense of the Western American novel as a relational category, the production of which is implicated in the broader struggle for the power to represent American history, culture, and nationhood. My interest in this struggle is to articulate the forms of agency which are

implied by the tendency of hegemonic Western American mythology to exclude women's voices, a hegemony internalized by the academy and reproduced in canonical literary histories of the Western American novel.

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I. The Bovine Object of Ideology: The Gender of Origins in the Popular Western

> There was once a man living on the southern range, Maverick by name, who accumulated a large herd of cattle by the simple method of branding as his own all stock which in the great general roundups of the olden days had escaped the branding-iron. . . . Maverick-branding became a recognized feature of the cattle industry. (Frances McElrath, *The Rustler,* 1902)

> It was quite common for herd owners to pay the boys from $2.50 to $5 per head for all the "mavericks" they could put the company's brand on, and "rustling for mavericks" in the spring was in order all over the range country. . . . This practice taught the cowboy to look upon the unbranded, motherless calf as common, or public property, to be gathered in by the lucky finder. (A.S. Mercer, *The Banditti of the Plains,* 1894)

> You leave other folks' cattle alone, or you take the consequences, and it was all known to Steve from the start. . . . He knew well enough the only thing that would have let him off would have been a regular jury. For the thieves have got hold of the juries in Johnson County. (Owen Wister, *The Virginian,* 1902)

i. Women Writers and Popular Westerns

Owen Wister's exemplary Western *The Virginian* (1902) suggestively displaces the very figure most central to the historical events which inspired the novel: the motherless calf, or maverick. Calves of unknown origin posed a unique problem for the cattle trade throughout the period of open-range ranching, which prevailed in Texas and the Great Plains from about 1870 until the close of the nineteenth century. During the great roundups, when ranchers

banded together to sort, count, and brand their herds, orphaned calves became objects of explosive tension because of the way in which they disrupted the discourses of class and property on the free range: cowboys hired to manage the roundups were usually ordered to turn mavericks over to their employers, but some considered these animals part of the public domain, and established their own small herds by branding mavericks as their own. Although maverick cattle constituted a relatively small proportion of industry profit, the ideological stakes were high enough to start a war. Beginning in Johnson County, Wyoming, in the spring of 1892, when two accused cattle rustlers, Nate Champion and Nick Ray, were murdered by a group of 50 vigilante stockmen, this war played out anxieties over class and property ownership in a particularly unstable and difficult-to-control social space.

The Johnson County War supplied Owen Wister with material for his paradigmatic tale of the West, *The Virginian*, a novel credited with rescuing the Western from the dissipation of the pulp magazine and making it into a respectable genre fit for the discriminating reader (Aquila 9). It has since been recognized by scholars of the genre as the foundational text of twentieth-century popular Western mythology, inspiring generations of novelists, from Zane Grey to Louis L'Amour, to reproduce Wister's paradigm in endless permutations.[1] Given that Wister had lived for a time in Johnson County and was likely familiar with the nuances of the maverick

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[1]Virtually every major discussion of the Western novel considers *The Virginian* paradigmatic in some way. For examples, see Loren D. Estleman, *The Wister Trace: Classic Novels of the American Frontier* (25); Robert Murray Davis, *Playing Cowboys: Low Culture and High Art in the Western* (3); and David B. Davis, "Ten-Gallon Hero" (19).

debate, his evasion of the maverick question in his fictionalized version of the rustler wars suggests that this debate was somehow incompatible with his own reading of the conflict.

Wister's hero, known only as The Virginian, is the foreman of a large Wyoming ranch who must break with his cowboy brethren in order to fulfill his duties to his employer. Hanging rustlers--including his best friend, Steve--is among The Virginian's more unsavory duties. Such is his loyalty to his employer, however, that The Virginian steadily climbs the ladder of ranch society. Meanwhile, his romance with refined easterner Molly Stark supplements his increasing salary with the cultural capital necessary to make him a true gentleman. At the novel's climax, The Virginian jeopardizes his social achievements by accepting an invitation from the rustler Trampas to settle their differences in a gunfight, knowing full well that Molly despises violence. But when her fiancé returns victorious, it is Molly who renounces her sentimental principles in thankful surrender to The Virginian's embrace. Marriage to Molly and a partnership in his employer's cattle business are the rewards for our hero's steadfast loyalty and unyielding principles.

The Virginian embodies Wister's ideal democratic citizen--a 'natural aristocrat' who rises to the top of the socio-economic hierarchy without posing a threat to those already at the top. In order to sustain itself, however, Wister's ideological apparatus depends upon distinguishing the cowboy hero who earns his wealth from the rustlers who steal theirs. This distinction was by no means easily achieved in Johnson County, where cattle rustling was an ambiguously defined practice, and where any cowboy who owned

cattle was vulnerable to rustling charges no matter how his herd had been acquired. Wister's fictionalized version of the rustler wars thus achieves a degree of moral clarity lacking in the historical record, where the ambiguous status of the maverick calf made cattle theft an ideological problem rather than a moral one.

Maverick cattle are significantly present in another novel of the West, also inspired by the Johnson County War, also published in the spring of 1902, and written by a woman who, like Wister, had traveled extensively in the West. Frances McElrath's *The Rustler: A Tale of Love and War in Wyoming* invokes the rustler wars as the setting for the romance between a rugged cowboy and a haughty eastern gentlewoman, assembling through this now classic plot device a host of dialectical relationships--East and West, civilization and wilderness, social and natural, aristocrat and 'commoner,' woman and man--all of which in some way speak to the 'exceptional' conditions under which American nationhood is constituted. Its divergences from Wister's paradigm are equally suggestive: McElrath's narrative takes a direction antithetical to that of *The Virginian* when her own silent and sinewy cowboy hero, rejected by his disdainful sweetheart, becomes a notorious rustler[3] To account for the fall of her hero, McElrath alludes to certain aspects of Johnson

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[2]The feminine/masculine, East/West dialectic in *The Virginian* is discussed by Christine Bold, *Selling the Wild West* (43), Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything* (42-45), Marcus Klein, *Easterns, Westerns, and Private Eyes: American Matters, 1870-1900* (129-30), and G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister* (passim).

[3] *The Rustler* is not unique in this regard. Frederick Remington's *John Ermine of the Yellowstone* (1902) also depicts the demoralization of a Western hero rejected by an upper class Eastern woman. For a discussion, see Christine Bold, *Selling the Wild West* (46-47).

County history evaded in *The Virginian*, implying a relationship between the different uses of history in the two novels, their opposing gender politics, and their divergent readings of America's exceptional status as a frontier nation.[4]

Although *The Rustler* received relatively little attention when first published in comparison to the enormous publicity secured by *The Virginian*, the novel is important with respect to contemporary scholarship about the popular Western, not simply because it poses a challenge to the assumption that the genre has emerged without the participation of women writers, but also because it illuminates how the very emergence of the 'classic' Western novel engaged citizenship debates in which gender was a key site of struggle. Implicated in the articulation of America's exceptional status as a frontier nation and, therefore, the exceptional character of its 'pioneering' citizens,[5] the cultural production of Western images during the Progressive Era was a process necessarily caught up in the struggle to define American citizenship. If *The Virginian*'s central priority is to guarantee the virility of its male hero--who rises through the ranks

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[4]Although to date very little is known about Frances McElrath, an article in *The Critic*, which includes a portrait of her, indicates that she "spent the greater part of her life in the West on cattle ranches and at army posts" and that her "father was an editor and writer"("Lounger" 8). McElrath's father may have been Thomas McElrath, partner in the publishing firm Greely & McElrath (1807-1888; "McElrath" 416-17). Apart from *The Rustler*, I have only been able to find one other published work by Frances McElrath: a short story entitled "By Advertisement" appearing in *Harper's Weekly* on August 19, 1893. In this equally intriguing story, an aging bachelor responds to an advertisement by a "young, beautiful, stylish" woman who seeks correspondence with a marriage-minded "well-to-do ranchman," only to find that Julie Raynor is actually Julian Raynor, a young hoaxter out to amuse himself by "playing himself off for a woman" (798-99).

[5]For a discussion of American exceptionalism--that is, the nineteenth-century belief that "the frontier of free or cheap land [was] the wellspring of American democracy"--see David Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism.*

to become the model American citizen--it is precisely in response to a social environment in which the gender of citizenship was vigorously contested (Tompkins 43). Given both the contingency of the gendered status of American citizenship and the stake of Western narratives in this debate, the cultural production of this mythology was a field which admitted not only women writers, but also feminist positionings.

My argument departs from recent discussions of women and the Western: Jane Tompkins has argued in *West of Everything* (1992), for example, that "when women wrote about the West, the stories they told did not look anything like what we know as the Western" (41). More recently, Norris Yates has initiated a recovery of popular Westerns by women in a volume entitled *Gender and Genre* (1995), but he uses models of recovery-- specifically those developed by Elaine Showalter, Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar-- in a way which reinscribes the assumption that the popular Western is an inherently masculine discourse in which 'authentic' female voices are manifest only in "palimpsestic" form:

> By writing from within the male camp in this "gender war" and using the double-voiced strategy, intentionally or otherwise, women authors could bore from within, still get published, and to some degree resolve the conflict between the demands of the macho Western and their feminist leanings. (4)

Yates' argument, like Tompkins', implies that the misogyny commonly associated with the popular Western is an uncontested characteristic of this 'macho' genre, which somehow disallows women

from speaking in their own voices. My findings, on the contrary, suggest that popular Westerns are produced through debate in which the place of women in the mythological West is a crucial point of contention, and that this very debate has authorized female as well as male voices.

The way in which *The Rustler* and *The Virginian* address one another at every turn indicates that both novels were engaged in a struggle over the gendered status of the archetypal American, producing diametrically opposed positions on the issue, yet clearly sharing a common generic vocabulary. While *The Virginian* has since emerged as the paradigmatic text, producing a mass market for middlebrow Western novels and exercising undeniable influence on the genre in the twentieth century, Wister's literary practice was situated within a broader cultural field also occupied by subjects who did not enjoy the status and privilege that Wister received, among them women writers who vied for literary enfranchisement. However, not all participants in the debate received equal treatment from the publishers who distributed their work. Unlike Wister, who was well-supported by his publisher, receiving funds for his Western journeys and a prestigious illustrator to accompany him, *The Rustler* was marked as an ephemeral text from the very moment of its production, receiving little attention either from its own publisher, Funk & Wagnalls, or from the broader publishing community. Its debut was announced in *Publisher's Weekly* on March 15, 1902, along with Funk & Wagnalls' other spring titles (760), but it was not singled out for special promotion. Two novels on Funk & Wagnalls' spring list, Israel Putnam's historical novel *Daniel Everton, Volunteer*

Regular and Michael Davitt's history *The Boer Flight For Freedom,* were allotted full-page advertisements in *Publisher's Weekly* respectively on May 3 and May 24, 1902 (1067, 1189). *The Rustler* was also among a list of titles publicized on May 31 as "Novels for the Vacation Outfit." The copy constructs the novel as light, ephemeral reading:

> A Story of Life Among the Cowboys.
> Every reader who delights in a tale full of dash and adventure, love, and breathless suspense will revel in this story of the adventures of a spirited Eastern girl in the recent "Rustler" uprising of outlaw cattlemen in Wyoming. (1285)

The novel received no further publicity in *Publishers' Weekly,* and no additional editions were produced. Funk & Wagnalls' advertising economy positioned the novel, then, as recreational reading, the value of which did not transcend its commodity function, and which did not fundamentally distinguish it from Funk & Wagnalls' other offerings in this category. The legacy of *The Rustler* in American literary history has thus been to fulfill the ephemeral status originally assigned by its publisher.

This chapter is an attempt to account for the fact that women like McElrath did participate in what is now almost unanimously regarded as an all-male field of cultural production. In particular, I argue that *The Rustler* and *The Virginian* can be situated within a common debate, engendered by the increasing presence of women in the public sphere. This phenomenon mobilized a very effective strategic feminist discourse, targeting specific sites of social

antagonism and discord in order to challenge the exclusion of women from American citizenship. "Social feminists" argued that the vote would enable women to 'clean up' the various socio-economic 'messes' made by men in the public sphere (Buechler 52). *The Rustler* similarly engages its feminist intervention in the production of Western American mythology by exposing one such 'mess' in the very region that was supposed to guarantee America's exceptional status as a classless society. In order to map out the terrain of this debate, it is necessary first to return to the historical materials used by Wister and McElrath to ground their novels.

ii. "The Maverick is a Motherless Calf": Class, Property, and the Rustler Wars

In 1884, the Wyoming government attempted to put an end to ongoing disputes involving maverick cattle by passing the controversial Maverick Law, giving control of calves of unknown origin to the Wyoming Stock Growers Association (WSGA), an elite society of stock-owners, many of whom were investors from the eastern states and from overseas. Under this legislation, mavericks were to be turned over to the WSGA, who would be responsible for distributing them at regular auctions.[6] Opponents of the WSGA--

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[6]Histories of the Johnson County War consulted to formulate this sketch of the maverick dispute include D.F. Baber, *The Longest Rope: The Truth About the Johnson County Cattle War;* Oscar H. Flagg, *A Review of the Cattle Business in Johnson County, Wyoming Since 1882, and the Causes that Led to the Invasion;* Jack R. Gage, *The Johnson County War Ain't a Pack of Lies: The Rustler's Side* and *The Johnson County War is a Pack of Lies: The Barons' Side;* A.S. Mercer, *The Banditti of the Plains;* and Helena Huntington Smith, *The War on Powder River.* Much of this history is conflicting, and the exact details of many key incidents are in dispute. I have found Smith's book especially helpful for sorting through this material, because hers is the only text to supply thorough documentation and more rigorous critical analysis of the social conditions underlining the dispute.

including cattle-owning cowboys and homesteaders--bitterly resented the legislation as yet another step in the monopolization of the Wyoming cattle industry by the cattle 'Lords,' an elite inner circle of wealthy aristocrats.

The Maverick Law was supposed to put to rest a problem that had existed for as long as the industry itself, but which had become particularly pressing as the cattle industry in Wyoming became more fiercely competitive. The practice of grazing cattle on the open range, although appealing to the entrepreneurial fantasy of limitless economic expansion, made the task of determining property ownership problematic. Inevitably, a few animals would escape branding at the yearly roundup, and, once separated from their mothers, their origin became impossible to determine. This unmarked property was not so much a material as a discursive problem: the orderly distribution of maverick calves required an ideological framework for determining who could legitimately own them. To many cowboys, the maverick calf was the just reward for their skill and resourcefulness. Their claims to the animals, however, were regularly challenged by the owners of large cattle companies, known locally as 'Lords' or 'Barons,' who claimed title to mavericks found on their property or roped by one of their employees. It was common practice for larger operations to offer salary bonuses to cowboys who turned mavericks over to their bosses, and to prosecute cowboys who 'mavericked' for themselves.[7] The issue, though, had as much to do with what was implied ideologically by

[7]On mavericks and the maverick dispute see Smith (27-29), Mercer (14-15) and Flagg (4-11).

the availability of such animals in the public domain as it did with their formal economic value. Cattleman Granville Stuart averred, "It was only a step from 'mavericking' to branding any calf without a brand, and from that to changing brands" (Smith 57). To define mavericks as part of the public domain and concede to their more-or-less arbitrary distribution had implications for the stability of the institution of property itself.

Contrary to popular fantasies of the West as a timeless refuge from the afflictions of modernity, then, the consolidation of huge economic power-blocs on the one hand, and the emergence of a highly vulnerable wage-earning class on the other, implicated the cattle industry in debates that were violently engaged in urban settings. Indeed, there are significant correspondences between labor disturbances in Johnson County and those in nearby Chicago, such as the Haymarket Massacre of 1886[8] and the Pullman strike of 1894.[9] The Wyoming cattle trade was not immune to the pattern of boom-and-bust economics, labor unrest, and violent class antagonism which underpinned these crises. The boom began in the late 1870s, when the industry began to attract major investors--hailing from such far-flung locations as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, England, and Scotland--who saw in open-range cattle ranching the seemingly ideal

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[8]The Haymarket massacre occurred on May 4, 1886, after police attempted to break up a Communist rally in Haymarket square. In retaliation, one of the demonstrators threw a bomb at the police, who opened fire. Seven policemen were killed, and seventy civilians were injured. See Howard Furer, ed., *Chicago: A Chronological & Documentary History 1784-1970* (89-91).

[9]Employees of the famous Pullman railroad company went on strike during the summer of 1894. Over the objections of Illinois governor John P. Altgeld, President Grover Cleveland ordered Federal troops to restore order in the city. When all was said and done, 12 people were reported killed and 515 arrested. The nationwide impact of the Pullman strike has been studied by Almont Lindsey in *The Pullman Strike*. See also Furer (95-96).

realization of laissez-faire capitalism on a corporate scale (Smith 7-14). They purchased huge herds, left them to graze on the open range, summer and winter, and reaped the profits in the spring. Publicity material such as General James S. Brisbin's *The Beef Bonanza, or How to Get Rich on the Plains* (1881) contributed to the popular belief that raising cattle on the open range amounted to a license to print money for those with enough capital to make the initial investment. This and other promotional material, used to attract investors to the cattle frontier, claimed that open-range cattle ranching delivered high dividends with little expense aside from the initial capital investment, and that the only skills it required were those that came naturally to the well-rounded businessman who enjoyed the vigorous, outdoor life--"merely a form of outdoor sport that paid dividends" (qtd. in Smith 10-11). The imaginary dimension of the industry infected even its accounting procedures: entire herds were bought and sold on the basis of the "book-count," determined through crude (and wishful) calculations meant to save the expense of actually rounding up and counting the herd. More often than not, the numbers on the books were not born out when the herds were finally tallied before going to market. Many stock-owners went bankrupt this way (Smith 13-14).

Poor management and harsh weather took their toll, profits dwindled, and in many cases labor was asked to absorb the losses. In 1886, the year of the Haymarket Massacre, Wyoming stockmen attempted to implement a significant wage cut, which was successfully resisted through a cowboy strike. Relations between cowboys and their employers deteriorated rapidly in the ensuing

years, as did the stability of the industry itself. The crushing blow was delivered when the disastrous winter of 1887 decimated herds and bankrupted ranchers, reducing community morale to an all-time low.[10]

Class struggle in Johnson County was both articulated and enacted through the discourse and practice of cattle rustling. "Men ordinarily honest," writes Johnson County historian J. Elmer Brock, "stole cattle from the big outfits and did not consider it dishonest but an act justifiable in a war of classes" (quoted in Smith 115). The WSGA drew up blacklists of cowboys barred from employment, using the term 'rustler' in its pejorative sense to label strikers and thieves as well as cowboys who ran their own small herds. Jack Flagg, among the most notorious 'rustlers' of the time, had been blacklisted by the WSGA for his part in the 1886 strike. In 1888, he and a group of other blacklisted cowboys formed the HAT brand, sealing their reputations as cattle thieves through this challenge against the WSGA monopoly (Smith 32-33). With its local newspaper advertisement appearing in brazen proximity to those of established outfits, the prosperous Hat brand signified to many that the rustlers had indeed got hold of Johnson County (Smith 114-120).

Wyoming courtrooms were bogged down with rustling cases in the late 1880s, including various charges against the HAT partners, but popular opinion weighed so heavily against larger cattle companies that most juries refused to convict rustlers, no matter how convincing the evidence (Smith 116-17).[11] When legal channels

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[10]Baber (19-24), Mercer (6-9), Flagg (1-20), Smith (30-48).
[11]On specific court cases see Smith (64-89).

failed, some stockmen apparently resorted to vigilante justice. In 1889, suspected rustlers Ella 'Cattle Kate' Watson and James Averell were hanged. Eyewitnesses named a well-known cattle 'Lord' as the leader of the lynching (Smith 121-134). In October of 1891, Nate Champion, another well-known cowboy-activist and reputed rustler, was attacked in his bed by four men, one of whom Champion identified as a detective working for the WSGA (Smith 157-58). On separate occasions in December of that same year, two men with connections to the Hat brand were murdered, both under similar circumstances (Smith 161-68). Hindsight has prompted historians of Johnson County to look upon these events as precursors to the 'war' that broke out in April of 1892, when a group of vigilante stockmen invaded Johnson County in order to exterminate every suspected rustler in the county, apparently with the blessing of Wyoming governor Amos Barber.[12]

Lurking in the immediate vicinity of this violent confrontation was the figure of the maverick calf--but for ideological rather than economic reasons. The proceeds from mavericking figured insignificantly in the income of the large cattle companies, and can hardly account for the energy spent to prevent cowboys from accessing them. Given the way in which the branded bodies of cattle functioned as representations of wealth, however, a reading of their structural place in the discourse of free-range capitalism is more

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[12]Suspicion of Barber's involvement is based an order he issued shortly before the invasion, which effectively prevented the Sheriff of Johnson County from summoning the militia to help stop the invasion. See Smith (193) and Mercer (40-45).
□

likely to account for the way in which the maverick calf was almost always implicated in property disputes between cowboys and cattle companies.

Within the discourse of property on the open range, the cow's branded body occupied the structural place of what ideology theorist Slavoj Zizek calls the "sublime object" of ideology, a term borrowed from Lacanian psychoanalysis. The sublime object is an ordinary, everyday object which finds itself occupying the place of the impossible-real object of desire. Treated as though it were "an indestructible and immutable body," the sublime object is "exempted from the effects of wear and tear," a status that "is always sustained by the guarantee of some symbolic authority" (Zizek 19). Such objects appear to transcend the insurmountable gap between signifier and signified--the gap upon which the Symbolic Order is constituted--but in fact they only mask the absence of the impossible-real object within the Symbolic. Zizek's Lacanian reading of ideology explains this principle using money as an example: "In the social effectivity of the market we . . . treat coins as if they consist 'of an immutable substance, a substance over which time has no power, and which stands in antithetic contrast to any matter found in nature'" (18). Zizek's emphasis here is on the behavioral rather than intellectual dimension of the illusion: "What [individuals] 'do not know', what they misrecognize, is the fact that in their social reality itself, in their social activity--in the act of commodity exchange--they are guided by the fetishistic illusion" (Zizek 31). Ideology, therefore, is manifest as social behaviour rather than in terms of a simple distinction between the social reality and the subject's misrecognition of that

reality. The social effect of capitalism is such that subjects behave as though money were a sublime object.

The orderly flow of capital within the free-range cattle industry depended upon all participants behaving as though cattle were born branded with the transcendental mark of their owner. As cowboy historian Blake Allmendinger has shown, the brand filled the place of the absent owner--or rather, masked the owner's absence:

> Before fencing transformed the public space of the open range into a series of privately controlled segments of land, cattlemen let their livestock graze with other ranchers' wandering herds; hence animals could easily mix and become confused with one another in promiscuous groups that roamed the unfenced frontier. Ranchers used brands to distinguish their stock from that of other cattlemen and to protect their possessions from outlaws who could rustle and sell unbranded mavericks. Ranchers invented hieroglyphic economic inscriptions, or forms of language, to inform readers that no one could take ranchers' cattle or mistake their bulls, heifers, calves, and castrated steers for other men's real estate. (4)

The discourse of private property on the free range required its subjects to treat the brand as though it embodied the transcendent, sublime presence of the owner watching over his or her property. Maverick cattle disrupted this illusion by exposing the absence masked by the brand, requiring the industry to regularly confront

the arbitrary naming which underpinned the institution of private property.

The fact that rustling convictions were rare was read by cattle companies and their supporters as evidence of a legal-judicial system controlled by rustlers, but most property disputes were grounded in the difficulty of distinguishing between theft and purchase on the open range. Individuals accused of altering or removing existing brands or of driving calves away from their mothers could always legitimate their claim by insisting that the animal in question was found a maverick (Smith 54-56). The fundamental illegibility of the brand made it possible for competing fantasies of ownership to vie for legitimacy. The social effect was not, however, a general breakdown in the institution of private property; rather, the struggle was articulated as an antagonism between two distinct classes: the wealthy cattle companies who controlled the range and most of its resources, and an alliance of cowboys, homesteaders, and small-business owners. As historian Helena Huntington Smith observes, the conflict focalized around the figure of the maverick:

> To the big stockman the maverick is a symbol of property and the property is mine, not thine. To the little stockmen who came along later, the maverick is a symbol of his own rights on the public domain. The maverick is a source of hatred and strife. The maverick is a boil on the neck of the body politic. The maverick is a motherless calf. (86)

In keeping with the class-based underpinnings of the dispute, mavericking was considered a 'problem' only when it disrupted the

subordinate status of certain groups, especially cowboys, whose expertise in managing cattle gave them an edge over their 'tenderfooted'[13] employers. Attempts to regulate the distribution of maverick cattle throughout the 1880s affected particularly the access of cowboys to mavericks. The 1884 Maverick Law required all mavericks to be turned over to the WSGA for auction, but deliberately made no provision for how the auctions were to be carried out, enabling the WSGA to exclude cowboys by demanding expensive bonds and by auctioning the animals in large lots that no cowboy could afford (Smith 86-87).

Rustling became a crisis in Wyoming in the years following this particular piece of legislation: Cowboys refused to turn mavericks over for auction and were branded rustlers; others deliberately plagiarized cattle from large stock companies in retaliation against their monopoly. Juries increasingly preferred the claims of the 'little stockmen' over those of the cattle 'Barons.' Histories of the Johnson County War tend to dwell on the difficulty of distinguishing the real rustlers from the honest cowboys, and attempt to settle the vexed question of which 'side' of the dispute stood on the moral highground.[14] Such questions are unanswerable because the conflict was in fact engendered by a structural fracture in the discourse of property itself. Maverick legislation only served to call attention to the arbitrary naming which underpinned the institution of property,

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[13]A term used in much Western American literature to describe newcomers to the West, particularly those of genteel, urban background.

[14]An especially intriguing example of this tendency in Johnson County historiography is Jack R. Gage's *The Johnson County War Ain't a Pack of Lies: The Rustler's Side* and *The Johnson County War is A Pack of Lies: The Barons' Side*. Both of these titles are bound together, back-to-back, in the same volume.

infecting virtually every property dispute with the maverick's scandalous ambiguity.

The crisis exploded in violence when, after months of planning and preparation, a large group of wealthy ranchers, frustrated by the difficulty of securing rustling convictions, decided to take the law into their own hands. On April 6, 1892, at 4:00 a.m., a party of 52 men, including hired mercenaries, eastern 'tenderfoots' who had come to help defend their western interests (and no doubt to indulge their heroic fantasies), local cattlemen, and two journalists, arrived via train in Casper, Wyoming. On Saturday, April 9, the 'invaders' surrounded the ranchhouse where Nate Champion and Nick Ray were known to be staying. Both men were well-known members of the 'rustlers' side', but Champion was a particularly desirable target: A blacklisted cowboy who now ran his own herd of allegedly rustled cattle, Champion had become a local celebrity because of his open defiance of Johnson County's most powerful cattlemen (Smith 64-89). At dawn, an unsuspecting Ray emerged from the ranchhouse and was shot and mortally wounded. Champion managed to drag him back to safety, and the two remained under siege for several hours, with Champion firing at every opportunity, until the impatient invaders finally forced him out by setting fire to the ranchhouse. "In his sock feet he burst out on a dead run. There are all kinds of reports about how many bullet holes were in his body" (Gage 58).

The invasion went no further, thanks to the timely arrival of Jack Flagg, who stumbled upon the scene en route to, of all places, a Democratic state convention in Douglas, Wyoming. Flagg had no difficulty mobilizing more than enough armed men to stop the

invaders, who were eventually forced to retreat to a ranchhouse just outside the town of Buffalo, remaining under siege for several days while a huge and menacing crowd gathered around their precarious refuge. Friends of the invaders, meanwhile, were for a time unable to telegraph for help because the invaders themselves had cut the telegraph lines.

Although reluctant to deliver his allies into the hands of the authorities, Wyoming Governor Amos Barber had no choice but to telegraph President Benjamin Harrison for military assistance, which he was finally able to do on Tuesday, April 12, 1892.[15] Federal troops arrived the following day and took custody of the invaders, who were subsequently held in various facilities until, in August of 1892, they were released on bail (Smith 263-64). When, after numerous delays, the invaders were finally brought to trial in January of 1893, every single case was dismissed because of legal technicalities --an outcome facilitated, no doubt, by the invaders' many influential supporters (Smith 241-42, 281-82).

iii. The Rustler, the Rancher, his Calf and her Mother: Domestic Politics and Frances McElrath's Western Heroine.

Owen Wister's interest in the Johnson County War is no surprise given his immediate involvement with many of its key players, places, and events. His first western journey took him to Wyoming in 1885, one year after the Maverick law was passed. His

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[15]Barber's telegraph did not mention the murders of Champion and Ray or the premeditated invasion, again suggesting that Barber had been involved in the plot and was now protecting his colleagues. The telegraph correspondence between Barber, the President, and the Military has been collected by George D. Heald, ed., *Wyoming Flames of '92: Official Communications During the Johnson County Cattle War.*

host in Wyoming was Major Frank Wolcott, manager of the VR ranch, and a key participant in the invasion![16] And of course, Wister was part of a famous 'inner circle' of men - also including Roosevelt, Remington, and Turner- who collectively orchestrated a number of re-orientations in the meanings and politics of hegemonic frontier discourse during the late-nineteenth century![17] Clearly, the Johnson County war was of interest to Wister not only because of his personal connections to the region, but also because industrial expansion and class conflict in the West spoke to his interest in articulating the national content of Western American culture and history.

But Wister was not alone in recognizing the implications of the Johnson County War with respect to the national cultural imaginary. In the spring of 1902, Frances McElrath's *The Rustler* was published--a 'coincidence' made all the more intriguing because of the implied relationship between the two novels: so closely do they resemble each other, some critics have commented, that "the two authors of the two books could have been accused of collaboration" (Frantz & Choate 160). *The Rustler* raises questions about the relationship between gender and genre with respect to the emergence of the 'classic' Western, tying these questions to issues of its politics and its use of history. In particular, the novel plots gender and the politics of the Rustler Wars as inextricably linked discourses. Representing rustling as a form of class antagonism constituted by the indeterminate status of the maverick calf, McElrath makes explicit the authorizing function of the maverick's (absent) mother.

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[16]Wolcott is mentioned in Wister's diary of his first western trip. See Fanny Kemble Wister, ed., *Owen Wister Out West: His Journals and Letters* (34, 174).
[17]White (passim), and Bold (Selling 37-52).

Because this novel is neither widely read nor readily available, some detailed plot description is useful here. In the opening chapter of *The Rustler*, the heroine, Hazel, refuses an offer of marriage from English ranch owner Horace Carew. "You do wrong in thinking that in settling down you would be giving up your entire freedom," he tells her in the novel's opening line. While Horace is absorbed in his proposal, Hazel "[chances] to look over the edge of the cut-bank along which her horse was slowly walking and [sees] Jim [the foreman of the ranch belonging to Hazel's cousin]. . . . Their eyes met, and that was the beginning of all things" (9-10). Although Hazel is a regular guest at the great houses of Newport, the recent death of her father, whose "affairs" are in some disarray, has forced her to economize by staying at the Wyoming ranch until it can be discovered whether she has been left "an heiress or a pauper" (51). As in *The Virginian*, a love relationship evolves between the silent, virile cowboy (a self-proclaimed woman-hater) and the well-bred lady tenderfoot, but with highly suggestive differences in outcome.

Jim is at first indifferent to Hazel, who considers Jim beneath her but nevertheless expects him to admire her refined looks and manners. When he does not, Hazel hatches a plan "to make Jim know that I've been on the ranch before I leave it" (49). To this end, "Hazel stoops to conquer" (57), ridding herself of her expensive dress and demeanor and seducing Jim through various performances which make her appear humble and vulnerable. Her strategy works too well: for Jim, "Miss Clifford rich and cared for would have been somebody altogether outside the pale of possibility. But the simple young woman earning a scanty subsistence by teaching--poor, proud,

and alone--was one whom he dared offer his protecting arm to support" (113). But Hazel takes no pleasure in her triumph. Sensing the shift in Jim's feelings for her, Hazel is overcome with panic. "The strong spirit of the man looked out at her for once and she quailed before it . . . . In her sudden revulsion of feeling she hated the vulgar and trivial impulse that had prompted her all winter. She was sanely herself again" (106-8).

Unfortunately, Hazel's awakening comes too late for Jim, who, devastated and disillusioned by her rejection, becomes the most notorious rustler in the county. Over a period of time he becomes the leader of a highly organized gang of rustlers whose 'ROB' brand flaunts both their crimes and their imperviousness to the law. A vigilante army, led by Hazel's spurned suitor Horace Carew, is organized to stop Jim's gang. The two plots converge when Jim abducts Hazel and takes her to his rustlers' hideout in an attempt to force Hazel to acknowledge his wealth and power.

While Hazel is in captivity, the rustler war breaks out in a way which closely follows the historical record of Johnson County; McElrath's romantic plot is intertwined with these events. A secondary romance also develops when Horace Carew conducts a covert investigation of local rustler activity. Suspecting the involvement of a man named Nathan Grimes, Carew cultivates a relationship with Grimes' adopted daughter, suggestively named Mavvy (short for Maverick), in order to learn details about the rustlers. Mavvy, who falls in love with Carew, learns of a plot by the rustlers to kill him and risks her life to prevent the murder: she first warns Carew of the danger and then, by disguising herself as Carew,

takes a bullet meant for him. Mavvy narrowly survives; meanwhile, Horace and his "gentlemen army" kill Nathan Grimes and Nick Lowry, clearly modeled after Nate Champion and Nick Ray, after a prolonged siege at their cabin. Jim stumbles upon the spectacle, escapes under gunfire, and rides through the county warning its inhabitants of the invasion--a deed carried out in Johnson County by Jack Flagg. McElrath closes the rustler war in a way that is similarly consistent with the historical record: the vigilantes are arrested by the local law enforcement with the assistance of enraged citizens "not knowing that practically the stockmen's interests were their own" (248). Later, "through the exertion of considerable money and outside influence, the stockmen were let out of jail on heavy bail with the understanding that the case would never after be brought to trial, and the forty gentlemen, with the charge of murder still against them, were set at liberty" (258).

Jim comes through the crisis, his rustling operation for the most part unscathed, and focuses his attention on flaunting his power and wealth before Hazel's captive gaze. Hazel is unimpressed by Jim, but is deeply moved by the hard life of the rustlers, especially their children, who are uneducated, in poor health, and in need of moral guidance. Among these children is Tips, who had been adopted by Jim after his parents were killed in an Indian raid. When Tips dies of a fever epidemic that has swept the rustler colony, Hazel blames herself for exposing Tips to the unhealthy environment of the rustlers' hideaway. She does her penance by taking responsibility for the welfare of the rustler families, teaching the children to read and their mothers how to see to the children's moral and physical well-

being. Jim is also stirred by the death of Tips, but his repentance comes too late; while he is busy returning stolen cattle to their appropriate ranges, he is shot and fatally wounded by an unseen assailant. He manages to make his way back to the rustlers' hideout, where he spends his last days under Hazel's care. Jim's death marks the end of the reign of the rustlers, and helps determine Hazel's decision to continue her work with the former rustlers' families rather than marry Horace. That role is reserved for Mavvy, who finally manages to win Horace over with her self-sacrificing devotion.

Like *The Virginian*, *The Rustler* constructs the East/West split through its composition of gender relations and marriage. It negotiates a very different resolution, however, on behalf of its heroine, who manages to evade successfully the marriage that looms over her in the novel's opening paragraph. This evasion, moreover, is the novel's central project, and is explicitly tied to McElrath's reading of the rustler war as an event which deconstructs the economics of both class and gender. Whereas *The Virginian* articulates the clear distinction between good and evil (and erases the class content) in the rustler wars by evading the maverick issue, McElrath explains the nuances of the debate in the chapter following Jim's turn to rustling. She represents the rustler wars as a phase of class antagonism marking the transition from "baronial conditions" to a more "commercial condition. . . . The cowpuncher was beginning to feel dissatisfied with the mere romance of his occupation, and was whispering to himself that the profits on the range were rather more one-sided than need be" (164). The maverick, according to McElrath, was pivotal in this "evolution of the rancher." In considerable detail,

McElrath explains that "Maverick-branding became a recognized feature of the cattle industry" (165), eventually encouraging the cowboy to compete with his employer: "If his employer could make thirty or forty dollars out of the maverick which he found and branded, the cowpuncher argued, why should not he himself have that large profit instead of the paltry sum paid him?" (167) This in turn leads to "quasi-honest" branding practices. "Then the cowpuncher who had used to go out and 'rustle' mavericks for his employer became on his own account a 'rustler' "(167).

McElrath's account of mavericking makes clear how the uncertain status of mavericks exposes the discourse of property to alternative readings, which are manifest by means of the cowboys' subversive labor. This is precisely what *The Virginian*'s moralized version of class struggle, founded upon the transcendental signification of private property, disallows. The latter text recuperates the ideological fantasy of Wister's "natural aristocracy"--which rationalizes his 'democratic' class system--through its depiction of The Virginian's social mobility, founded upon his 'naturally' conceived aristocratic status. The transcendental signification of property supplies the linchpin of this narrative: the salient difference between The Virginian and his former friend, the rustler Steve, is that Steve steals cattle and The Virginian does not. This construction rewrites the economic distinction between the cowboy and his employer as a moral distinction between the cowboy and the rustler in order to represent a sameness of interest between two competing classes: The Virginian is both a cowboy and an aristocrat and therefore embodies the fantasy of unequal equality.

The marriage narrative is crucial to the signification of property and class in both novels. Historian Nancy F. Cott supplies a model for reading these marriage plots:

> The differentiation of public from private [in the late-nineteenth century] was incomprehensible without marriage, which created couples who made homes and families that amassed and transmitted property. Because marriage bears a formative relation to both private property and domestic intimacy, it not only inhabits but undergirds the domain of privacy. (110)

The cultural work of marriage in constructing the public/private distinction meant that it was read as both a matter of public and private interest (Cott passim). Because the intelligibility of the boundary was maintained through the denial of citizenship to women and their containment within the private sphere, the signification of private property and the social status of women were inextricably linked. Women political activists, therefore, enjoyed more cultural legitimacy when advocating on behalf of the moral and economic stability of the family; they figured prominently, for example, in efforts to ban the sale of alcohol because of its impact on the family, particularly the women and children who were victimized by alcohol-related violence and unemployment. Women's Abolitionist groups, similarly, highlighted those aspects of slavery which corrupted the institution of the family: the sale of children from their mothers; the sexual domination of enslaved women by their masters; and the corruption of slave-owning families caused by the

master's infidelity.[18] Woman's political activism met with far more resistance when it advocated empowering women as an end in itself, rather than as an extension of women's domestic duty![19]

In both *The Virginian* and *The Rustler*, the marriageability of male heroes denotes their social status, which in turn formulates a particular epistemology of social organization: Molly Stark signifies the power and status to which The Virginian is 'naturally' entitled because of his inherent physical and moral virtues. To subordinate herself to him, as she finally does on the eve of their marriage, is to signify The Virginian's 'natural' entitlement to the status she represents. On the other hand, Hazel's rejection of Jim marks his "awakening" from this ideological fantasy: he too possesses all of the right virtues, and is seduced by Hazel into believing that he can therefore aspire to a higher status; however, the novel stops short of representing a social reality in which this dream can be realized. Jim is thus stunned by "the absurdity of his thinking for a moment that a refined lady would love him--and marry him--and that he should have children of his own and a home, and live a respected man in some good community" (137).

These two novels, then, are in agreement with respect to the national orientation of their Western narratives, and to their engagement with an entire apparatus of assumptions about class, gender, and social organization. The crucial difference between them has to do with their arrangement of the gender hierarchy and its link to a way of processing certain contradictions inhering in American

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[18]See Karen Sanchez-Eppler, "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition."

[19]Baker (90-93), Buechler (51-53), Dubois (40-52), and Riley (47).

democratic ideology: In *The Virginian*, Wister argues that democracy is a social reality despite the stratification of American society because the latter is the effect of a 'natural' hierarchy formed through a social-Darwinian process of struggle. *The Rustler* bases its feminist strategy on a refusal of this rationalization, arguing that class stratification and antagonism are socially constituted processes which undermine the achievement of real democracy--that is, democracy at the level of social reality (equal equality) rather than ideological fantasy (unequal equality)[20]

The distinction between social reality and ideological fantasy is articulated through the Jim/Hazel courtship: Hazel's pretense of making herself available to Jim is the 'dream' while her return to her former self marks Jim's 'awakening.' The novel endorses Jim's aspirations--they are a sign that he has, by cultivating the capacity to recognize Hazel's attractions, "simply come to his own, to his better self" (111). The problem is that he does not yet inhabit a social reality in which these dreams can be realized. Hence Hazel ends her performance upon recognizing that she is not prepared to become, in her own social reality, the poor, proud governess Jim had fallen in love with:

> The play was at an end. The sudden revelation of the soul of the man had been too much for Hazel. It had stirred her into a deeper comprehension of him and of what she

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[20]McElrath's version of equality is, of course, invested in ideological fantasies of its own. Hazel's independence is authorized on the basis of Jim's failed 'revolution' on the one hand, and Mavvy's marriage to Horace on the other. A similar politics was engaged by middle class women reformers and suffragists, who tended in their paternalism to infantalize the working-class and to exclude African-American and immigrant women from active participation in their organizations (DuBois 93, 125; Buechler 54-58).

had been doing, and she dropped the role she had assumed . . . . She was sanely herself again. (108)

The narrative does not simply return to the status quo (a Hazel/Horace marriage), however, because it is the marriage myth which is itself at stake: as the crucial naturalized social relation--differentiating classes on the basis of female desire--the marriage myth must be deconstructed in order to make democracy a social reality. This procedure is entwined with the novel's feminist project. The maverick dispute--specifically the way in which the ambiguous status of the maverick calf disrupts the articulation of private property--supplies the basis for generating the more radical feminism embraced by Hazel once the limitations of her earlier performance are exposed. A clear homology is drawn, first of all, between the status of women in classic patriarchy and the status of calves as property. Most explicitly, the link is embodied by the character of Mavvy, whose symbolic name invokes a reading of gender and property as mutually implicating discourses. Mavvy is introduced in a chapter which follows directly Hazel's successful evasion of advances from both Jim and Horace. Seeking distraction from Hazel's rebuffs, the dejected Horace attends a nearby ball, where, during an illustrative square dance, the (male) dancers are instructed to "lock horns with your own heifers, and rassle 'em to their places" and to "corral the fillies, rope your own, and back to your claim with her!" (144). Whereas Hazel has just escaped the marriage 'roundup,' the less fortunate orphan Mavvy is brought to the dance, apparently to be prostituted by her adoptive father, who forces her to accept the crude advances of another rustler. She is

rescued by Horace, who is glad for the opportunity to restore to health his recently bruised masculinity.

Just as the ambiguous status of the maverick upsets the symbolic economy through which private property is articulated, so it also raises questions about the status of women who, within the marriage market, are treated just like cattle. To recognize the status of women/property as the effect of a symbolic economy is one step towards upsetting the apparatus of social relations through which this status is determined. Hence McElrath explores the enabling potential of the women/cattle analogy as well as its more disturbing implications. On the one hand, for example, Hazel's situation is as precariously contingent as that of the calf whose brand can easily be altered or plagiarized: if her social identity is constituted through symbolic processes, then what is there to distinguish her from the destitute Mavvy, especially given Hazel's eroding income? The possibility of marriage to Jim is thus "an impending avalanche" threatening to subsume Hazel's identity. But when Hazel 'awakens' to the social reality of her place in the marriage market, she is able to behave in a way which effects substantive changes to her social situation. By refusing marriage, she disrupts the gender economy which commodifies women in order to constitute the fundamental privilege of citizenship--the right to own property--as masculine.

Hazel 'awakens' to the social reality of the marriage economy after her seduction generates an unanticipated outcome. Her initial plan is simply to make herself desirable in an economy in which her highly refined manners, dress, and accomplishments are not valuable. Jim, the only remotely eligible bachelor in the novel, is

initially "as insensible to her charms as a post" (45). Hazel decides that because Jim is "too independent to allow himself to be taken up by people socially," it is up to her to go, like Mohammed, to the mountain (64). Her plan, however, is based on a fundamental misrecognition of her status within the marriage market. Her adaptability, we are told, is "true to [Hazel's American] breeding and nationality," which gives her the "capacity of "fitting in" in any environment" (60). Accordingly, she adapts to the local marriage economy, inspiring Jim to dream of what a life with her could mean: "I might get to be a partner some day," he muses. "With Hazel beside him he could strive for any glory" (114). However noble these aspirations may be, they are fundamentally anti-democratic because they merely replace one form of inequality (based on class) with another (based on gender). Hazel is repulsed by Jim precisely because his awakened desire exposes her transformation as nothing more than crude adaptation to an economy in which her fundamental status as marital property remains unchanged.

On the basis of this rupture between two ideological fantasies--both of which are at some level consistent with democratic ideology, but neither of which constitutes democracy as a social reality--*The Rustler* formulates a more radical feminist position, advanced as a step towards realizing democracy as social practice. McElrath argues that the subordination of the subject to the arbitrary forces of the market economy is effected specifically by the mother's disengaged authority: if the calf's absent mother undermines its symbolically produced status as private property, then it is possible to posit a feminine alternative to the symbolic violence of the branding iron.

Jim's turn to rustling is the symptom of social trauma originating specifically in objectification of women and the consequential neutralization of their moral authority as mothers. Immersed entirely in the world of work, Jim and his adoptive son Tips inhabit a motherless, misogynist landscape: "'Women,' observed Tips . . . 'may be all very well in their place, but their place ain't on the range nor anywheres near it!'" (21). The role of Tips' mother in this landscape has fallen to Jim: 'Can't see what a feller'd want of a mother when he'd got Jim,' Tips belligerently informs Hazel (27). Jim is himself the product of a motherless, dysfunctional, and impoverished home: his father was an outlaw and his mother 'was always too hard-worked' to have time for him (75).

Having inscribed Jim's fall in terms of a seduction plot which exposes both the myth of the classless society and the commodification of women within marriage, the narrative treats the ensuing trauma by authorizing the mother outside of marriage, where her power is uncompromised by commodification. Still captive at the rustlers' hideaway, Hazel pays for her 'vulgar' behavior--which reduces the maternal to the level of ideological fantasy--by enacting the maternal at the level of her social behavior. "She had set one discordant note jarring through the world; now she wanted to atone by bringing others into harmony" (325). She opens a school for the rustler children, tends to the sick, and advises the rustlers' wives on domestic matters. The ROB brand has by this time come to dominate the local cattle industry, but Hazel's activities undermine the harm done by Jim's unscrupulous business practices: "her gentle measures were designed to frustrate the very work he was carrying

on. He had brought her to the camp to witness with her own eyes his supremacy, and instead of bowing before it like the rest, she had quietly gone to work to undermine his power" (341). In her new role as a prototypical social worker, Hazel's mothering repairs the trauma Jim had experienced when his earlier fantasies had been shattered. At first seduced by Hazel and the democratic fantasy she performs in order to mislead him, Jim is now redeemed by the example of her newly realized maternal authority:

> Witness the little weeping child beneath the mesquite bush vowing to bear an honest name. Witness his years of faithful labor as foreman of the K cattle company and the first worthiness of his love for Hazel. It had sent him widely astray, that love, but it had come from an intrinsically true source and it had finally brought him back to the right. (353)

Hazel's domestic feminism places *The Rustler* in the tradition of feminist discourse closely associated with the progressive reform movement of the late-nineteenth century. Feminist reformers argued that, with respect to issues such as poverty, disease, unemployment, crime, and exploitation, 'cleaning up' the Republic was the task for which women were best qualified because their moral authority supplied an antidote to the corruptive impulses of unbridled individualism, associated with male domination in business and politics (Buechler 54-55). The disappearing frontier was also an occasion for publicly authorizing the domestic woman because the growth of various forms of social antagonism and discord was widely attributed to the disappearance of the Western 'safety valve,'

announced in the census of 1890. Without frontier land reserves, there were not the resources available to guarantee the social reality of democracy in America;[21] American democracy, consequently, had to be reinvented in a way that addressed the now undeniable reality of scarcity (Wrobel 27-52). The matrix of approaches to this issue cut across the political spectrum, from the emphasis on rational management of populations and resources to the development of imperialist policies--such as those embodied in Roosevelt's Rough Riders--which extended the American frontier beyond national boundaries by constructing other nations as frontiers ripe for 'civilization.' *The Virginian* too can be situated within this vector of "frontier anxiety."[22] In contrast to the rugged individualism privileged by frontier imperialism, feminist reformers situated their approach domestically: they fixated on specific social effects of scarcity--poverty, disease, unemployment, child labor--figuring these issues as domestic ones best handled by the 'experts' in domestic matters--women who, in the course of home management, dealt with the problem of scarcity on an everyday basis.[23]

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[21]It is important to distinguish between the ideological implications of frontier land reserves and its material effects. It was the perception that land was available to all, and not the realization of its distribution, that made all the difference, as journalist Charles Nordhoff observed in 1875: "it is plain that the knowledge that any one may [take up land in the public domain] makes those who do not more contented with their lot, which they thus feel to be one of choice and not of compulsion" (qtd. in Wrobel 10). Indeed, the entire discourse of frontier exceptionalism depended upon repressing the very antidemocratic way in which aboriginal people were displaced in order to make the frontier 'available' for settlement.

[22]On the relationship between frontier anxiety and imperialism, see Wrobel (53-68); Christine Bold, "The Rough Riders at Home and Abroad: Cody, Roosevelt, Remington and the Imperialist Hero; and Amy Kaplan, "Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890's" (682-84).

[23]Baker (85-110), Schneider and Schneider (93-98), Riley (37-39).

It is along these lines that *The Rustler* authorizes a heroine who reads as a direct challenge to Wister's rugged frontiersman--a challenge issued from well within the generic boundaries of what we know as the Western. McElrath's representation of the maverick dispute, specifically its ideological implications vis à vis the rustler wars, not only figures the West as a site of scarcity and class struggle,[24] but also engages with the way in which ideology both constitutes and misrepresents social relationships. This valence of the novel, together with its emphasis on how social antagonism registers a need for female authority, invokes an apparatus of discourses which comfortably underwrites the construction of McElrath's frontier heroine. Not only does Western experience constitute Hazel as an independent, 'American' citizen, but the very engagement of her moral authority repairs the trauma entailed by scarcity on the one hand, and lawless individualism on the other, embodying the democratizing force of the frontier in the figure of the maternal woman rather than the rugged frontiersman. When, at the end of the novel, Hazel announces her plan to remain unmarried so that she can see to the upbringing of the (now reformed) rustlers' children, the novel projects a future in which democracy--formerly an ideological fantasy responsible for Jim's misrecognition of his material status, his resulting disillusionment, and his criminal turn--is reinvented as social reality through the construction and intervention of the maternal frontier heroine.

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[24]This position was not at all unique at the time. Even before 1890, conservationists had vociferously argued that the capacity of the frontier to underwrite American democracy was compromised by the unscrupulous consumption of its resources, and, moreover, that the unfair distribution of Western land only intensified old economic disparities (Wrobel 42-47).

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II. Literary Domesticity, Aesthetic Politics, and Mary Hallock Foote's *The Led-Horse Claim.*

i. McElrath, Foote, and the Politics of Ephemera

My claim that women's literary traditions have had a determining influence upon the so-called 'classic' Western formula draws from existing feminist research on other late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century literary movements. Suzanne Clark's *Sentimental Modernism,* for example, asserts that "Modernism reversed the increasing influence of women's writing, discrediting the literary past and especially . . . sentimental history" (1). Western fiction at the turn of the century responded to women's culture in similar ways, particularly by more clearly defining the antithesis between "women's" and "Western" culture. This opposition did not so much reflect existing cultural categories as it did respond to the fact that these categories were eroding, making it possible, as an example, for Frances McElrath to imagine the frontier as a public space which, like the public sphere, required female intervention. As discussed in the previous chapter, the ways in which *The Virginian* and *The Rustler* seem to speak directly to each other registers this broader struggle to redefine "women's place" in the nation, played out in this instance on the symbolic terrain of the American frontier.

It would be inaccurate, however, to read certain texts as simple and direct evidence for broader cultural developments without also considering the very complex conditions mediating their production, distribution, and value as cultural capital. Frances McElrath's domestic-feminist heroine supplies a compelling foil to

Owen Wister's masterful hero, particularly because the female love interest in *The Virginian* is depicted as a feminist herself--but what do we make of the ephemeral status of the text, produced in only one edition? This question is a particularly vexing one because the very conditions which made certain texts ephemeral also determine the value of the relevant archival material--most of which has been discarded precisely because McElrath never achieved the stature that would have made it 'worth keeping.' Although popular ephemeral fiction is a more respectable academic research area than ever before, the analysis of sub-literary material is usually defended on the basis of the cultural relevance implied by popularity itself. In the early 1980's, for example, Janice Radway, Tania Modleski, and Jane Tompkins valorized their research of 'sub-literary' texts on the basis of the enduring popularity of certain generic forms[1]. "Their enormous and continuing popularity," Modleski assumes, "suggests that [Harlequin Romances] speak to very real problems and tensions in women's lives" (14). Radway advises us not to assume that "generic popularity must be a simple and direct result of ideological shifts in the surrounding culture;" nevertheless, the popularity of the romance clearly constitutes the implied value of her research (19). Given its narrow sphere of influence as a text that did not circulate beyond its modest first edition, what exactly can we assume that *The Rustler* is evidence for?

Certain aspects of the considerably more well-documented career of Mary Hallock Foote account for the ephemeral status of *The*

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[1]Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women*; Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*; Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs.*

Rustler, while also shedding light on the conditions under which Foote claimed a position as a "literary" author. Both McElrath and Foote wrote during a period in which the status of literary domesticity in the new aesthetic hierarchies of the late-nineteenth century was in decline; but unlike McElrath, who produced her domestic-feminist Western at the expense of the literary value her work might acquire, Mary Hallock Foote claimed a position as a *literary* woman by distancing her work from domesticity.

The relation between these two authors implies an aesthetic politics which undermined the value of cultural expressions associated with feminized forms of power in late-nineteenth century American society. Throughout the nineteenth century, domestic feminism valorized women's participation in the public sphere by extending the application of female moral authority beyond domestic boundaries: hence, women tended to become politicized through their involvement with various moral reform movements, such as Abolition and Temperance. Harriet Beecher Stowe's tremendously popular abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* credited with fueling the Civil War and putting an end to slavery in America, encodes literary domesticity[2] and domestic feminism as intersecting phenomena underwriting women's cultural and political authority in the nineteenth century. The decline of literary domesticity as a valid mode of literary production coincides with the emergence of American feminism as an independent movement, and can be read as a form of backlash against the cultural and political authority

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[2]For a history of literary domesticity as a movement, see Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public State: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America.*

domestic feminists had acquired. This chapter will situate Foote's career in this context, arguing that the ways in which Foote encoded domesticity in her early fiction are implicated in the production of her status as a 'literary' woman. I will focus in particular on Foote's first novel, *The Led-Horse Claim,* not because I consider this text Foote's best or most important work, but because it marks the moment at which Foote made the transition from author of occasional sketches and short fiction to established novelist. The novel is therefore particularly instructive for shedding light on how Foote's position as a 'literary' woman was constructed.

ii. Foote's Career: An Overview

Although not a well-known writer today, Mary Hallock Foote was highly regarded, especially in the 1880's and 1890's, as a Western illustrator and author of quality 'local color' fiction. She was born in 1847 to a middle-class, rural Quaker family in Milton, New York. Trained at the Cooper Institute School of Design for Woman in New York City, Foote had already begun her career as an illustrator when she married mining engineer Arthur Foote and emigrated West in 1876. Little did Foote expect that she would not find herself living in a permanent home until 1895. In the interim, Foote lived in California (New Almaden and Santa Cruz); Leadville, Colorado; and Boise, Idaho. In each location, the Foote family's attempt to establish a permanent home was aborted, either because Arthur's position was terminated, or because one of his own engineering projects had failed. The most ambitious of these was a massive irrigation project undertaken in Boise, Idaho in 1884. Although the project eventually

failed and nearly bankrupted the family, Arthur's plans for it supplied the foundation for the present irrigation system in the state of Idaho. The nature of his work was such that Mary was compelled to live apart from Arthur for extended periods, in boarding houses, with friends, or with her family in Milton. Throughout this period, she also coped with childbirth, miscarriages, loneliness, chronic insomnia, and financial anxiety.[3]

In 1878 Foote published the first of many sketches and short stories appearing regularly in what were then referred to as the "quality" magazines. These included *Century Magazine* and *The Atlantic,* two firmly established, middle-class, national publications. Hard cover editions of Foote's twelve novels and four short story collections were published by the equally respectable Boston firm Houghton Mifflin. Contributing stories and sketches on a regular basis, Foote was to *Century Magazine* what Wister was to *Harper's:* an eastern 'scout' deployed by a "quality" magazine to explore the American West on behalf of its genteel eastern editors and readers. By reputation, she was soon associated with the nation's leading Western authors: Owen Wister, Bret Harte, and Hamlin Garland (Etulain 145). An equally skillful illustrator, Foote was commissioned by *Century* to produce a major series of Western drawings accompanied by prose sketches, which appeared in 1888 and 1889 under the title "Pictures from the Far West." Like Owen Wister, Foote derived literary capital from a combination of Western experience

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[3]My biographical information is compiled from Lee Ann Johnson, *Mary Hallock Foote* ; James H. Maguire, *Mary Hallock Foote* ; and Rodman W. Paul's introduction to *A Victorian Gentlewoman in the Far West: The Reminiscences of Mary Hallock Foote.*

and literary competency. Both authors were associated with regionalism, but their region of specialization was identified with America-as-nation in a way that other literary regions--such as Bret Harte's California, Mary Murfree's Tennessee, or Sarah Orne Jewett's New England--were not. Both considered themselves aspiring realists, thereby signifying certain 'literary' aspirations as articulated by prominent cultural authorities such as William Dean Howells, Richard Watson Gilder, and Henry James.

Foote's publishing history is characterized by two distinct phases. Before 1900, her main markets were *Century Magazine,* which published most of her 'quality' adult fiction including short stories and serialized novels, and the children's magazine *St. Nicholas.* Foote's first piece of 'serious' Western fiction was a short story entitled "In Exile," which she wrote in 1877 and 1878 with encouragement from *Century* editor Richard Gilder, whose wife Helena was Foote's closest friend. To "protect" herself, in Foote's words, from "self-deception and the perhaps too flattering encouragement of friends," Foote submitted the story to William Dean Howells at *The Atlantic* (*Victorian* 137), rather than to her "friends" at *Century.* It was accepted, but did not appear until 1881. In the meantime, Richard Gilder made Foote promise to give *Century* first refusal of all future manuscripts.

Because it was the title piece in Foote's first short story collection, and because it established certain recurring themes in Foote's work, "In Exile" remains one of Foote's most well-known works of short fiction. In this bleak tale set in a California mining camp, a young school teacher falls in love with a local mining

engineer. Because "a mining camp was not place for a nice girl, with no acknowledged masculine protector," the female protagonist had to "be left entirely alone, or [be] exposed to the gossip of the camp." This, her beloved "knew very well . . . and so he kept away" (30). Foote did not originally intend to unite the lovers, but did so after Howells complained that the story was "too wantonly sad" (qtd. in Johnson 33). Subsequent short stories, as well as Foote's first novel, *The Led-Horse Claim* (1882), also deal with love relationships strained by difficult circumstances: *The Led-Horse Claim* depicts a doomed love affair between two people from opposite factions of a bitter claim dispute. Again, editorial intervention saw to it that Foote ended the novel with a 'happy' marriage. In the short story "A Cloud on the Mountain" (1885), a young girl dies to save the life of the engineer she idolizes. Although a later story, "The Rapture of Hetty" (1891), ends differently--its heroine disappears into the night with her lover after her family forbids her from seeing him--it is similarly 'tragic' insofar as the heroine's disappearance supplies the only escape from her confining situation.

In her early fiction, Foote drew upon the disparate conventions of romance[4] regionalism, and realism. She was known in particular for her emphasis upon detailed and accurate depictions of life in the Western mining camps. Engineers and miners sometimes wrote to her expressing their amazement that a woman could depict their profession with such technical accuracy and detail (Paul 43). Drawing upon her immediate experience in the mining and irrigation

[4]I am using the term "romance" in the way that it was popularly understood in the late-nineteenth century--as a literary mode associated with adventure, exotic locations or periods, and idealized love-relationships.

industries which employed her husband as an engineer, Foote inflected the romantic plot in her novels with a topicality that was typical of late-nineteenth century American realism: *Coeur d'Alene* (1894), for example, is based on the bitter and violent mining strikes which erupted in Idaho in 1892; *The Chosen Valley* (1892) depicts an irrigation project which ends in disaster when two people are killed in a dam collapse--the result of corrupt business practices which sacrifice safety to profit. Returning to questions of business ethics, *John Bodewin's Testimony* (1898) is the story of a mining engineer who is under pressure to give false testimony in a claim dispute. All of these novels situate a 'love interest' in the context of timely and topical political and economic questions with relevance extending beyond regional boundaries.

After 1900, a significant change in Foote's financial situation affected the pattern of her publications: Arthur had secured a permanent position at the North Star Mine in Grass Valley, California, where the couple would remain until 1932. No longer relying on the quick sale of short and serial fiction, Foote published novels almost exclusively--seven of them between 1900 and 1919. The emphasis in her writing also shifted after 1900. In her first five novels, Foote mapped romantic plots onto settings that were closely based upon Arthur's professional experience as a mining and irrigation engineer, while her later work gradually became less topical and more panoramic. Whereas conflict in *The Led-Horse Claim* and *Coeur d'Alene* is driven by the political and economic disputes in which the principal characters find themselves, in *The Desert and the Sown* (1902) conflict is figured in psychodynamic terms. It is the story of a

woman who has lived for twenty years with the belief that she is a widow, only to discover that her husband is alive and has been living as a drifter. Now a wealthy landowner, the female protagonist finds herself unable to acknowledge the gnarled frontiersman as her husband. Foote also produced several panoramic historical novels in her later period, including *The Loyal Americans* (1910), a chronologically sweeping novel set before, during, and after the American Revolution; and *A Picked Company* (1912), set during the Oregon emigration of the 1840s. In her final two novels, *Edith Bonham* (1917), and *The Groundswell* (1919), Foote returned to writing fiction closely based upon her own personal experience, but adopted a more retrospective position. *Edith Bonham* is based on Foote's intense and life-long friendship with Helena Gilder; *The Groundswell* upon her relationship with her daughter Agnes, who had died of appendicitis in 1904. Although not for the lack of trying, *The Groundswell* was Foote's final publication.

The conditions under which Foote declined in status as an author are particularly suggestive. Her correspondence with Houghton Mifflin during the 1920's indicates a string of politely rejected story ideas and manuscripts, including an unfinished novel entitled "On Trust," and Foote's memoir, *A Victorian Gentlewoman in the Far West.* Although the latter was eventually published posthumously, Foote's daughter, Betty, persuaded her that it best remain a private, family document. This is a curious reversal of the earlier conditions underwriting Foote's literary authority, because, in the past, her experience as a westerner had always been readily transformed into literary capital. Equally suggestive is the way in

which her autobiography was now considered valuable only as a private document. In fact, these events speak to a possibility which had been a source of anxiety to Foote throughout her career: that the 'literary' value of her writing would be undermined in some way by the domestic orientation of its production.

iii. Professionalism and the Decline of Literary Domesticity

By the late-nineteenth century, the rise of professionalism had changed the ways in which literature and its practice were defined and evaluated. Linked to democratization and laissez-faire capitalism, professionalism produced a new class of prestigious occupations accessible, in theory, on the basis of merit, and serving the specialized needs of a complex social, economic and political system, as well as the self-interest of professionals themselves. At the same time, professional associations reacted *against* laissez-faire capitalism by restricting access to the professions and monopolizing markets for specialized knowledge (Menand 113-14). In the field of cultural production, professionalism responded to the commodification of literary production by creating a similar social distinction between groups of writers who, because of the commercialization of high-cultural publishing, the emergence of mass print-culture, and the proliferation of writing as a form of productive labor, were otherwise indistinguishable--between, that is, literary 'hacks' who wrote only for profit, and 'legitimate' authors whose work was intrinsically valuable (Borus 86). According to literary historian Louis Menand, the literary equivalent of the professional association was the literary movement--realism, naturalism,

modernism. "They lent the little-known writer the identity of a movement and the prestige of a group . . . and they all tended to follow the characteristic associational practice of presenting their ranks as open to anyone with talent" (120).

Literary professionalism was a common strategy enabling women authors at the turn of the century to resist the rigid ties between femininity and women's writing that had determined the literary practice of their predecessors during the "feminine fifties." Elizabeth Ammons has studied the ways in which Sara Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, Willa Cather, Mary Austin, and others, self consciously broke with established women's literary traditions in order to claim status as artists, and rejected identification as 'woman' as the primary determinant of their literary practice (10-11). Amy Kaplan has documented this process with respect to the career of Edith Wharton, who adopted literary professionalism precisely as a strategy for breaking away from the influence of popular, feminized literary traditions:

> By the time Wharton was growing up in the 1870s, popular fiction had become synonymous with women's fiction among middle-class readers, and novel writing was viewed as women's work. . . . For many, these origins devalued a genre already made suspect by the Puritan hostility toward fiction and the elitist fear of the novel's genuinely popular appeal. . . . Wharton struggled against the domestic legacy of the American female novelists to define her notion of professional authorship, and rejected their sentimental product to define her notion of realism. (70-71)

In an environment of ubiquitous literary commodification, professional standards produced distinctions on the basis of 'intrinsic' merit. 'Functional' texts--that is, texts with overt social or commercial

objectives, accordingly declined in value, a process affecting women's writing in particular. Richard Brodhead observes a shift in the value of women's sentimental fiction, which, at mid-nineteenth century was produced with the understanding that "literary discourse is continuous with, not differentiated from, the discourses of piety and domestic instruction and that the *work* of literary writing forms part of a larger project of promoting domestic morality and Christian belief." By the late-nineteenth century, Brodhead continues, "literary writing [was considered] a *different thing* from the work of piety or nurture." Thus, women writers with explicitly literary aspirations adopted practices which reflected "the late-nineteenth century high-cultural presentation of literature as a sphere of its own of value in itself" (160-161).

Although this scholarship tends to focus on the ways in which professionalism enabled some women writers to resist the requirement that they write 'as women,' feminist historians have identified professionalization as a phenomenon which actually impeded the progress of feminism in the twentieth century. Nancy Cott argues that, because professionalism emphasized conduct based on scientific standards of objectivity, it was difficult for women to organize politically within the professions without calling their own professionalism into question. Women who did so were subject to the criticism that they allowed their gender to cloud their judgment and influence their conduct. As well, inherently sexist standards of merit could be masked by the discourse of objectivity. These claims, Cott argues, are born out by the measurable decline of women's involvement in the professions during the first half of the twentieth

century (213-40). Cott cites the American Psychological Association's two-tiered membership system as an example of the hidden double-standards which existed in many professions. Under the two-tiered system introduced in 1926, certain members were distinguished as "fellows" of the Association. All existing members received this distinction automatically, but future fellows would have to be elected by the Association's male-dominated Council. During the 1930s, only 18 percent of the fellows were women, even though they constituted about 30 percent of the broader membership (Cott 223). Similar developments have been documented in such diverse fields as medicine, the professional rodeo, and the academy[5]. Empirically based research on literary professionalism has yielded identical findings: Gaye Tuchman found in her research on the novel in Britain that, as the novel gained in status as a field, women were gradually "edged out" of the field of novel writing. Citing the work of Christopher Wilson and Gaye Tuchman, Susan Coultrapp-McQuinn suggests that late-nineteenth century American literary culture was less hospitable to women than it had been in previous decades because of the tendency of professionalism "to institutionalize ["masculine"] values of rationality, objectivity, specialization, and authority" (198)[6]

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[5]For an overview, see Joan Jacobs Brumberg and Nancy Tomes, "Women and the Professions: A Research Agenda For American Historians" (275-96). For a discussion of how professionalization excluded women athletes from the rodeo, see Candace Savage, *Cowgirls* (1-38). Paul Lauter identifies a similar pattern in the academy during the 1920s. See *Canons and Contexts* (22-47).

[6]See Susan Coultrapp-McQuinn, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century*; Gaye Tuchman with Nina E. Fortin, *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change*, and Christopher Wilson, *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era*.

While late-nineteenth century domestic feminism resisted this trend by professionalizing domesticity itself, literary domesticity declined in status as a mode of cultural production. Women in other fields--doctors, nurses, reformers, social workers, educators, public health officials, and other similarly 'domesticated' occupations--translated their traditional domestic roles into legitimate professions, but this strategy was not available to women writers who aspired to professional status, because literary domesticity was no longer considered *literary* work. At the same time, as the discussion below of Mary Hallock Foote's career will suggest, literary domesticity persisted as a material practice because, in certain respects, the material conditions under which many women became writers had remained unchanged.

Like many literary domestics, Foote conceived of her writing as women's work. It allowed her to supplement the family income without displacing Arthur Foote's position as the principal breadwinner, despite the fact that her income often surpassed his. Foote extended this identification to her literary practice, which she often conceived as a form of mothering. Her domestic position conflicted, however, with her literary status, and undermined her capacity to function as a literary professional. Foote's textual practice negotiates precisely this conflict: her first published novel, *The Led-Horse Claim, produces* a certain distance from literary domesticity which Foote was not able to articulate in her material practice as a writer. Whereas Frances McElrath's strategy is to redraw the West as a public space requiring the intervention of a professional domestic, *The Led-Horse Claim* uses the concept of 'frontier' to inscribe

domestic decay and a corresponding decline in the authority of the domestic woman. By producing fiction which figures domesticity as an idealized fantasy position in relation to a 'real' West, Foote simultaneously positions herself as a literary-realist, thereby declaring her affiliation with a recognized, professional, literary association.

iv. Western Experience as Literary Capital

To understand how Foote's 'literary' status inflected her representation of domesticity on the frontier, it is necessary to map out the intersecting symbolic and material economies she negotiated as both an author and a wage-earner. Like popular Western author Bertha Muzzy Bower, whose orientation in the cheap fiction press presumes the primary value of her work as real rather than symbolic capital, Mary Hallock Foote's literary activity was mobilized by financial need. However, while Bower's popularity implied a certain fidelity to proven literary commodities, Foote belonged to a literary elite which valued 'original' acts of creation. Thus, Foote's literary choices were not less narrowly circumscribed than Bower's by her position within material and symbolic economies. Foote's geographic location, for example, determined the value of her literary labor in ways which Foote considered confining rather than liberating. Of her 1876 migration to California, Foote writes, "No girl ever wanted less to "go West" with any man, or paid a man a greater compliment by doing so" (*Victorian* 114). It was with equal reluctance that Foote gave up her career as an illustrator, which, before her marriage, had already garnered her prestigious

commissions to illustrate editions of Hawthorne, Longfellow, and Whittier. Illustrating required access to materials not readily available in California, pretty models and costumes were difficult to come by, and perpetual domestic upheaval--Arthur was almost constantly moving from job to job--made publisher's deadlines almost impossible to meet. In part, Foote negotiated these difficulties by shifting from pastoral to a realist mode of illustration, which freed her from the task of fashioning elaborate settings out of her crude surroundings;[7] but these compromises did not make it any easier for Foote to acquire materials and meet her publisher's deadlines. In 1878, Foote stumbled upon writing as a more viable alternative after Richard Gilder, impressed by her long letters to Helena, persuaded Foote to write Western "sketches" to accompany some illustrations she had done for *Century*. Meanwhile, it became clear to Foote that Arthur's career was not progressing as they both had hoped. After the birth of her first child in 1877, Foote found her financial circumstances even more pressing . "I think I never should have written at all" she wrote in 1887, "if I had not begun under money pressure" (qtd. in Paul, "When Culture Came" 10).

Foote's Western emigration and fortuitous connections to the publishing world coincided with the rising demand for regional fiction. While fiction which addressed frontier conditions--that is, conditions on the *boundary between* national and regional spaces rather than *within* them--differed from regional fiction proper, it was, nevertheless, deeply implicated in the project of regionalism.

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[7]See Shelley Armitage, "The Illustrator as Writer: Mary Hallock Foote and the Myth of the West" (151-174).

Positioning themselves as nation-builders in a country recently divided by civil war, "quality" magazines--*Century* in particular--initiated editorial policies which included a greater proportion of regional representation, either by publishing work by regional writers from the South, West, and coastal regions, or by commissioning eastern writers, including Foote and Wister, to record their experiences in the 'regions.' In 1886, for example, Richard Gilder tried to persuade the editor of a southern periodical to carry, in the interest of national unity, a series on Abraham Lincoln:

> The great force and utility of the "Century's" attitude toward the South rests on the fact that we are national and antislavery in our views . . . . It is of great use that a Northern periodical should be so hospitable to Southern Writers and Southern opinion, and should insist upon giving a fair show to Southern views even when they are not altogether palatable to our Northern Readers. . . . After having done what we have for the South--and what we expect to do--with entire sincerity we now ask the South to listen to the story of the War from an entirely Northern point of view. (*Letters* 392-93).

If establishing ties with a Southern periodical could unify a nation divided on the basis of racial politics, establishing connections between the East and West could unify a nation divided on the basis of class. Viewing Western culture as vulgar and inferior, Gilder believed that distributing the right kind of literature could assimilate the lower classes by exposing them to genteel values. "Civilization is traveling Westward on the million wings . . . of the "Century," he

wrote in 1884, ". . . I am greatly interested in this enormous, somewhat vulgar West . . . Now and hereafter we can drop in a word now here, now there--if not of Arnold's "sweetness and light," at least a word containing broader views than those they seem too often to entertain" (*Letters* 394-95). Gilder's responses to the West, similar to his views on mass print-culture, are underlined by anxieties about the growth of national communication networks and mass-production print-technology--developments which were in the process of producing competing forms of national print culture.[8] In a letter to Hamlin Garland, Gilder professes his "embarrass[ment]" with "the newspaper press now-a-days. . . . It not only expresses the vulgarity of the American masses, but increases it. . . . Now if we print too many stories which are full of the kind of language which should not be used, we seem to many persons to be continuing the work of vulgarization. On the other hand, we value correct pictures of life--and the consequence is we are giving an undue proportion, possibly, of dialect fiction" (qtd. in H. Smith 95).

One way for the "quality" magazines to distinguish themselves from the nationally-distributed dime novel, for example, was to commission authors who offered an alternative to the so-called 'hack' writers catering to what literary elites considered the infantalized tastes of the loosely defined 'masses.' The distinction was made all the more important by similar claims circulating in the popular press. As art historian Alex Nemerov has shown,[9] virtually every

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[8]On the struggle between elite and popular periodicals to define 'national' culture, see Matthew Schneirov, *The Dream of a New Social Order: Popular Magazines in America, 1893-1914*. (75-102).

[9]See Alex Nemerov, "Doing the 'Old America': The Image of the American West, 1880-1920" (285-344).

segment of the cultural hierarchy was flooded with images of the regions and of the 'wild West,' all of which laid claim in some way to experiential authenticity: 'Buffalo Bill' Cody had been involved in various military efforts against the Sioux and Cheyenne, which he later dramatized in his wild West shows, hiring 'real' Native-Americans to supply the appropriate 'color' to his spectacle;[10] dime-novel authors were sometimes endowed with literary personas which authenticated the fiction;[11] pulp Western novelist Bertha Muzzy Bower was 'qualified' to publish Western stories because she had been raised in the West. According to Amy Kaplan, American realism was constituted by this pervasive sense that 'reality' itself had become a contested category:

> They [realists] often assume a world which lacks solidity, and the weightiness of descriptive detail--one of the most common characteristics of the realistic text--often appears in inverse proportion to a sense of insubstantiality, as though description could pin down the objects of an unfamiliar world to make it real. . . .
>
> This unreal quality comes from two major sources . . . intense and often violent class conflicts which produced

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[10]William F. 'Buffalo Bill' Cody got his name from the great quantity of Buffalo he killed to supply meat for laborers on the Kansas Pacific Railroad (1867-68). He was known for his work as a Pony Express rider, Government scout, and participation in "more Indian Battles than any other living man" (*Who's Who* 372).

[11]Note, for example, Loren D. Estleman's brief biography of dime novelist Edward Judson: "An adulterer who married four times, he once shot a man to death in an argument over the man's wife, for which act he was hanged from an awning post and then cut down before he strangled. Small wonder that his scoundrel's heart was drawn toward unprincipled killers, whom he whitewashed and made over between yellow covers into defenders of the Golden Rule." See *The Wister Trace: Classic Novels of The American Frontier* (20).

> fragmented and competing social realities, and the simultaneous development of a mass culture which dictated an equally threatening homogeneous reality. (9)

Because Gilder positioned *Century* as a corrective to the "vulgar" reality depicted in popular journalism, establishing referential authenticity in *Century Magazine* was not accomplished simply on the basis of the author's experiential qualifications--that is, being 'Western' did not in and of itself distinguish Hamlin Garlin from other sensational writers; Gilder also required that his authors mark themselves off from the popular press by demonstrating their competency with 'literary' language. Hence Gilder's particular concern with Hamlin Garland's fiction was that its heavy dialect would undermine literary language in the same way that popular journalism did.

The interconnected movements of realism and regionalism also responded to questions which transcended Gilder's particular editorial project. The pervasive sense that America was in the process of bewildering and irreversible social change--the growth of enormous corporate capitalist power-blocs, violent class conflict, crowded cities, the "new immigration" of groups from China and Southern Europe, the construction of national transportation and communication systems--is a problem addressed within both realism and regionalism. Both movements had in common the project of extending representation to social groups not traditionally represented in literature, rationalizing and containing change, and resisting mass-cultural fantasies projected in popular fiction and the sensational press. While the task of the realist was to explore

conditions in urban, industrial culture, regionalism both recorded the 'inevitable' passage of 'primitive' rural and small-town cultures, and supplied a literary reserve for these 'disappearing' ways of life. Although the Western frontier was not a clearly mapped region, the production of frontier literature invoked conventions associated with regionalism, including emphasis on the character sketch, on detailed descriptions of culture and custom, on specificity of place, and on an implied relation between the primitive region and the 'modern' nation.[12]

Very few authors were equipped to perform the very specialized task of producing authentic and literary frontier fiction. Foote was one of them. In addition to her position as a frontierswoman, she had been raised in an educated household, had been encouraged to read literature from an early age, and had attended a respectable college (the Cooper College of Design in New York City). She could therefore supply a rare combination of experiential position and literary competency. Although she was from a modestly wealthy farming family, Foote was well-connected socially, especially because her friendship with the Gilders gained her admission to elite literary circles that included such monumental figures as Howells and Longfellow. It was a particularly fortuitous combination, because *Century* required writers with just the right

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[12]On Realism and Regionalism as interconnected movements, see Eric J. Sundquist, "Realism and Regionalism," (501-524); Richard Brodhead highlights the ways in which regionalism responds to upper-class anxieties about immigration by depicting 'the foreign' in familiar terms. See *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (135-41); For discussions of the social and cultural origins of American realism, see Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (especially pp. 7-14); and Daniel H. Borus, *Writing Realism: Howells, James, and Norris in the Mass Market*.

balance of 'regional' and 'literary' competence. Femininity also enhanced Foote's marketability in certain respects because regionalism, although not exclusively produced by women, was a significant means of literary access for marginal writers. According to Richard Brodhead, "regionalism made the experience of the socially marginalized into a literary asset, and so made marginality itself a positive authorial advantage. Through the inversion of customary privilege built into its formal logic, this genre created a writer's role that women were equipped to perform" (117). Judith Fetterley, Marjorie Pryse, and others have also been active in articulating regionalism as a significant women's literary movement.[13] Foote's regional position, together with her social connections and cultural competency, fortuitously converged to enable the quick sale of almost everything Foote wrote during the 1880s and 1890s.

The value of Foote's literary labor as real capital conflicted, however, with symbolic economies within the very 'literary' press which determined the market for Foote's fiction, resulting in Foote's sense that she occupied a false position. Exemplary of several self-deprecating comments which appear in Foote's correspondence is an 1887 letter to Helena Gilder, in which Foote laments the fact that nobody appeared to recognize " that my work does not pretend to be Art," but is "in fact only an *industry*" (qtd. in Paul 1976; 10). Foote's domestic position both mobilized and rationalized her literary labor, because it was as a *mother* that she wrote to earn money to support

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[13]See Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, eds., *American Women Regionalists 1850-1910* ; Sherrie A. Inness and Diana Royer, eds., *Breaking Boundaries: New Perspectives on Women's Regional Writing* ; Marjorie Pryse, "Distilling Essences": Regionalism and "Women's Culture."

her children. However, because Foote supplied a literary market which did not value literary domesticity, she faced in her textual practice the task of distancing her authorial persona from the material context of her literary labor.

vi. Literary Domesticity and Symbolic Capital

The term "literary domestic" was initially suggested by Mary Kelley as a designation for a group of nineteenth-century American women writers--Fanny Fern (pseudonym for Sara Parton), Maria Cummins, E.D.E.N. Southworth, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and others-- who wrote best-selling novels which focused on middle-class domestic life. Literary domesticity encompassed both the material and textual practice of middle class women writers who simultaneously transgressed and reproduced their domestic positions: on the one hand, these women publicized domesticity, exposed themselves to public display through their celebrity as best-selling novelists, and acted as economic providers; on the other hand, domestic fiction engaged the cultural production of public/private boundaries and implied a necessary relation between the naturalized domestic woman and her literary practice.[14] While taking a different methodological approach, Margaret Homans' psychoanalytic study argues similarly that nineteenth-century women's literary practices were structurally identical to childbearing. Drawing upon Nancy Chodorow's feminist revision of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Homans explains that, in childbirth, a

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[14]See Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* ; and Susan Coultrapp McQuinn, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century* .

woman reconstitutes a "presymbolic symbiosis with her mother;" hence, "the reproduction of mothering" is also "the reproduction of a presymbolic communicativeness, a literal language" (24-25). Homans calls this relation "literalization," and argues that it structures nineteenth-century women's writing: "The literal is composed . . . of a collision between women's placement as the silent object in the traditional male view of language and a mother's more positive wish to reproduce the nonsymbolic language of infancy" (33). Homans' title, *Bearing the Word,* recalls this impulse in women's writing to resist patriarchal language by transforming the figurative into the literal.[15]

Conceptualizing their writing in the same terms as motherhood enabled women writers, according to Homans, to "[neutralize] the conflict between writing and motherhood" implied by patriarchal myths of language. There is a material dimension to this strategy as well: by identifying their economically productive labor with mothering, literary domestics rationalized their 'unfeminine' positions as economic providers. Indeed, best-selling domestic novels such as Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) and Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* (1855) represent women's productive labor in relation to mothering, and imply that *literary* labor in particular is an ideal manifestation of this relation. After she is widowed and abandoned by her family, Fanny Fern's heroine Ruth Hall becomes a writer to support her young daughter. In her father's absence, similarly, Jo March assumes the role of the father by writing sensation fiction, and later

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[15]See Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing.*

commodifies her femininity as the headmistress at a boys' school. In both instances, a precondition of women's productive labor is the absence of a male provider; thus, women's economic activity is constructed as supplemental and in this sense consistent with the 'work' of femininity. The material practice of writing negotiates the problem of productive labor as 'unfeminine' by allowing women to 'go public' without also putting themselves on public display. The commodification of domesticity, meanwhile, engaged women's reproductive roles as mothers as itself a form of productive labor. Literary domestics of the mid-nineteenth century thus exploited the "Cult of True Womanhood[16] as a basis for their empowerment as both literary authorities and economic providers. As Jane Tompkins points out, this "sentimental power" both reproduced and transcended domestic boundaries to become a culturally productive form of political power:

> The image of the home created by [Harriet Beecher] Stowe and [Catherine] Beecher in their treatise on domestic science is in no sense a shelter from the stormy blast of economic and political life, a haven from reality divorced from fact which allows the machinery of industrial capitalism to grind on; it is conceived as a dynamic center of activity, physical and spiritual, economic and moral, whose influence spreads out in ever-widening circles. To this activity--and this is the

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[16]See Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

crucial innovation--men are incidental. ("Sentimental Power" 35)

Although the unprecedented success of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) speaks to the legitimacy Stowe and others enjoyed as domestic authorities, literary domestics were as vulnerable to criticism as were women writers later in the century. The *terms* of the criticism shifted, however, from moral to aesthetic grounds. Early in the century, it was the *morality* of the novel and the novel-writer that was suspect. Novel-reading lured women away from their domestic duties, while novel-writing exposed women to unfeminine public exposure (Kelley passim). The tenor of this criticism attests to the continued salience of the domestic boundaries negotiated by literary women. By the 1880s, different tactics were engaged to close the window of opportunity created by literary domesticity, which was now criticized on aesthetic rather than moral grounds: Domestic-sentimentalism had become one of many obsolete literary conventions which constituted the sub-literary 'other' of emerging 'literary' movements, particularly literary realism. Theories of realism at the time, such as those articulated by Howells, James, and Norris, engaged an implied critique of women's literary traditions, and critical language increasingly associated femininity and domesticity with literary failure.[17] William Dean Howells attacked Victorian culture as "a hospital for female invalids" (qtd. in Schneirov 147). Howells himself was disparaged by Frank Norris on the

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[17]My observations on the position of the feminine in realism are drawn from Daniel H. Borus, *Writing Realism: Howells, James, and Norris in the Mass Market*; Alfred Habegger, *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature*; Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism*: and Eric J. Sundquist, "Realism and Regionalism."

grounds that his theory of realism was effeminate. Norris called it "the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call, the adventure of an invitation to dinner" (qtd. in Apthorp 4).

The material conditions underpinning Foote's literary practice resemble those of the eponymous heroine in *Ruth Hall* and Jo March in *Little Women.* Like both of these characters, Foote mobilized her literary labor on the basis of Arthur's 'lack' as an economic provider. It is worth repeating biographical details revealed earlier to illustrate this point: Between 1876 and 1895, Arthur Foote did not obtain secure employment as an engineer; often, Foote's income was all that kept the family afloat as they moved from mine to mine on an almost yearly basis. At times, Foote lived in rooming houses or with relatives while Arthur pursued field-work, periodically leaving their infant son in the care of relatives so she could spend time with her husband. A series of terminated positions and aborted schemes culminated in 1884, when Arthur took on a monumental irrigation project in Boise, Idaho. The result was disastrous: the magnitude of the project was such that it was next to impossible to generate on a continuous basis the capital that was necessary to keep it going. In the long term, indeed, the project was completed under the aegis of the Federal Bureau of Reclamation, but not soon enough to prevent the financial ruin of the Foote family. Subsequent, smaller projects also failed. Not until 1895 did the Footes embark on a more stable path, when Arthur accepted a position at a mine in Grass Valley, California, where the couple remained until 1932.

In her memoirs and correspondence with publishers, Foote implies an inverse relation between the economic and aesthetic value of her fiction even as she stresses its ties to her domestic life and its importance as a means of stabilizing the family in turbulent times. In relation to its maternal function--as the glue which keeps the family together in hard times--Foote rationalizes the value of her writing as real capital, suggesting a continuity between herself and earlier literary domestics in terms of the material relations of her literary practice. Its *aesthetic* merits, however, are inherently compromised on the same basis. For the first two years of the Idaho irrigation project, Mary and the children lived with relatives in Milton because the family could not afford to build a house. Mary's literary labor reunited the family when she sold the serial rights to *John Bodewin's Testimony* to finance the construction of their house. The relation between her literary labor and the work of producing a home was not lost on Foote, who declares unequivocally that "J.B.'s Testimony" built the Cañon House" (*Victorian* 292). Uneasy about the future of the irrigation project, Foote was especially productive during her years in Boise. Her memoirs describe her literary work during this period as a form of mothering: "I made capital out of my children's tears and wrote a story called "The Lamb That Couldn't Keep Up"--and posed the children themselves for the illustrations and sold it to *St. Nicholas* for a good round sum to put away for my own lamb that was coming in June" (*Victorian* 298). When the Footes' savings were lost in the Panic of 1893, Mary again became the sole breadwinner: "I still had my own little job. . . . My work at this time was potboiling, which is "all right . . . if it boils the pot" (*Victorian* 359). Arthur's

second and more modest irrigation project fell through in 1894 after Arthur was cheated out of his claim, "but I made profit of it in my fashion," Foote writes, "I wove it impertinently into a story, a thing of barter and sale called "The Harshaw Bride" (*Victorian* 371). Similarly, Foote's earliest illustrations, completed while she still lived with her parents in Milton, were sold to help cover debts at the family farm. "Those sales were too quick and too easy," Foote later wrote, "It was the pressure at home which must excuse the plucking of such unripe fruit. We women were eaten to our souls with a horror of debt" (*Victorian* 87).

By 1894, Foote had become an established illustrator and author, but still maintained that "I persist in these things . . . for other reasons than because I think them so worth while."[18] In a particularly revealing letter to Bliss Perry, Foote discusses a poem written by her daughter Betty, probably in memory of Foote's youngest daughter, Agnes Foote, who died of appendicitis in 1904. Foote had arranged for its publication in *The Atlantic* without Betty's knowledge:

> She will shrink of course from the idea [of publication] because these verses come from her heart were made for love of the little sister at home. But nobody knows who reads where or how the thoughts came into printed form. You know very well what I think about women: that the best use they can make eventually of any spark of creative power vouchsafed to them is to work it into

[18]Mary Hallock Foote to A.V.S. Anthony, August 10, [1884]. Unless otherwise indicated, this and other correspondence quoted in this chapter is from the Houghton Mifflin collection at Harvard University.

> deeds --loving service for others. We are transmitters-- The great powers of artistic expression are not given to women.[19]

The passage resonates with many of the same anxieties which domestic-sentimental writers had faced earlier in the century: although femininity legitimizes literary production within the home, the process of going public violates the sanctity of the private domain. What appears to have changed is the extent to which the domestic relations of literary production can be made public: Like the writing of Jo March and Ruth Hall, Betty's literary labor is mobilized as an expression of familial love, but whereas both Alcott and Fern make this productive relation public in order to valorize their own authority, Foote neither expects nor wants to expose the domestic mode of production underwriting Betty's poem. Whatever domestic crisis might mobilize the work does not translate into the aesthetic economy of the magazine that publishes it, nor, in Foote's view, should it.

Because Foote worked her own fiction into selfless deeds by selling it, then, literary commodification constituted *both* the positive maternal value and the negative aesthetic value of her work. In August of 1896, Foote turned down an invitation to contribute a sketch to the October issue of *The Atlantic*, giving reasons which imply the underlying assumption that literary *labor* does not produce *good* literature: "I have nothing worth your reading for so soon as October. It would have to be a very strong impression freshly received that could push me into such company. Such impressions

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[19]Mary Hallock Foote to Bliss Perry, undated (c1904).

are always about, but one never knows when, or whether at all they will come."[20] Certainly, Foote was not alone in her ambivalence toward literary commodification, which was a ubiquitous source of anxiety to authors whose idea of their work as 'literary'--and therefore inherently valuable--conflicted with its commodity status. Foote articulated her 'literary' aspirations by writing for 'highbrow' magazines, and by evaluating her work--negatively--according to hegemonic standards of 'literary' excellence. In response to one solicitation from *The Atlantic* for example, Foote replied that the "note does not encourage me, except in one - or [two] - words . . . "Students of Literature may apply, as well as "makers" of it."[21] Clearly uncomfortable negotiating contracts, Foote accepted a "lower price" for the serial rights to *The Prodigal,* finding it "a disagreeable thing to peddle ones [sic] things about."[22]

While literary professionalism encoded a privileged field within the literary marketplace, valorizing certain works as aesthetically 'good' in spite of their commodity status, Foote was equally uncertain of her status as a professional. Indeed, Foote's reservations about the status of her work as a commodity were compounded by the fact that she considered domesticity and professionalism two entirely different and conflicting positions. Just as Foote evaluated her fiction against hegemonic standards of 'literary' excellence, so she also evaluated her material practice against the standards of literary professionalism, and was deeply ashamed of the way in which domestic duty intervened in her

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[20]Mary Hallock Foote to Houghton Mifflin & Co., August 1, 1896.
[21]Foote to Houghton Mifflin & Co., July 15, 1897.
[22]Mary Hallock Foote to Bliss Perry, February 2, [1900].

professional life. In 1900 Foote was forced to resign a commission to illustrate an edition of Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* because of an unexpected sickness in the family, which left a set of twin babies under her care while their mother (Mary's niece-in-law) recovered from typhoid fever. This is how she broached the subject with her editor:

> I am so ashamed of my unbusinesslike behavior that I think the circumstances will warrant an apology, and even an excuse on my part. Though excuses never really do excuse anything. . . . These things are as they are ordered, in a woman's life . . . . It should be a final lesson to me never to say I will do thus and so . . . and to make no business promises, involving the time of others. . . . Forgive me the stupid way in which I have wasted your time.[23]

In her correspondence with friends and family and in her memoirs, Foote emphasizes the way in which maternity mobilizes her literary practice. In this letter to her editor, however, maternal duty undermines Foote's capacity to "do business" like a professional. Interestingly, Foote does not consider the rather extreme circumstances she describes as a legitimate excuse for missing her publisher's deadline. Foote is able to rationalize her literary productivity in relation to her maternity, then, but this very relation is simultaneously excluded from the professional code which determines her relationship with her editors.

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[23]Mary Hallock Foote to Horace Scudder, January 2, 1900.

Foote's position as a literary outsider is consistent with the status of women writers within the publishing house that issued most of her work in book form. Houghton Mifflin's list encompassed a hierarchical spectrum, from respectable 'light' reading to 'classic' works produced by literary giants. Most of Houghton's literary icons were authors born in the early 1800's, and now approaching the end of their careers. This demographic is consistent with Bourdieu's observations about French literary culture in the 1970's, which typically reserved 'classic' status for authors who were no longer productive. While American women novelists had been especially active during the same time period (1820-1860), only two of them, Warner and Stowe, were represented on Houghton's list of 'classic' literature.

Between 1892 and 1902, Houghton's special editions--distinguished by expensive paper, bindings, and illustrations--included material by Hawthorne, Dante, and Shelley; and "complete works" collections of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Shelley, Lowell, Whittier, Dickens, Fiske, Hawthorne, Lord Macaulay, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Bret Harte, and John Burroughs. I have been unable to find any similar editions of work by women writers, with the exception of special editions of Stowe's work and "holiday" editions of the more popular writers (Kate Douglas Wiggin, for example) produced for the Christmas market. Promotional strategies, advertising formats, and packaging collectively subjected Houghton's authors to an implied cultural hierarchy. Women writers were well-advertised and constituted a significant proportion of Houghton's 'light' reading list. Femininity was also recognized as a marketable feature: an 1892

circular features "Books by Four Women: Mrs. Wiggin, Mrs. Cooke, Mrs. Kirk, Mrs. Austin."[24] At the top of the cultural hierarchy, however, the absence of women is noticeable. Distinguished literature appeared most often in expensive gift-book and "complete works" formats; it included fewer novels and short-story collections, and more poetry and 'serious' non-fiction. In November of 1892 Houghton Mifflin advertised that "The Great Authors of America are so largely represented among the publications of Houghton Mifflin & Company . . . that an enumeration of them is simply a list of the representative names in American Literature." These names included Whittier, Lowell, Holmes, Thoreau, Aldrich, Harte, Fiske, Longfellow, Emerson, Howells, Warner, Howells, Bryant, Stedman, and Mrs. Stowe.

According to Bourdieu's model of the field of cultural production in industrialized settings, material by established authors underwrites the development of new authors and the production of 'important' but less profitable work. Although men and women writers shared this role at Houghton Mifflin, established women authors were packaged and promoted in ways which subtly ghettoized their work. The circular described above includes a list of 26 'lesser' but well-known authors appearing on the reverse side, which includes Phelps, Jewett, Lucy Larcom, Charles Eggbert Craddock (pseudonym for Mary Murfree), Celia Thaxter, Edith Thomas, Agnes Repplier, Margaret Deland, Blanche Willis Howard,

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[24]Houghton Mifflin Collection, Harvard University (hereafter referred to as *HM)*, Ms. Am 2030, #236 [Scrapbook], [p. 22], [1892]. Houghton Mifflin kept meticulous scrapbooks of its advertisements, circulars, brochures, and other ephemera. These are now part of the extensive Houghton Mifflin collection housed at Harvard University. My commentary on the literary hierarchy at Houghton Mifflin is based upon scrapbooks kept between 1880 and 1900.

and Alice and Phoebe Cary?[25] Like these women authors, Bret Harte and William Dean Howells were still productive in the 1890s, and were steady sellers for the firm. Their names appear, however, among the "representative names in American Literature" along with 'classic' authors such as Emerson and Thoreau.

The prominence of women writers was an issue for Houghton Mifflin managers. A fragmented summary of 1895 manuscript submissions survives which records the "curious" fact that "we received 278 mss. from men and 232 from women; but that men furnished 43 of those that were accepted, women only 21.[26] A similar record from 1900 notes that 716 submitted manuscripts were declined; 62 accepted, and that 22 of the accepted manuscripts were written by women. The anonymous author of the report notes that

> a person with an imaginative turn of mind might make some interesting generalizations from the distribution among masculine and feminine authors of our accepted books. Of the novels, women wrote 11 and men 9; of the more serious books, women also wrote 11 but men wrote 31. From this one might deduce the theory that women had fully as much imagination as men, but that in serious study and scientific exploration men were three times as good as women. However, this can be nothing more than an interesting guess.[27]

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[25]*HM* Ms. Am 2030, #241 [scrapbook], p. 34.
[26]*HM* bMs. Am 1925, #2022, p. 57, Jan. 13, 1896.
[27]*HM* bMs. Am 1925, #2022, [p. 64-5], [1901].

Houghton Mifflin's implicit classification of most of its women authors as 'lesser' is consistent with Mary Hallock Foote's self-identification as a "student of literature" rather than a "maker of it." While Foote was more likely to view her work positively in relation to the income she earned from it, and the ways in which this extra income figured in her domestic life, she sometimes viewed her status as a 'literary' woman as a form of imposture that exposed her to undue scrutiny. Yet Foote was ambitious as well. Writing to Helena de Kay (later Gilder) in 1875, Foote asks, "how can one ever do or be anything if meekness & quietness are the best things in life. I know plenty of women who have meekness but they have attained it only by giving up all hope or thought for themselves--and I could not do that without giving up ambition too" (qtd. in Graulich 44). Foote articulated these ambitions, not only by publishing in elite magazines and seeking approval from men in positions of cultural authority, but also in her textual practice.

vii. Domesticity and Realism in *The Led-Horse Claim*

While Foote engaged literary domesticity in her material practice, the fiction of her apprenticeship implies that she articulated the value of her writing as 'literature' by representing domestic authority as a fantasy position. Here, I use the term "fantasy" not in its psychoanalytic sense, but to name a category produced within realist texts in order to signify 'reality.' Thus, in relation to the 'reality' of a woman's life in the West, Foote represents belief-systems associated with domestic authority and sentimental power as imaginary and 'unreal.'

In both her fiction and her private correspondence, Foote often responded with ambivalence to her own experiential capital, and considered the West a masculine sphere, particularly because it lacked the material conditions of genteel femininity, such as clearly marked domestic spaces, established communities of women, and the material characteristics of a middle-class home. Foote considered it unfeminine to write realistically about the West, yet this is precisely what her work as a regionalist required. In a particularly ambiguous letter to Helena, Foote writes, "How I wish I had a son who would put his name to my stories. One could write so much better if one were not a woman--a wife and mother of small girls--the fields beyond which only men may tread. I know as much about the men who tread those fields as a man could--more--but I don't know the fields and don't wish to appear to" (11/22/1900; qtd. in Graulich 46). On the one hand, Foote suggests that a man could write 'better'--that is, more realistically--about the West, yet she contradicts herself by wishing above all for "a son to put his name to [her] stories, implying that the name alone will make her stories 'better.' Her anxiety, then, has less to do with the inherent quality of her writing than it does with what her Western position implies about her femininity: It is one thing to know the men, but the more pressing fear here is that Foote will "appear" to know the "fields" upon which men tread.

An earlier letter describes more precisely the masculinizing influence of 'authentic' knowledge of the West. In an 1894 letter to A.V.S. Anthony, who headed the art department at Fields, Osgood & Company and had mentored Foote in her apprenticeship as an illustrator, Foote welcomes the arrival of Owen Wister onto the

literary scene with a sense of relief that she no longer carries the burden of being the only eastern writer in the West: "How much more a man can do than a woman with this masculine life. . . . He can dare to do what a woman had better not even try to do." Great artists, Foote suggests, "must know all there is to know about life, and no woman can never know all there is about this life out here, unless she has a husband who spares nothing in his talk, and my husband is not one of that sort, I'm thankful to say.[28] By this point in her career, Foote had become a regular contributor to *Century*, had published four novels and two story collections, had been widely acclaimed for her "Pictures of the Far West" series, and had been selected as an Art Juror for the Chicago World's Fair. Wister's career, in contrast, had only just begun.[29] In both of the passages quoted above, Foote's particular anxiety has to do with how the absence of certain boundaries in the West exposes her to 'unfeminine' knowledge.

Paradoxically, this representation of femininity as itself a dislocated subject position in the West was a feature which ensured that Foote's novels and stories recorded experiences that were authentically 'feminine,' and which also constituted Foote's position

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[28]Mary Hallock Foote. to A.V.S. Anthony, August 10, 1894. Arthur's protective streak, incidentally, is documented in Foote's letters memoirs, where Foote describes him shielding her from a lynching in 1879 (*Victorian* 177), and being generally reticent about his professional affairs. Although Arthur's protectiveness was often a source of frustration--Foote constantly worried about the family income, and regarded Arthur's more grandiose engineering schemes with pessimism-- Foote also clearly expected Arthur to shield her from experiences that a 'gentlewoman' ought not to have.

[29]Wister's first stories were purchased by *Harper's* in 1891. In 1893, he was commissioned by *Harper's* to travel West to produce more fiction. His first story collection, *Red Men and White*, was published by Harper & Brothers in 1896 (Lambert 522).

as a literary realist. A particularly compelling passage in Foote's memoirs suggests that Foote understood certain kinds of experience as 'feminine,' and related these categories to her theory of realism. The passage describes Mary's treacherous journey to Leadville, Colorado in 1879. Arthur had hired a private stage coach for the trip, which he drove himself. At a particularly dangerous point in the road, the Footes encountered a speeding stage coach traveling in the opposite direction:

> I felt that moment I would just as soon die myself as see my husband force that dying horse up the bank, but it had to be done [to avoid a collision]. . . . I am glad I have forgotten what I said to my husband in that moment when he saved our lives, and I hope he has too! The horse died after we got to [our destination] and there we hired another, or the remains of one, and he died the day after we reached Leadville. A. paid for both--and how much more the trip cost him . . . I never knew, but that is the price of Romance: to have allowed his wife to come in by stage in company with drunkenness and vice, or anything else that might happen, would have been realism" (*Victorian* 171-72).

The passage implies a theory of realism that excludes genteel femininity as a subject position from which the 'real' West can be 'experienced.' At the same time, 'feminine' experience is represented as something that the West does not accommodate; hence Arthur's hired coach--an approximation of privacy--does not in the end protect Mary from certain 'realities.' A similar sense of displacement

structures Foote's representation of femininity in the literature of her apprenticeship.

Negotiating the tension between Foote's theory of realism as a gendered discourse, and her conflicted position as a 'literary' woman, Foote's first novel, *The Led-Horse Claim,* inscribes its frontier as both 'literary' and 'real' in relation to a number of fantasy-positions, including romance, sentiment, and domesticity. Commissioned by Gilder for serial publication in *Scribner's Monthly* (which was later to become *Century Magazine), The Led-Horse Claim* marks a significant shift in Foote's reputation as an author because it suggests that the market for her fiction was established enough to justify a lengthier work. Setting her story in the mining town of Leadville, Colorado, where she had lived for several months in 1880, Foote drew heavily upon experiential capital to produce the novel. At the same time, as the subtitle *A Romance of a Mining Town* suggests, Foote engages a mode of realism advocated by Gilder, in which the objective is to strike the appropriate balance between mimetic and imaginative content. "The more reality the better," Gilder believed, "But let it be reality all the way through, reality of the spirit as well as of the flesh, not a groveling reality which ignores the 'romantic spirit'" (qtd. in Johnson 50). In a letter to her brother-in law, James Hague, Foote takes her stand as a realist by pointing out that she does not *endorse* the sentimental values represented in the work: "In the sentimental passages, I hope you will remember that I am not representing what I consider *ideal* relations, but the relation to each other of two *young,* isolated and passionate people--the people who would naturally fit in a story of crude action and rash sentiment" (qtd. in Johnson 50).

The plot revolves around a rivalry between two mines, each laying claim to a single vein of silver. The struggle entangles Foote's heroine, Cecil, in a crisis of loyalties divided between her brother, Conrath, who manages the Shoshone mine; and her lover, Hilgard, who manages the Led-Horse mine. When Cecil learns that the rivalry may become violent, she urges Hilgard to leave so that she will not be forced to choose between Hilgard and Conrath. Without Cecil's knowledge, Hilgard decides at the last minute to remain and defend his mine, killing Conrath in the ensuing confrontation. Cecil disowns Hilgard upon learning he has killed her brother. At this point, Foote had originally intended to end the novel, but under Gilder's direction, she added an extra chapter reuniting her lovers through a series of coincidences which result in marriage.

Tellingly, Foote considered Gilder's intervention a reflection on the *value* of the work: an unhappy ending would have been at once more 'real' and more 'literary,' but the novel was not good enough to sustain it: "I ended the story at Leadville--as I believe it would have ended; the young pair would, in the order of things as they were, never have seen each other again. But my publisher wouldn't hear of that! I had to make a happy ending. I think a literary artist would have refused to do it" (qtd. in Paul 17). Elsewhere Foote writes, "it was assuming rather too much for that little romance to make it a tragedy. But I always knew it should have been, as far as the "love interest" was concerned" (*Victorian* 262).

That the happy resolution to the marriage plot signified the sub-literary status of the novel suggests that Foote did have 'literary' aspirations for the novel, even though she would later consider them

unfulfilled. Foote articulated these aspirations through the discourse of realism, locating two romantic figures confronted by the 'reality' of life in the present-day mining industry. The novel's opening passage clarifies this setting:

> The ark of the mining interests, which had drifted about unsteadily after the break in bonanza stocks in the summer of 1877, had rested, a year or two later, in a lofty valley of Colorado, not far from the summit of that great "divide" which parts the waters of the Continent. It rested doubtfully, awaiting the olive-leaf of Eastern capital. Through the agency of those uncertain doves of promise, the promoter of mining schemes and the investor in the same, the olive-leaf was found, and, before the snows had blocked the mountain-passes, the gay, storm-beleaguered camp, in the words of its exhibitory press, began to "boom." (9)

The opening paragraph positions the novel in its own time and place, establishes a background of economic unrest, and invokes an atmosphere of 'unreality' generated by the popular press, particularly the untrustworthy representation of the economic "boom" advocated by promoters and the "exhibitory press." Chaotic social and economic circumstances are rendered coherently through Old-Testament imagery in a way which both establishes an ironic distance between the narrative voice and the events narrated, and marks off the literary language of the text from its mundane subject matter. All of its familiar realist 'tags' engage a generic contract which promises the reader a story that is 'real'--that is, historically

grounded, timely, objectively and expertly narrated, and so forth. In particular, 'reality' is established in relation to the tendency of popular Western mythology to romanticize the transformation of natural resources into capital: Allusions to "Eastern Capital," stock market "bonanzas," corporate "interests," and so on, conjure up the material relations of Western expansion and development. That Foote is able to accomplish so much in this brief passage also demonstrates her extraordinary skill as a writer. An equally 'realist' move situates the story in the context of social upheaval caused by chaotic economic activity, alluding in particular to the condition of the most vulnerable classes:

> The discontent and the despair of older mining-camps in their decadence hastened to mingle their bitterness in the baptismal cup of the new one. It exhibited in its earliest youth every symptom of humanity in its decline. The restless elements of the Eastern cities; the disappointed, the reckless, the men with failure to wipe out, with losses to retrieve or to forget, the men of whom one knows not what to expect, were there. (11)

This chaotic and timely setting supplies the context for (dis)placing Foote's romantic hero and heroine, both of whom occupy fantasy positions in relation to a social reality of unbridled economic competition and instability, underlined by capitalist value systems. Hilgard "might have won more honor in the camps and fields of the civil war, than he was likely to gain in frontier mining camps. He would have been the idol of his men, the life of his mess,--a leader of forlorn hopes and desperate charges. His rich-blooded beauty would

have wrung the hearts of susceptible maidens, marking him in the ranks of those about to die. . . . But in the less heroic time in which his lot was cast, and in a crude community of transplanted lives, adjusting themselves to new conditions, Hilgard's excess of good looks was a positive inconvenience" (22).

Hilgard's moral investment in the mine is completely out of step with the social reality of his position. The real economic value of the mine represents only a small percentage of the holdings of Hilgard's employer, a faceless eastern corporation. Considering Hilgard's actions "excessive; as pitched not quite on the key of daily life" (205-8), they repudiate them in a telegram issued shortly after the murder: "Officers of company deplore unhappy tragedy of twenty-second. They repudiate measures requiring sacrifice of life for property. Less violent policy would better represent company." Hilgard has similarly misread his social position as a paid employee with no entitlement to the silver he commits murder to defend: ""They don't repudiate the mine," Hilgard said to himself, bitterly, "Their scruples won't prevent their pocketing the dividends after they have washed their hands of the men who saved their property" (190-91).

Cecil's fantasy position, meanwhile, prevents her from recognizing the ways in which her sexual attraction is implicated in the economic exchange between men--a relation suggested by the novel's title, and explained by Cecil's servant and companion, who describes a dream she has in which Cecil herself occupies the place of the 'led-horse': "Mr. Conrath was a draggin' you over the bridge, an' him on Andy [Conrath's horse]; an' you was pullin' back, but he had

you by the hand an' would n't let go." Cecil replies "it was Andy, not I, who wouldn't go over the bridge. My brother would not have to drag me, if he wanted me to follow him anywhere" (147-48). The dream exposes the social reality of Cecil's status as property in relation to the dispute between Hilgard and Conrath--a relation about which Cecil is in denial. Elsewhere, Cecil and Hilgard meet secretly at the boundary line between the Led Horse and Shoshone mines. This boundary is marked by "defaced" trees, each of which bears "an inscription deeply cut in the white, exposed wood." Cecil at first reads these marks as the "amorous records" left by lovers at their secret "trysting place," but a second look reveals that the symbols are not romantic but "arithmetical" (98). Hilgard solves the mystery, explaining that the numbered trees mark the boundaries between the two rival mines. These arbitrary boundaries locate the sexual attraction between Cecil and Hilgard in the context of the social agonism which drives them apart. While Cecil is unable to decipher the relation, the narrative contains several explicit signals which mark the distinction between Cecil's experiential position and that of the 'objective' narration.

Hilgard's early meetings with Cecil set up the conflict between the fantasy-based impulses which attract them, and the social reality which divides them. Their first encounter takes place when Cecil unknowingly trespasses on Led-Horse territory, and situates their relationship in the context of the property dispute between the two rival mines. They meet again at a dance, where their romance develops tenuously amid the vulgar and chaotic atmosphere of the crowded dance hall. "[Hilgard] felt impatient of the people crowding

about them; they were helping to confuse those brief moments that lacked so little of perfection. It was like trying to follow the faint thread of a retreating melody through a maze of distracting sounds" (63). In relation to the turmoil in their social environment, the sexual attraction between Cecil and Hilgard is defined as unreal: "We are none of us living our real lives" Hilgard remarks during the dance (65). Cecil's family similarly views her relationship with Hilgard as "too unreal . . . too unnatural" precisely because of its basis in an ideal attraction (226).

These dynamics erupt in crisis when Hilgard plans an 'invasion' of the Shoshone mine in order to reclaim the disputed vein of silver. Conrath is killed in the ensuing confrontation, which takes place at an underground barrier between the two mines. Having learned of the plan, Cecil has begged Hilgard to leave town on the next train, and now believes that he is not directly responsible for her brother's death. When Hilgard unexpectedly returns, Cecil "accepted the fact. . . as the natural result of her longing for him. She had thought he would hear of her sorrow first when he was thousands of miles away; but the merciful snow had checked him, and the news had brought him back. . . . This was the rapid, unreasoning instinct that took the place of surprise at the sight of him" (179). Again, Cecil fantasizes an ideal relation between herself and Hilgard--one which is not implicated in the economic competition leading to her brother's death. While she is prepared to accept Conrath's death as "restitution for wrong," she is devastated to learn that Hilgard is her brother's killer, not only because it implicates Cecil in the deadly exchange, but also because she stands to profit from Conrath's death: "If you were

old or crippled," she tells him, "if your life were spoiled in some way, I would share it with you. I would go away with you now, if I could suffer with you. But, if we were together, we should not suffer. We should be happy--after a while" (184).

Although Foote's original plan was to end the novel here, at her editor's request she added a series of coincidences leading to the union of Cecil and Hilgard. After the crisis at the mining camp, Cecil leaves Leadville for a rooming house in the city, only to find that Hilgard is staying under the same roof. Learning that Hilgard has become dangerously ill, Cecil nurses him back to health, and then leaves him a second time by taking a position as governess to two boys. Cecil's resistance finally breaks down when her pupils turn out to be Hilgard's younger brothers. The improbable plot devices which resolve the conflict also suggest the basis for it: If Cecil and Hilgard are driven apart by economic agonism, they are reunited through conventions of popular sentimental-domestic fiction, in which marriage plots naturalize kinship ties as the effect of ideal sexual attraction rather than material economic exchange. The 'happy' marriage which ends the novel contradicts the logical structure of events leading up to it: In the economic environment Foote depicts, excessive economic competition undermines the production of new social relationships, producing a tendency toward perversely close family ties which prevent Cecil from socializing with men outside of her own family. The enterprise of marriage is thus undermined by an imbalance of power between sentimental attraction and economic competition, making all social ties impossible save Cecil's incestuous bond with her brother. Cecil's conflicted position is the symptom of a

broader imbalance between sentimental and economic values, caused by a marketplace that is so excessively competitive that the only social ties its subjects are able to form are incestuous ones.

The very signification of public/private boundaries is jeopardized by excessive market competition. Feminine rituals, for example, are disrupted by the constantly shifting boundaries of the private sphere:

> Even the ladies who lived in the populous parts of the camp struggled vainly to fulfill duly that important feminine rite, the exchange of calls. There were difficulties of roads and of weather, and of finding the missing houses of acquaintances, which, in the progressive state of the city topography, had been unexpectedly shunted off into other streets. A new street had barely time to be named and numbered, before it was moved backward or forward, or obliterated altogether, in the intermittent attempts of the city government to reconcile United States patents with "jumpers'" claims. (131)

The future of Leadville if these conditions persist is implied by the pattern of Cecil and Hilgard's separation: both of them take refuge in the city, which is depicted as a region in which domesticity itself has been commodified, reversing the direction of sentimental power articulated in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* for example, where sentimental values originating in the home are projected upon the public sphere in order to infuse economic and political relations with ideal moral content. Indeed, Foote depicts the city as a region of the homeless

because of the way in domesticity itself has been subsumed by the market: Cecil's companion in the city is her spinster-aunt Esther Hartwell, who "was from the country, and classed hired nurses with baker's bread and shop-made underclothing, and other desolations which properly belonged with the homeless existence of people who lived in hotels and boarding-houses" (218). Cecil and Hilgard live at the same rooming house, yet live entirely separate, compartmentalized lives consistent with the city's "first law for everyone to mind his own business" (220-21).

The editorially-driven reunion mobilizes the very forms of social attraction which have previously been defined as fantasy positions. When Cecil learns that Hilgard has become dangerously ill, she and Esther supervise his recovery rather than leaving him to the care of a hired nurse. Certain details about Cecil's past are also disclosed which suggest that Cecil's present tragedy culminates a steady decline in female power within her family. Foote introduces Cecil's father as a man who has "no sympathy [for the] . . . practical Christianity which took the women of his family into the sick-rooms of pilgrims and strangers," resents Miss Esther's "promiscuous helpfulness," and opposes "feminine crusade" (235). Cecil's mother, we learn, died shortly after marrying this man. The capitalist value-systems leading to Conrath's death prove to have been inherited from his father without the balancing effect of his mother. Indeed, Conrath eventually embodies the relation between sentiment and capitalism as competing value systems, his identity determined on the one hand by the weight of his body when shipped as freight, and on the other hand by the female relatives who await its return:

"Two ninety-seven," the man at the scale called to the clerk. He printed the number of pounds weight upon the lid of the box, and swept, with one stroke of his marking-brush, a black circle around the figures.

Conrath was going home at last. The camp lightly remembered his misdeeds; but the women who had waited long for his body to be brought to them from the alien soil where it had lain, kept a different record - in which all was forgotten save the good they had known of him. (278-79)

Conrath's death recuperates the sentimental relation between mother and son that 'reality' disallows. Once returned to his family, Conrath is buried next to his mother:

> The matted growth of periwinkle which had woven its coverlet of dark and shining leaves above the mother's bed, before another winter's snows had whitened it and another summer had starred it with purple blossoms had crept half across the new-made grave. One might fancy the mother, in her sleep, reaching out unconsciously and covering her child (279).

When Cecil and Esther save Hilgard's life by replacing the hired nurse with their own freely given care, they assert sentimental value systems which determine human relations on the basis of feminine nurture and Christian piety, thereby recuperating a faintly drawn domestic boundary marked off as a space where the rules of commodity exchange do not apply. As she oversees Hilgard's recovery, Esther recites a prayer which also summarizes the

ideological function of piety as the moral content of private property: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (232). Plot devices assist in the resolution by suggesting that an idealized connection between Cecil and Hilgard does exist, signified by the string of coincidences which reunite them as if to imply that their marriage is divinely ordained after all.

Equating a happy ending with marriage, Foote did not entirely compromise the tragic tone she had originally envisioned for the novel. In the novel's penultimate chapter, Cecil and Hilgard are married under funeral-like conditions, in "the gloom of the heavily curtained parlor, where the remnants of two families were assembled to witness the marriage ceremony." Cecil's father has refused to attend the ceremony, leaving to her grandmother the task of giving away the bride. "It was with a stern reluctance in her heart that she fulfilled this duty of the relationship. The two women who represented the family of the bride, wore their dull, black mourning robes, but Cecil, with pathetic magnanimity, had put on a gown as white as the happiest omens might have called for" (267). The extent to which this marriage recuperates the idealized bond between Hilgard and Cecil is further compromised by the fact that its historical legacy is minute. The final chapter returns to Leadville, where, only one year after the crisis, Cecil's place in the history of the mining town has been forgotten. The rival mines are now consolidated under the management of one superintendent, who "had heard of Conrath's sister . . . and had vaguely wondered what part, if any, might have been hers in its history. . . . [He] had not found it

easy to believe in the existence of a young girl, such as Miss Conrath had been described, in such a place, under such circumstances. It had been his experience that women generally fitted the places where they were found, and the men who were their companions" (277). Although the novel defines excess competition in the public sphere on the basis of the sentimental values that are undermined by excess materialism, the field of historical knowledge does not recognize sentimental power as a historically productive force. Foote thus retains the tragic tone she had originally planned for the novel by depicting Cecil's position in the history of Leadville as ephemeral, incidental, and, by implication, non-productive of any significant change in the dynamics of the public sphere.

Foote's use of sentimental literary conventions is tied to her self-identification as a literary woman. By depicting sentiment as a fantasy position in relation to a 'real' frontier, Foote constructs her own position as that of a literary realist, defined in binary opposition to literary domesticity. Foote interpreted literary failure in the same terms, regarding Gilder's request for a happy ending as an indication of both the novel's 'flaws' and her own lack of resolve, which prevented her from standing up to her editor. If Foote's representations of the frontier are also representations of her literary aspirations, then her literary aspirations must have inflected her representations of the frontier. Like some of her literary-domestic predecessors--Caroline Kirkland, Catharine Sedgwick, and Lydia Maria Child, for example--Foote equates the boundlessness of the frontier with the absence or instability of domestic boundaries. Because the concept of 'frontier' implied a liminal position between

various categories--savagery and civilization, East and West, masculine and feminine, nation and wilderness, it implied a prior position of liminality on the part of the woman writer, an absence of the clearly marked 'women's sphere' which literary domestics were expected both to occupy and to reproduce. The production of domestic spaces in the wilderness thus figures, as Annette Kolodny's exhaustive survey suggests, as a dominant structuring principle of early nineteenth-century women's frontier writing. There are, however, occasional exceptions to this trend, in which the frontier supplies a basis for exposing domesticity as an unstable category. Two early historical romances, Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824) and Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827) both depict rebellious heroines for whom the wilderness provides a means of escape from domestic confinement. In a particularly suggestive episode in *Hobomok,* the heroine, Mary Conant, flees to the wilderness to escape her tyrannical father, who has forbidden her from marrying according to her own wishes. To register her defiance, Conant marries an Native American--not the man of her desire, but a man who personifies the wilderness as a site of female rebellion. Later, Mary reconciles with her father and is divorced from Hobomok by means of a simple ritual, leaving her free to marry her original lover. The wilderness thus offers a fantasy space in which women are empowered to make their own marital choices, although her second marriage is achieved at Hobomok's expense. In a similar way, Sedgwick's Hope Leslie is marked as a rebellious woman by her frequent and unexplained disappearances from her Puritan home. She "was always like a crazed body of moonlight nights; there was

never any keeping her within the four walls of a house" (173). Ann S. Stephens' *Mary Derwent* depicts a white woman living among the Shawnee. "Cast out, by her own free will, from civilized life," Stephens' heroine "felt the force of liberty and the wild, sublime pleasures of an unshackled spirit" (Kolodny 201). Similarly, the diaries of pioneer women often record a sense of liberation derived from the absence of formal domestic spaces. "Am wearing the Bloomer dresses now," wrote Miriam Davis Colt in 1856, "find they are well suited to a wild life like mine. Can bound over the prairies like an antelope, and am not in so much danger of setting my clothes on fire while cooking when these prairie winds blow" (Luchetti and Olwell 84). The more conservative Caroline Kirkland is less interested in resisting or revising domestic ideology than she is in addressing the problem of how to sustain it in the absence of the material spaces and objects that typically mark off "women's sphere." "As women feel sensibly the deficiencies of the "salvage" [sic] state," Caroline Kirkland writes,

> so they are the first to attempt the refining process, the introduction of those important nothings on which so much depends. Small additions to the more delicate or showy part of the household gear are accomplished by the aid of some little extra personal exertion. "Spinning money" buys a looking-glass perhaps, or "butter money" a nice cherry table. Eglantines and wood-vine; or wild-cucumber, are sought and transplanted to shade the windows. . . . By and bye a few apple-trees are set out; sweet briars grace the door yard, and lilacs and currant-

> bushes; all by female effort. . . . They are not all accomplished by her own hand indeed, but hers is the moving spirit, and if she do her "spiriting gently" . . . she can scarcely fail to throw over the real homeliness of her lot something of the magic of that IDEAL which has been truly sung. (188-89)

Although Sedgwick, Child, Stephens, Colt, and Kirkland produce widely diverse readings of domesticity on the frontier, their writing collectively implies a necessary relation between women's experience in the West and the 'problem' of women's sphere. The way in which Foote takes up this problem is inflected by hierarchies of literary value predicated upon the lesser status of literary domesticity in the late-nineteenth century. On the one hand, the absence of clearly articulated domestic boundaries on the frontier supplies Foote with the basis for positioning herself as a literary woman--a feminine 'realist' who, dislocated from the fantasy position of domesticity, is able to articulate the real relation of domesticity to late-nineteenth century capitalism, characterized by rapid economic growth, social upheaval and instability, and ubiquitous commodification. But if a happy ending engages sentimental power as a redemptive force in the public sphere, it also signifies 'literary' failure; hence Foote distances her fiction from sub-literary traditions of women's writing by constructing sentimental power as ultimately utopian and unreal.

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III. Bower's Last Stand: Opening a Window of Opportunity in the Mass Market

i. Gender and Access to the Mass Market

Both Mary Hallock Foote and Frances McElrath appropriated the Western novel to respond to changes underway in the American public sphere during the Progressive Era. McElrath figures the frontier as a traditionally masculine domain which, like the public sphere, requires a feminine influence to cleanse it of various social problems. For Foote, this process works in reverse: the pervasiveness of commodification in industrial culture supplants all other value systems, including those traditionally entrusted to the moral authority of women in the home. While both of these authors rely upon the conventions of popular mythology to articulate their resistance to myths of the West as a male proving ground, neither author actually occupied a position as a producer of popular culture per se: Foote's 'literary' position, as argued in the previous chapter, was predicated upon a disavowal of the commodity value of her texts. 'Respectable' publishing houses such as Funk & Wagnall, publisher of *The Rustler,* were also dominated by the view that books were unique objects, not mere commodities; and that publishers should not subordinate completely to commercial objectives (Radway 21-22). Accordingly, *The Rustler* was produced as part of a larger selection of titles for the summer reading market in an effort to appeal to individualized reading tastes[1]. Popular

[1]See chapter one, pp. 41-42.

Western author Bertha Muzzy Bower differs from the other women in this study because she clearly was a mass-market author, capitalizing in particular on the popularity of *The Virginian.*

Born in 1871 in Cleveland, Minnesota, Bower moved with her family to a ranch in Big Sandy, Montana, when she was nineteen, and married Clayton J. Bower the following year. Little is known about Bower's life during her eleven-year marriage other than that she and Clayton had three children together, although sketchy accounts exist which tell of her lack of formal education, marital unhappiness, and stint as a school teacher.[2] After divorcing Clayton, Bower remarried twice, first in 1905 to author Bertrand Sinclair (divorced in 1911); and again in 1921 to Western author and rodeo champion Bud Cowan. Her first publication was a short story in *Lippincott's Magazine,* which appeared in 1904. In that same year, Bower published her first Western novel, *Chip, of the Flying U,* in serial form in Street & Smith's *Popular Magazine,* a general all-fiction magazine established in 1903. Bower soon became a regular contributor to *Popular,* averaging about two novels a year until her death in 1940, in addition to numerous short stories. Although her movements have not been thoroughly documented, Bower appears to have preferred to live in settings which best suited her profession as a Western writer. She and her second husband, Bertrand Sinclair, spent the summer of 1908 writing in a remote cabin in the Monterey mountains. In 1919, Bower established a ranch in Quinsey, California; and in 1920, she and Bud Cowan founded a silver mine in El Picacho,

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[2]Orrin Engen's *Writer of the Plains* is the main source for biographical information on Bower appearing here and elsewhere.

Nevada.[3] Through various film adaptations of *Chip, of the Flying U,* Bower also developed ties to Hollywood, including friendships with cowboy-actors Tom Mix and Gary Cooper. When Bower died in Los Angeles in 1940, obituaries appeared in both regional and national publications, including the *New York Times, Publisher's Weekly,* the *Helena Independent,* the *Kansas City Star,* and *Newsweek Magazine* (Engen 54). Her most famous creation was, without a doubt, the fictional Flying U Ranch, populated by an assortment of cow-punchers of both the comic and heroic variety, whose adventures constituted the mainstay of Bower's career for more than thirty years.

Bower accessed the mass market for Western fiction by 'passing' as a male writer, not only by working under an androgynous signature which reviewers tended to read as masculine, but also by participating in a mode of popular writing opposed to feminine literary traditions and associated with the masculine, "red-blooded" fiction of Owen Wister, Zane Grey, Jack London, and Edgar Rice Burroughs (Slotkin 156-57). Bower's gender neutral signature, which may have been publisher-driven,[4] was not always and only read as masculine, but it clearly functioned as a means of drawing audience attention away from the fact that Bower was a woman. Accordingly, as Bower historian Stanley Davison observes, conflicting

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[3]Bower's writing cabin at the El Picacho sight was recently discovered by Alvin R. McLane, whose article chronicles the six years Bower spent at the mine.

[4]Based on information supplied by Bower's granddaughter, Alvin R. McLane believes that "Bertha masked her gender by using her initials, B.M., because her publishers did not think that her novels would be a commercial success if readers knew that the writer was a woman" (134).

accounts of Bower's gender identity circulated in the *New York Times* throughout her career:

> In 1908 a review of *The Lure of the Dim Trails* ascribed authorship to Mr. B.M. Bower. Some light dawned early in 1909, when a note on *The Lonesome Trail* declared "the author's real name is Miss B.M. Sinclair." Retrogression sets in with the 1914 report on *Ranch at the Wolverine,* credited to "Mr. Bower." The next year, we learn that Miss Sinclair has written *The Flying U's Last Stand;* but when *The Phantom Herd* was reviewed in 1916, it was stated that "Mr. Bower is writing romances of the movies...." A few months later, *The Heritage of the Sioux* was noted with no comment on the author's personal identity. Reviews in the next few years either ignored the matter, or used the word "he," but a note on *The Skyrider* late in 1918 mentions "her book." With *Rim of the World* in 1920, credit went to "Miss B.M. Bower." No one had gotten it exactly straight. But at last a critic of *The Trail of the White Mule* in 1922 identified its author as Mrs. Robert E. Cowan. The truth was out, but it didn't stay out. (4)

Sometimes, quite elaborate fictions were invented to identify Bower. In 1926, a *NYT* reviewer who, in Davison's words,

> obviously had not read his predecessor's material, wrote this gem: "B.M. Bower, the president and general manager of a silver-copper mine in Nevada [this much was true], is a strong but not altogether silent man who, during the

> intermissions in his professional duties, has found time to write thirty-four books, aptly described on the dust jacket of this, his latest, as "rollicking novels of Western adventure." (4, bracketed material mine)

Davison also cites an undocumented description which associates Bower with "the notorious 'Diamondfield Jack' Davis in the murder of two sheepherders in eastern Idaho in 1896" (4). This confusion persists into the 1930s, when dust jackets for Bower novels regularly cite quotations referring to Bower as "he," as if purposefully to perpetuate what Davison describes as a "minor hoax" (5).

Reviews of Bower's fiction, meanwhile, regularly compared it to that of Owen Wister:

> 'Chip' is all right. Better than 'The Virginian.' (*Brooklyn Eagle)*

> 'The Virginian' has found many imitators, but few authors have come as near duplicating Own Wister's magnetic hero as has B.M. Bower in 'Chip of the Flying U.' (*Philadelphia Item)*

> Since the great stir made by Owen Wister in his 'The Virginian' no better picture of the West and Western conditions has come from the hand of any fiction writer... (*Woman's Home Companion* reviewing *Good Indian* [1912])[5]

[5]All reviews quoted in Engen (40-42).

Wister had already been singled out as an author of what was referred to as "red-blooded" fiction. 'Masculine' both in style and content, this mode of popular writing was valorized as a means of recuperating popular writing from the feminine literary traditions which still figured prominently in the popular literary marketplace (Slotkin 194-5) By literary reputation, Bower was linked to Wister and therefore to the masculine mode of popular writing he was known for.

Given that B.M. Bower was the first woman writer to access the mass-market for Western fiction, the fact that she did so by passing as a male writer suggests that the very avenues of access to the mass-distribution of Western fiction were determined within the narrow parameters of gendered writing--that the production of gendered genre, in other words, was a process mediated by the needs and desires of mass-market publishers. Although the popularity of gendered genres such as the romance and the Western is often interpreted as evidence for the psychic needs of the men and women who consume the fiction, relatively little work has been done to address the agency of cultural institutions in constructing reading (and writing) choices according to gendered generic categories. In 1984, Janice Radway pointed out in *Reading the Romance* that, "because literary critics tend to move immediately from textual interpretation to sociological explanation, they conclude easily that changes in textual features or generic popularity must be the simple and direct result of ideological shifts in the surrounding culture" (19). Such assumptions, Radway continues, have led to the conclusion that steady increases in the popularity of romance fiction reflect "a

greater need for romantic fantasy" among women, without addressing the possibility that corporations have "learned to address and overcome certain recurring problems in the production and distribution of books for a mass audience" (20). Radway's introduction to the 1991 edition of *Reading the Romance* reiterates this need to "demonstrate the problems inherent in a simple reading off of cultural meaning or ideology from a single text" (11). By selecting or commissioning certain texts for mass-distribution, classifying these texts into recognizable brand names or generic formula, and organizing distribution networks to access particular populations, publishers structure the mass-market in ways which also articulate their own cultural fantasies, based on the desire for predictable and profitable markets for the fiction they produce. These fantasies play a part in determining the reading and writing choices made available to readers and authors.

Because the commodity value of the Western novel has historically been connected to its function as national mythology, the same gendered exclusions which governed ideals of nation tended to structure, at particular historical moments, the production of the Western novel as a mass-market commodity--a move which sometimes even required cultural producers to resist female-dominated literary markets. A turning point in the history of American popular culture, the publication of the first dime novel by Beadle & Adams in 1860 involved a number of innovations designed to make the production of cheap fiction more predictably profitable (Radway 22-23). Beadle & Adams used various techniques--uniform packaging and pricing, predictable content, industrial modes of

production--to adapt the principles of commercial production to the book industry. These technologies went hand-in-hand with promotional rhetoric appealing to a collective American identity as the basis for constructing a predictable mass market--a strategy that worked well in a period of civil war, when profound national divisions made fictions of national unity especially appealing. Although not typical of the kind of fiction Beadle & Adams would subsequently be known for, Ann S. Stephens' *Malaeska* (1839), a hybrid of frontier and sentimental fiction, was chosen as the first dime novel because it was "American in all its features."[6] In their advice to prospective authors, Beadle & Adams stressed that they wanted only "PURELY AMERICAN NOVELS" (qtd. in Johannsen I, 37). A more precise definition of 'American' surfaced as a certain narrative formula, derived from the tradition of Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales,* became predominant: Violent confrontations between white backwoodsmen and 'savage' Native Americans, often involving the rescue of captive white women. Collectively, these stories mythologized Western expansion as a defining feature of the nation, investing particular importance in the male hero as the principal agent of manifest destiny, defined in relation both to the 'savagery' of the Native American and the utter dependence of female captives (Bold 23-28).

Bower's point of access to mass distribution, Street & Smith's *Popular Magazine,* drew similar ties between commodification,

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[6]Publishers' notice from the first dime-novel edition (June, 1860), included in Benjamin Blom's 1971 reprint (v). For an account of the subsequent shift in Beadle & Adams' fiction in favour of male-centered action-adventure stories, see Christine Bold, *Malaeska's Revenge; or, The Dime Novel Tradition in Western Fiction.*

nationalism, and masculinity. Established in 1903, *Popular* boasted that it was the most widely circulated all-fiction magazine in the nation, inscribing these claims in nationalist rhetoric which tied its industrial mode of production to democratization, thereby resisting high-cultural attitudes toward mass-produced fiction as inherently inferior. The magazine's promotional jargon resonates with anxiety about the status of its fiction, legitimizing its content through the intersecting rhetorics of populism and nationalism. One editorial boasts of the expense of obtaining the American rights to H. Rider Haggard's *Ayesha.* "It would surprise you to know just what we paid for the American rights. . . . Our policy is that nothing is too good or too high-priced for *The Popular Magazine*" (April 1905, n. pag.). Nor does *Popular* engage only hack writers: "That the *Popular Magazine* secures the very best stories by the most famous and most capable authors is further proved by the fact that a serial from the pen of H.G. Wells will be commenced in the February number. We doubt that many of our readers do not know of this gifted author" (April 1905, n. pag.). More often, however, the endless superlatives describing the value of *Popular* are substantiated by circulation figures in a way which ties its popularity to its ability to represent a national reading public:

> "This is only the seventh issue of the magazine" an editorial proclaimed in 1904. "To-day it is the biggest magazine on earth at any price, with a circulation greater than the population of many cities. . . . Its name is known, its contents commented on, and it has an established position upon the display stand of every newsdealer from

> Maine to California and from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada (October 4, n. pag.).

This quasi-democratic rhetoric is pervasive in the editorial pages of *Popular:*

> If our circulation figures are true, we *have* published the right kind of stories, those that appeal to the greatest number of readers. . . . Such generous approval of our efforts to provide the very best magazines at any price could not fail to be gratifying. . . . It also proves one important contention of ours--that the reading public of this country will appreciate honest, enthusiastic and painstaking efforts to provide good literature. (April 1905, n. pag.)

In keeping with its claims to represent the national populace, *Popular* was particularly mindful of assuring its readers that the needs of advertisers were secondary, reinforcing the democratic basis of its format and content. Early in the history of the magazine, a minor controversy had developed with respect to the position of the table of contents, which had been shifting from issue to issue in order to accommodate advertising. This inconvenience to readers was resolved, it was proudly announced, "by placing the contents page on the inside of the front cover" even though "this position . . . is one much coveted by advertisers." The editorial explains this decision through the following anecdote:

> Whitely, the world-famous proprietor of a London department store, was approached by his manager one day with a request that he be given permission to expose

> a new line of silks for sale in a corner of the railed off parlor for ladies. . . ."That apartment [Whitely retorts] is reserved for the comfort and convenience of my customers, and I wouldn't sacrifice one minute of that comfort and convenience for all the silks in London. Dismiss the sale."

This, the editor continues, "about represents the policy of *The Popular Magazine*" (April 1905, n. pag.). The anecdote implies that *Popular*'s editorial policies perform the work of democratization by treating its mass-audience in the same way that the proprietor of a London department store would treat his presumably more well-to-do clientele.

Most of the stories appearing in *Popular* in 1904--the year *Chip, of the Flying U* was published --were printed under masculine signatures, featured male characters, and addressed 'masculine' topics--nautical adventures, mystery, crime, exploration in the West and abroad, intrigue, college life, football, the racetrack, and commerce. In any given issue published at this time, no more than one or two of the stories, if any, were credited to women writers. Attractive female figures, meanwhile, often decorated its colorful covers as if to appeal in particular to the male gaze. This is not to say that Street & Smith presumed its audience to be entirely male. Although *Popular* defined the *value* of its fiction in masculine terms, its advertising pages addressed both men and women, selling products such as "Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup" for children's teething pain, and H.J. Tillotson's "cure" for the 'male' disease of "Varicocele Hydrocele" (October 1904, n. pag.). Often, author

biographies were used to authenticate the fiction, emphasizing the ways in which an author's worldly experience qualified him (or, occasionally, her) as a cultural producer. Henry C. Rowland's "experience as a medical officer on board a transport during the war with Spain gave him a peculiarly keen insight into the seafaring life" (April 1905, 1). George Bronson-Howard was the pseudonym used for a former secret agent, "a man whose keen, incisive brain and marvelous secret service work have more than once solved problems intimately connected with the greatest achievements of American diplomacy" (April 1905, 104). Significantly, these framing devices were rarely used for Bower's fiction, and when they were, they evaded the question of her experiential qualifications in ways which must have been strategic. Bower's *Lure of the Dim Trails* was published as part of a larger series of "stories based on the causes which have materially assisted in the upbuilding of the United States of America." These stories, the editors of *Popular* declared, had two purposes--"the first, entertainment, which is the aim of every *Popular* story, and second, the desire to exploit in fiction the wonderful glory and magnitude of our country. Could we have a better theme, or one more suited to our publication, which is first, last and all the time, an American publication for the American people?" (April 1905, n. pag.). All of the stories in the series would be written, it was promised, "by men who are virtually authorities in their respective subjects" (March 1905, 26). Accordingly, these stories were framed by biographies which emphasized the authors' qualifications--not necessarily as clearly tied to the respective topics as *Popular* had originally claimed they would be. "Captains of Piracy:

A Story of Oil" was written by "Mr. W. Beall Baldwin, who is an old favorite with our readers" (March 1905, 32). Louis Joseph Vance, author of "The Mainspring: a Story of the Gold Mines," was "an ideal man to tell such a story, combining as he does a thorough knowledge of his subject with rare ability as a writer" (April 1906, 44). Bower's contribution to the series is framed differently:

> Cattle-raising, which forms the background of this engrossing narrative, played a very prominent part in the upbuilding and development of the great West, and it is to-day one of the most important, as it is one of the most picturesque, industries of our country. Not a few men now holding high position in the land--notably Theodore Roosevelt--drifted out West in their youth and lived the wild, free life of the ranchman, which possesses a peculiar fascination both for those who experience it and for those who can only read about it. (August 1905,1)

Evading entirely the question of Bower's biographical identity, this introduction validates the story on the basis of its ties to the trajectory of national populism epitomized by Roosevelt, clarifying the more particular conditions requiring Bower's masculine public persona. Although in earlier stories, the editors of *Popular* passively invited their readers to draw their own conclusions about Bower's identity, the more explicit association between her literary persona and national populism required a substitution in which Roosevelt occupied the structural place of the authority behind Bower's fiction.

Patriarchal inscriptions of American nationalism were not uncontested. Just as the gendered status of American citizenship was

being contested in the formal political arena, nationalist mythologies were also subject to feminist revisions, opening windows of opportunity for reinventing women as empowered figures. Bower opened one such window of opportunity when she accessed the mass market for Western fiction. In that same year that *Chip, of the Flying U* first appeared in *Popular*, Bertha Kapernick became the first woman to compete in the bronc-riding competition at Frontier Days in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Governing cultural institutions reacted similarly to both of these developments, using their power over the production and distribution of popular culture to limit the extent to which it could be put to feminist use.

Western historian Candace Savage notes that, by 1916, 240 women performed or competed at rodeos and Wild West shows, often as star attractions, becoming "the first significant group of professional women athletes in North America and the first to be taken seriously by the public and the press" (Savage 76, 80). Competing in all standard rodeo events, including the most dangerous ones, rodeo cowgirls took up a form of heroism traditionally reserved for men, and indeed vied with men for popular attention. The subversive potential of this spectacle did not escape either rodeo organizers, who prevented women from competing for the most prestigious rodeo titles, or the press, who closely scrutinized the rodeo girls' sexual conduct outside of the rodeo arena. This surveillance helped reinforce the very codes of feminine conduct that were transgressed within the space of the rodeo arena. Over the long term, however, this transgressive avenue was closed off. In 1929, when the Rodeo Association of America

(RAA) was formed, women were excluded from positions of power within it. Thereafter, RAA-sanctioned rodeos included fewer women's events. Also in 1929, bronc-rider Bonnie McCarroll was killed at the Pendleton Roundup; although she was not the first woman to die while competing, Pendleton organizers discontinued women's bronc-riding after the accident. Other rodeos followed suit, until the cowgirl athlete was supplanted by the rodeo queen as the iconic Western woman.[7]

In a manner homologous to the domesticating measures taken with women rodeo athletes, generic categories for Western fiction were reorganized after WWI in ways which institutionalized a feminized margin for women readers and writers. Marketed especially for women readers, the magazine *Ranch Romance* emphasized elements of popular Western fiction--particularly the romance plot--which were believed to appeal to women readers, providing a 'feminine' alternative to the many all-Western magazines established at about the same time (Dinan 14, 34-35). Never before had women been singled out as a specialized market for Western fiction. That 45% of its fiction was written by women, according to John Dinan's research, suggests that *Ranch Romance* also supplied women writers with a more welcoming market for their fiction than did the mainstream Western pulps (Dinan 14). The advent of *Ranch Romance* suggests that its publishers were aware that women were already active as writers and readers in the field. At the very moment when these women became visible, however, the generic framework which structured the production and reception of popular

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[7]This section summarizes Candace Savage's *Cowgirls*, 54-94.

Western fiction shifted in ways which channeled these women into conventional positions. Possibly because Bower did not fit prevailing generic categories as represented by *Western Story* and *Ranch Romance,* she continued to publish most of her fiction in *Popular,* which still retained a more flexible general fiction format.

ii. BM Bower's Window of Opportunity: *Chip, of the Flying U*

The boundaries Bower negotiated to appropriate the popular Western are identical to the opportunities it afforded her as a writer. Like many of her female counterparts in avant garde fields of women's writing, known collectively as 'New Woman' writers, Bower distanced herself from feminized literary traditions through the generic choices she made. Bower's first novel, *Chip, of the Flying U* (1904), inscribes this very process: rather than rely on a typical adventure plot, the novel's central conflict has to do with the relationship between gender and cultural authority. The hero, Chip, is a cowboy as well as a talented artist. Lacking, because of his humble background, a means of access to *status* as an artist, Chip reluctantly agrees to let the upper-class heroine of the novel, Dell Whitmore, take credit for one of his paintings so that it can be sold. Chip starts to regret his decision, however, after his painting becomes a sensation in the art world. Chip's growing resentment fuels a romantic conflict between the two protagonists, resolved when Dell ends her imposture and Chip is publicly recognized as the artist of the painting. Dramatizing the demise of the feminized cultural authorities Dell represents, Bower inscribes her own authority in ways which identify it with that of her male hero, Chip.

The success of *Chip* should be understood in terms of the tremendous sales of Owen Wister's *The Virginian,* published three years earlier, which not only identified a substantial market for middlebrow Western adventure novels--redeeming the Western adventure genre from its denigrated status as a staple of the dime novel--but also moved pulp-fiction publishers to capitalize on *The Virginian's* success. On the basis of a survey conducted by *Popular Magazine* shortly after it began publication, and in the wake of *The Virginian's* two-year stint on American bestseller lists (Hackett 98-99), the editors of *Popular* identified a "desire for stories of Western ranch life" which "resulted in the publishing of B.M. Bower's famous novelette, "Chip of the Flying U" (April 1905, n. pag.). Reviews of the hardbound edition of *Chip* compared it--favourably--to *The Virginian,* despite the dramatic differences between the two novels: in *Chip,* nobody gets killed, no cattle are rustled, and its hero spends more time painting than he does bronc-busting. An identification between *Chip* and *The Virginian* is sustained with respect to the Western American framework and the structure of the romantic conflict: in both novels, the heroine is introduced as an independent 'New Woman' figure who ultimately succumbs to the hero in a scene of sexual surrender. *Chip* departs significantly from Wister's adventure model, however, before it reaches its conventional resolution, an effect of the ambiguous relation between *Chip* and other novels of its 'type.'

Several isolated scenes in *Chip* are at odds with the more conventional plot structure, especially with respect to the way gender is constructed. The opening pages of *Chip* challenge explicitly

certain formulaic gender stereotypes: Crisis erupts at the Flying U Ranch when word is received of the immanent arrival of the Boss's sister, Dell Whitmore, newly graduated from medical college. As the Flying U cowboys speculate on Dell's "brand", we are treated to a detailed overview of female types in Western fiction:

> "There's just two bunches to choose from. There's the Sweet Young Things that faint away at sight of a six-shooter, and squawk and catch at your arm if they see a garter snake, and blush if you happen to catch their eye suddenly, and cry if you don't take off your hat every time you see them a mile off."
>
> . . . . "That don't seem to line up with the doctor's diploma," commented Weary.
>
> "Well, she's the other kind then--and if she is, the Lord have mercy on the Flying U! She'll buy her some spurs and try to rope and cut out and help brand. Maybe she'll wear double-barreled skirts and ride a man's saddle and smoke cigarettes."
>
> . . . "I'll bet she don't run in either bunch," began Weary. "I'll bet she's a skinny old maid with a peaked nose and glasses, that'll round us up every Sunday and read tracts at our heads, and come down on us with both feet about tobacco hearts and whisky livers, and the evils and devils wrapped up in cigarette paper" (18-19).

Imagining Dell as either helpless or unsexed, the Flying U cowboys read her immanent arrival as an invasion of male territory, and retaliate by planning a fake lynching; then "the old maid would sure

know she was out West" (22). At the appointed hour, Dell arrives at the ranch, escorted by Chip, and is greeted by the horrifying spectacle of a "limp form. . . lifted to the back of a snorting pony."

The staged lynching playfully challenges the very paradigm which encodes *Chip*'s generic status as a successor to *The Virginian.* It invokes an episode in *The Virginian* in which the protagonist must, out of duty to his employer, hang his best friend for cattle rustling. This pivotal ritual in the making of the masculine hero derives its meaning as such from the fact that The Virginian's sweetheart, Molly Stark, incapable of comprehending vigilante justice, is excluded from participation even as a spectator, thereby constructing the lynching as a hermetically sealed, ritualistic space, intelligible only to its male participants. While the Virginian is off carrying out this unsavory duty, his boss lectures Molly Stark on the morals of lynching, but comprehending the righteousness of vigilante justice proves beyond her. Bower's version of this event transforms a hysterical female spectator into a participant in the ritual at the moment when the lynching is exposed as a ritual performance. The struggle between good and evil is literally a straw man--for that is what Bower's lynching victim proves to be--which masks the real function of the spectacle as a platform for masculine heroism staged in order to produce a hysterical feminine response. "She'll be so rattled," one cowboy predicts, "she won't know whether it's a man or a mule we've got strung up" (22). The hysterical response predicted by the cowboys will signify Dell's exclusion from the cowboy community, ritualistically cleansing it of feminine contamination. It only takes a moment, however, for Dell to decode the performance, and when she

does, she also becomes an active participant in it: "Miss Whitmore was not a stupid woman. . . . She tore her eyes from the confused jumble of gesticulating men and restive steeds to look sharply at Chip. He met her eyes squarely for an instant, and the horror oozed from her and left only amused chagrin that they would try to trick her so. "Hurry up," she commanded, "so I can be in at the death. Remember, I'm a doctor" (37). Originally devised to exclude Dell, the lynching becomes her rite of passage into Western life.

The romantic conflict between Chip and Dell ultimately uses Dell's independence as a vehicle for constructing the male hero. Dell's medical training, for example, is trivialized: she is known 'affectionately' as "The Little Doctor," and, when Chip is injured, she is made his nurse--not his doctor. Dell's romantic involvement with Chip culminates the process by which Dell's original autonomy is undermined. Played out in the field of cultural politics, however, and involving similarities between Bower's own situation as a virtually anonymous author, and the way in which she places her hero in the same predicament, this romantic conflict also inscribes Bower's appropriation of cultural authority as a Western writer.

Both Dell and Chip are artists, but in different ways. As part of her college education, Dell has had formal instruction from "good teachers" (89); Chip, on the other hand, has never had a single lesson, but Dell recognizes his raw talent in the same way that she does her own shortcomings. Half way through the novel, a serious riding injury leaves Chip bedridden with a broken ankle. While nursing him back to health, Dell begins working on a landscape painting. It depicts "a scene in the edge of the Bad Lands down the river," a place

"Chip knew . . . well." The two become embroiled in a "heated discussion over the foreground, for the Little Doctor wanted him to sketch in some Indian tepees and some squaws for her, and Chip absolutely refused to do so. He said there were no Indians in that country, and it would spoil the whole picture anyway" (171). After Dell storms out of the room, Chip is reminded of "a scene he had witnessed in that same basin," and mentally superimposes it onto Dell's landscape:

> Dirty gray snow drifts, where a chinook had cut them, and icy side hills made the place still drearier. And the foreground--if the Little Doctor could get *that*, now, she would be doing something! --ah! that foreground. A poor, half-starved range cow with her calf which the round-up had overlooked in the fall, stood at bay against a steep cut bank. Before them squatted five great, gaunt wolves intent upon fresh beef for their supper. But the cow's horns were long, and sharp, and threatening, and the calf snuggled close to her side, shivering with the cold and the fear of death. The wolves licked their cruel lips and their eyes gleamed hungrily--but the eyes of the cow answered them, gleam for gleam. If it could be put upon canvas just as he had seen it, with the bitter, biting cold of a frozen chinook showing gray and sinister in the slaty sky-- (174).

Unable to resist the urge any longer, Chip transforms Dell's landscape into this "wordless tragedy of the West" (179). Expecting Dell to be furious at him, Chip is surprised to see Dell visibly moved by his

painting. Dell later convinces Chip, who is reluctant to "shoulder the blame" for the work, to let her pass the painting off as her own so that she can convince a well-connected suitor of hers to sell it on her behalf (184). Chip agrees to the plan, but secretly resents Dell's appropriation of his talent, which is compounded by a previous offense: Dell has been flirting with Chip while corresponding with a Dr. Cecil Grantham, making Chip believe that she is deliberately flaunting both her sexual and social power over him.

Through Dell's intervention, the painting is put on public display, receives rave reviews from ordinary viewers and critics alike, and is sold for a handsome price. Art critics, however, suspect the truth, contending that "the work has been done with a power and boldness undoubtedly masculine" (215). The masquerade ends as predicted when Dell, sensing Chip's growing resentment, publicly discloses her imposture and persuades Chip to paint a sequel to "The Last Stand," this time in his own name. Subsequently, Dr. Cecil Grantham is revealed to be Dell's best friend (a woman), rather than her lover. Chip's restored masculinity is signified both by Dell's sexual availability, and by his cultural autonomy as the recognized artist of "The Last Stand." As if to satisfy minimal requirements for adventure narratives, Bower concludes the novel with a final action scene not connected to the main plot, in which Chip saves Dell from a runaway horse, leaving her shaken and momentarily vulnerable to "the touch of lips that were curved and thin and masterful" (262).

The novel itself is authorized as 'authentic' Western fiction on the basis of Chip's masculinized cultural authority. The initial conflict between Chip and Dell depicts a system of cultural production which

wrongfully excludes certain groups from positions of cultural authority, resulting in false representations of the West. Although Chip has talent and experience enough to represent the 'real' West, his lack of education and social connections excludes him from status as an 'artist.' Dell, on the other hand, has the access Chip lacks, but not the talent. Given Dell's identification as a New Woman--college educated, professional, independent--her falsely represented landscape is explicitly associated both with women's culture and with the elitism of institutions empowered to sanctify artistic works. Meanwhile, Chip's contribution to the painting is described according to the criteria of realism: to Dell's picturesque landscape he adds "a few dabs of dirty white." The scene he adds to the foreground of the painting is one he had actually witnessed in his capacity as a Westerner, and it appeals to the everyday experience of the interpretive community at the ranch, who are able to authenticate its 'reality' right down to the identity of the cow in the picture:

> "By golly, I don't see how you done that without seein' it happen," exclaimed Slim, looking very dazed and mystified.
>
> "That's a Diamond Bar cow," remarked J.G., abstractedly....
>
> "By golly, that's right," chimed in Slim, "That there's the cow I had sech a time chasin' out uh the bunk down on the bottom. I run her till I was plum sick, an' so was she, by golly. I'd know her among a thousand...." (190).

Chip's abilities as a realist are read as masculine by these viewers, who instinctively question Dell's claim to have authored the painting.

"How the dickens did you get that cow an' calf in?" they ask her. "You must a had a photograph t' work from" (190). Local cultural authorities in the review press are equally suspicious: "It has been rumored that the artist is a woman," a newspaper reports, "but the best critics are slow to believe this, claiming that the work has been done with a power and boldness undoubtedly masculine" (215). The elitism which at first excludes Chip from status as an artist is eventually overturned in a way which links Chip's cultural sanctification to the democratic process: a wealthy senator buys the painting and puts it on public display, using his power as a democratically elected official to give Chip the recognition he deserves, and to make the work available to the local community. Given the way in which the authenticity of the painting is marked as a masculine quality, the democratic processes leading to the sanctification of Chip's authority explicitly privileges the male subject.

The authenticity of the painting as a representation of the West, however, is constructed differently. Entitled "The Last Stand," it invokes and challenges narratives of violent conquest, using the image of cow and calf besieged by wolves as a substitute for General Custer besieged by Native Americans. After completing the painting, Chip wages a diatribe against a Western story he reads in one of the "Six Leading" popular magazines:

> I wish I had the making of the laws," he exclaims. "I'd put a bounty on all the darn fools that think they can write cowboy stories just because they rode past a roundup once, on a fast train. . . . Huh! A cow-puncher togged up

> like he was going after the snakiest bronk in the country, when he was only going to drive to town in a buckboard! 'His pistol belt and dirk and leathern chaps'--oh, Lord; oh, Lord! And spurs! I wonder if he thinks it takes spurs to ride a buckboard? Do they think, back East, that spurs grow on a man's heels out here and won't come off? (199)

On the one hand, Chip's alternative to this tradition is derived from the equally conventional mode of depicting femininity on the frontier as threatened, besieged, and requiring male protection. Chip himself had shot the wolves during the actual encounter--a response which the painting also provokes from its male viewers, who have to be reminded that the wolves are "nothing but paint" (191). "I'd shor like t' be cached behind that ole pine stub with a thirty-thirty an' a fist full uh shells," one viewer exclaims (191). Chip's ability as an artist of realism, however, is marked by his capacity to transcend his own involvement in the moment--as a man charged with protecting the herd--and to occupy what is marked as an androgynous position, from which he is able also to identify with the besieged cow and calf. The painting therefore affects both male and female viewers: as opposed to the violently protective responses of the cowboys, Dell's first response impulse is to identify with the besieged cow. "Oh, the poor, brave thing," she whispers tearfully (181). In this respect, realism is marked as an androgynous discourse which bridges gender differences in order to construct a common 'reality,' making the artist of realism an androgynous figure. Physical descriptions of Chip, in

fact, point out 'feminine' features, such as his "womanish" lips and lashes that "many a girl would give a good deal to own" (26-27)[8].

The interpretive community organized under Chip's newly achieved cultural authority is also quite different from the one invoked in the opening lynching performance devised by the cowboys to alienate Dell. Certainly, there are limits to the extent to which androgyny functions in the text as a basis for disrupting gender stereotypes given that the value of Chip's painting is determined by its 'masculine' qualities. It is also differentiated from the mass-market framework in which *Chip, of the Flying U* was initially produced: whereas Chip is a 'serious' realist who produces tragic depictions of the West, Bower was known above all for her entertaining ranch humor, of which the fake-lynching scene in *Chip, of the Flying U* is typical. Furthermore, at the moment when Chip is able to produce paintings under his own name, the feminine presence in his work is almost completely obliterated: his sequel to "The Last Stand," entitled "The Spoils of Victory," depicts the same wolves nawing on what remains of the cow and calf. Yet the similarity between Bower's own use of an androgynous persona as a mode of access to the mass market, and the androgynous position Chip occupies as a realist, suggests an identification between Bower and her hero which enabled her to open a window of opportunity as a Western writer in the male-dominated mass market for Western

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[8]Although the illustration of "The Last Stand" included in the hard cover version of *Chip of the Flying U* was actually painted by a man, Western artist Charles M. Russell, it contains traces of a woman's authority insofar as Bower's text probably dictated the content of Russell's painting, commissioned after the serial version of *Chip* appeared. See Frederic G. Renner, *Charles M Russell: Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture in the Amon G. Carter Collection*, p. 93.

fiction. In some of her subsequent fiction, Bower was able to deploy the cultural authority she achieved more transgressively.

iii. From Androgyny to Feminism: Initiating Change in the Mass-Market Western.

Bower's more explicit focus on female-centered narratives corresponds with her growing status as an author. Following the first appearance of *Chip* in October of 1904, stories by "the Author of *Chip, of the Flying U*" or "of the Flying U Ranch" appeared regularly in *Popular Magazine.* In 1905, the editors announced that "the extraordinary popularity of *"Chip, of the Flying U,"* and other tales of ranch life by B.M. Bower, has led us to arrange with the author for a series of "Flying U" stories, each complete in itself" (April 1905, 8). At about the same time, Bower established what would be a long-term relationship with *Little Brown* to issue this work in hardbound editions. That Bower's name never appeared on bestseller lists is an unreliable indication of her circulation status because these lists excluded pulp novels and magazines. A better indication of her popularity is the fact that *Chip, of the Flying U* was adapted to the screen on several occasions. By the time Bower published *Lonesome Land* in 1911-12, she had a well-established reputation as a Western writer. An enthusiastic letter to the editor appearing in *Popular* praises the authenticity of Bower's fiction. "Let the Cowboys Speak for Themselves," a 1910 headline read, introducing a letter to the editor from three cowboys at the 7-L Ranch in Chinook, Montana: "I have lived all my life on the range of Montana and Wyoming, and I have never read a yarn of broncho fighters by any other author

that could equal B.M. Bower. The winter is on here now and the work consists of riding fence and "riding a fork handle," so your magazine is eagerly looked forward to" (April 1, 1910, n. pag.).

The publication of *Lonesome Land* corresponds with the period in which Bower's signature became entrenched as a proven commodity. Beginning where more conventional Westerns end--in marriage--*Lonesome Land* is the story of a battered woman's Western initiation, in which illusive domestic fantasies are supplanted by the reality of an abusive, alcoholic husband whose negligence forces the heroine to rely on her own resources, structuring the marriage experience as itself a frontier state. Val's initiation begins the moment she steps off the train, expecting her fiancé--ironically named Manley--to meet her, marry her in a modest but meaningful wedding ceremony, and whisk her off to the idyllic cottage he has prepared for her arrival. During her long-distance engagement, heavily embellished letters from Manley have fed Val's fanciful expectations--which are speedily crushed. Manley is not at the station when Val arrives because, it turns out, he is hopelessly drunk. In his place, Manley sends his friend Kent, who soon becomes Val's confidante as Manley's conduct becomes steadily worse. Manley neglects the farm, gambles, abuses Val verbally and physically, rustles cattle and brands them with Val's initials, and eventually commits murder. Val's means of coping with her crumbling marriage are especially suggestive. Needing cash, and having time on her hands because of Manley's neglect, Val writes stories for popular magazines. Through the income derived from the sale of these stories, along with emotional support from Kent, Val

shows signs that she will eventually become self-sufficient, although the novel's ambiguously tragic ending makes Val's future unclear: A fugitive from the law, Manley is killed before Val's eyes, leaving Val hysterical and Kent unable to comfort her.

Lonesome Land returns to issues raised in *Chip, of the Flying U* in ways which suggest a continuity between the two novels despite the fact that one is comic while the other is 'tragic.' The fact that Manley's letters to Val feed her fanciful and false expectations, and that Val resists the social reality of her position specifically by writing, inflects the narrative with cultural-political implications similar to those raised in *Chip, of the Flying U,* but takes gender more seriously as a key category in the conflict. On the basis of Manley's letters, Val has developed a "mental picture of [Cold Spring Ranch]--a picture of a gurgly little brook with rocks and watercress and distracting little pools." Certain gaps in Manley's discourse call into question the truth-value of this "impressionistic" and "hazy" picture. "A shack," he writes of her new home, is "but a synonym for a small cottage," and although "the flowers are n't [sic] doing as well as they might" Val's "tender care" is all that they require to flourish. Manley's deceptions mask the reality of Val's social relation to him--her status as property which, like their run-down shack, is subject to his neglect. The social reality of Val's position emerges as Manley binges on gambling and alcohol, and becomes abundantly clear when Val learns that Manley has been branding rustled calves in her name. Manley's plagiarized cattle, like his deceptively prettified letters to Val, codify his power over her in a manner analogous to writing.

Whereas "The Last Stand" first circulates under a woman's signature, but is self-evidently masculine precisely because it is so 'real,' a different argument is implied in *Lonesome Land,* which suggests that women in particular need positions of cultural authority in order to rewrite certain 'false' representations. Branded illegitimately and violently by the same man who has seduced Val into an abusive marriage, the cattle in *Lonesome Land* are images which deconstruct the interpretive framework of "The Last Stand." Depicting a scene of maternity besieged by the predatory landscape embodied in the wolves, "The Last Stand" provokes a rescue response in its male viewers, who self-identify as protectors of the cow and her calf. In *Lonesome Land,* Manley, not the landscape, is the malevolent agent in the text, and, moreover, because Kent's capacity to rescue Val is limited, Val relies more heavily upon her own resources than she does on Kent's support. In the same way that McElrath's *The Rustler* depicts competition for property as a violent conflict which disrupts the maternal bond, *Lonesome Land* also deploys cattle rustling as a trope for differentiating between women's real and imaginary positions within capitalist patriarchy: The imaginary position accepts the brand as a 'natural' sign of the essential relation between the (female) cow and her (male) owner. This naturalized reading of the brand masks the real relation between the wrongfully branded calf and the rustler, who breaks the natural maternal bond between mother and calf in order to claim ownership. The structural relation is identical to that between Val and Manley: if their marriage breaks Val's 'natural' family ties and

subjects her to Manley's control, exposing this relation gives Val the wherewithal to end the marriage.

Writing Western stories for popular magazines is Val's first act of resistance; the second is to free the rustled calves who, when they return to their legitimately branded mothers, expose Manley's plagiarism by recuperating the maternal bond. Both strategies encode Val's resistance as an intervention in Manley's misrepresentations. The text is ambivalent, however, with respect to the intersection between cultural and sexual politics: On the one hand, the market for authentic Western fiction produced by 'real' Westerners constitutes Val's access to literary capital. Her first attempt, a story of college life, is unsuccessful, but in the rejection letter Val is advised, because she lives "in the very heart of the West," to try writing Western stories instead (234). This process does not necessarily put Val in a position of agency as a cultural producer, but it does advance her position in material terms. Val is driven to write --"by accident, almost"--because she finds it "intolerable having to ask a man for money," especially one like her husband who "seems to resent it dreadfully" (230-31). The income earned from the sale of the stories is the initial step toward economic independence, which later gives Val the resolve to free the stolen calves and expose the lie she has been living. Her agency as a cultural producer is mediated, however, by the value of her writing as real capital: "It isn't nice to say that I'm writing, not for any particularly burning desire to express my thoughts, nor for the sentiment of it, but to earn money. It's terribly sordid, isn't it?" (231) The authenticity of her fiction is also called into question by Kent's response to it. That Kent,

a 'real' Westerner himself, is the only character in the text qualified to evaluate Val's stories implies a discourse community dominated by the same ties between masculinity and realism which mark the value of Chip's painting in *Chip, of the Flying U.* Kent's response to one of Val's stories suggests a degree of ambivalence about her capacity to produce authentic Western fiction: The story leaves him with "a dim impression that it was a story with people in it whom one does not try to imagine as ever being alive," and portrays "a West which beyond its evident scarcity of inhabitants, was not the West he knew anything about" (237).

Although the relation between Val's access to literary capital and her cultural agency is ambivalent, *Lonesome Land* constructs its own authority as more revisionist than Val's. The text turns various Western tropes on their heads in a way which exposes in particular their patriarchal underpinnings. Manley's abuse and neglect undermine Val's domestic fantasies, redefining marriage as the woman's frontier through a series of initiatory experiences: Val's arrival at the "squalid," weed-choked shack that she would share with a man she barely knew, her gaze "over the great, treeless, unpeopled land which had swallowed her alive" (70), her realization that Manley is a drunk and a thief--all of these experiences are patterned as an individuating process, culminating in Val's decision to divorce Manley. "Lonesome Land was doing its work. She was beginning to think as an individual--as a woman; not merely as a member of conventional society" (210). That the text names Val's transformation using the title of the novel itself suggests that the revisionist work performed by the text is identical to that performed

by Val's initiatory experiences on the frontier. Val's story is one, moreover, which other women share. "You had to fight that thing out for yourself," a female friend tells her, "every woman has to. . . I'm glad you've woke up to the fact that Man Fleetwood did n't git a deed to you, body and soul, when he married you" (288).

The structure of the narrative resonates with the uneasy relation between the novel's feminist project and the generic conventions and cultural politics which determine its generic position. In its hardcover edition, *Lonesome Land* was packaged as a mainstream Western novel--with cover-art depicting a saddle, lariat, and Western landscape, and a frontispiece illustration of a cowboy on horseback racing "over the uneven prairie." The spectacle of cowboys in action does not, however, figure prominently in its content. The illustration in fact depicts the only directly represented action scene in the entire novel--Kent on his way to rescue Val from a brush-fire threatening to engulf her homestead (another example of Manley's inadequacies). A more dramatic action sequence, in which Manley is shot and killed by a posse after he commits a murder, is reported indirectly by Kent and Val as they watch helplessly through a pair of field glasses. Not only is this spectacle played out at a distance, but the relation of rescue which usually underlines violence in Westerns is disallowed: at this pivotal moment, Kent is redundant, unable either to prevent the ugly spectacle as it unfolds, or to protect Val from its traumatic effects. "He realized suddenly that this was no way to comfort her, and stopped. He patted her shoulder with a sense of blank helplessness. He could make love--but this was not the time for love-making; and

since he was denied that outlet for his feelings, he did not know what to do" (321). The best Kent can do is ask a female neighbor to "pack [Val] up and take her to town as quick as God'll let you" (322). A number of conventions, then, are invoked in a way which complies with the requirements of Western adventure stories--a woman in distress, a cowboy-rescuer, an outlaw, and a violent confrontation. We are left, however, with a shadowy spectacle of violence witnessed by an ineffective hero and a heroine beyond rescue. The death of Manley, meanwhile, conveniently obviates another possible--but more radical--conclusion--that Lonesome Land will finish its work by nourishing Val's rebirth as an individual, a process which had begun with Val's decision to divorce Manley.

Resistance is more clearly manifest, however, in the lack of a formal resolution between the patterns of rescue and individuation which drive the narrative in conflicting directions. Val is left suspended in limbo between these two alternatives, on the one hand freed from her marriage to Manley, but on the other hand too traumatized by her ordeal to benefit from the freedom Manley's death implies; on the one hand vulnerable and in need of rescue, but on the other hand inconsolable. The only resolution is one Kent invents to comfort himself as he leaves Val under the care of a female neighbor: "'I can take care of the man's side of this business, fast enough,' Kent confessed whimsically, 'but there's some things it takes a woman to handle.'" He glanced again over his shoulder, gave a huge sigh of relief when he glimpsed Arline's thin face as she passed the window and knelt beside the couch, and turned with a lighter heart to meet the sheriff." It is unclear what help Kent can

offer the Sheriff at this point, or what Arline will be able to do for Val; what Kent takes comfort in has more to do with his rather unconvincing belief that there is "business" he can take care of.

By sanctioning divorce in a frontier setting, Bower puts to feminist use the Turnerian model of the frontier as an Americanizing terrain. An identical trope circulated in woman suffrage discourse, which often cited the fact that the Western territories were the first to implement woman suffrage, in addition to other legal reforms encompassing divorce and property laws, as proof that America's manifest destiny included female emancipation. "Nowhere else, upon the planet," Oregon suffrage activist Abigail Duniway remarks in her memoirs, "are the inalienable rights of woman as much appreciated as on the newly settled Borders of these United States" (qtd. in Matsuda 51-52). Speaking about woman suffrage in 1913, Roosevelt had wryly remarked, "I think civilization is coming Eastward gradually" (qtd. in Jensen 50). That anti-suffrage propaganda responded by painting the West as a savage hotbed of radicalism rather than the wellspring of the American character accounts for the fact that *Lonesome Land* evades the issue of Val's plans to divorce by killing her husband, disarticulating to a certain extent the novel's ties to an explicitly feminist tradition of Western populism. Nevertheless, *Lonesome Land* resists the gendered exclusions which, because of the ties between its commodity status and patriarchal constructions of American national identity, tended to inflect popular Western fiction.

The similarities between *Lonesome Land* and *The Rustler* are also striking. Both texts appropriate the Western novel in order to

depict a woman's Western initiation, a process which involves decoding and revising received mythologies about the West and women's place within it. Both texts find certain familiar conventions from the genre particularly useful: the analogy between women and cattle, based upon the reproductive role of cattle, their ties to capitalist production, and the violent manner in which they are marked as private property; the way in which the concept of the frontier as a liminal region can be deployed to challenge gender-based social distinctions; and the idea of the self-made individual as a basis for valorizing some mode of feminism. By passing as a male writer, which is in effect what her androgynous signature enabled her to do, Bower accessed a mode of popular writing that was valued in particular because its commodification was grounded in its cultural work as a form of nation-building, and was therefore a mode of cultural production associated with the authority of male writers. Unlike any other woman writer of Western fiction, B.M. Bower achieved status as a nationally renowned author, and was in a position to initiate change in the hegemonic mythologies which defined American nationhood and citizenship. That she was a woman, meanwhile, undermined the essentialist and gendered division of literary labor which tended to mediate the production and reception of these mythologies.

One indication of the extent to which Bower was able to initiate change in the field is the fact that she was eventually able to speak as both a woman and a Westerner in the popular press. Although Bower usually avoided publicity, in 1924 a letter from her was published in *Adventure Magazine,* which responded to the

tendency of historians to represent Western women as passive, unproductive, and out of place in the West:

> Certain mental qualities were an absolute necessity to survive the hardships and the dangers. Courage, patience, a quick, sure judgment, that imagination which we now call "vision," and a big, sympathetic spirit of helpfulness were all a part of the mental equipment that could meet emergencies and turn unexpected developments to advantage. There are certain fundamental laws of metaphysics which can not be ignored . . . . The men and women who had to depend on their wit and their endurance and their initiative for their very existence *could* not be clods. (qtd. in Engen 51)

Although such conditions produced "the six-gun type," these men had mothers and wives and sisters. "There were hundreds of them," Bower insists, "and I never met one of the colorless, forlorn type . . . . they were alert, vibrant with interest in all that went on around them; ready to talk your head off, usually, and never happier than when they could talk and talk of past adventures and paint in all the dramatic high lights" (51). Although Bower adds her voice "to the protest" against "overemphasizing the six-gun side of the West," she maintains that "wild times do come to those who travel the dim trails. . . . The 'buoyant pages of adolescent pageantry' have not all been turned, take my word for it, because I am living through a few chapters right now" (52).

By the time this autobiographical letter was published in *Adventure Magazine,* Bower's gender was both well-known and a

non-issue to *Adventure Magazine* editors. The *Adventure* letter introduced Bower matter-of-factly as the "well known . . . author of "Cowcountry" and other Western fiction. While not an old-timer of the SouthWest, she was born and raised in the NorthWest and has lived most of her life among cattle and cowpunchers" (qtd. in Engen 48). Such an introduction did not occur to the editors of *Popular* when they published *Lure of the Dim Trails* in 1904. In her early career, then, Bower clearly worked with generic limits which made her sex a problematic presence, but by 1924--four years after national woman suffrage became law--Bower was able to position herself as a spokesperson for the misrepresented Western woman. The popular Western novel supplied Bower with a means of acquiring this position, but it was not long lasting. The advent of *Ranch Romance* sanctioned a feminized margin within the field of popular Western fiction which discouraged further transgressive appropriations such as the one Bower enacted.

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IV. The Frontiers of the Popular Western Novel: Mourning Dove's *Cogewea.*

i. Introduction: Women Writers and Native Americans

Euro-American women and Native-Americans occupy overlapping categories in early nineteenth-century fiction. The savagery of the Native-American on the one hand and the passivity of the white female captive on the other construct both groups as the "other" of the white male hero, who acts as both the agent and justification of Euro-American expansion. Just as his capacity to survive in the wilderness is defined in relation to the helpless female captive, his right to conquer it is defined in relation to the savage Indian captor. Nineteenth-century Euro-American women writers often empathized with Native Americans in their fiction and prose, and were more ambivalent about Euro-American expansion and conquest (Kolodny 11). Lydia Maria Child, for example, championed causes in favour of Native American rights. Similarly, Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827) includes lengthy passages criticizing Euro-American abuses of Native Americans.

This feature became less important in women's Western writing at the turn of the century, when women Western writers made more overt claims about the status of women as individuals, American citizens, and subjects. Bower's *Lonesome Land* and McElrath's *The Rustler* both tell stories about women's individuation through frontier experience. In these novels, female characters newly or nearly married go through a series of initiatory experiences that teach them to rely on their own resources. Elinore Pruitt

Stewart's tremendously popular *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* (1914) chronicles a similar initiation in autobiographical form. The frontiers in these texts include no Native American figures either to challenge or to condone Euro-American entitlement to the land. Whether the struggle for resources is between ranchers and rustlers, or between homesteaders and the hostile landscape, Euro-American entitlement to the land is a non-issue. In this respect, all of the women writers discussed thus far are complicit with the project of Euro-American expansion. Their silence on the issue of Native-American entitlement corresponds to their closer identification with the project of expansion.

Historically, the political disparity between Euro-American women and Native Americans had also widened. By the turn of the century, Euro-American women were enfranchised in several states, had more autonomy in their marriages due to liberal divorce and property laws, and were better represented in the professions and in the labor market. Meanwhile, tribally-held Native American land-holdings had been whittled away by the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887, Native American children were being dispossessed of their culture in Euro-American run "Indian" schools, and Native Americans were not recognized as U.S. citizens until 1924, four years after the Nineteenth Amendment was passed. Even after Congressional legislation formerly recognized Native Americans as citizens, the states of Arizona and New Mexico still refused to acknowledge their right to vote (Fuchs 206-7). While Euro-American women had made significant gains in their struggle for recognition as subjects, Native Americans had suffered corresponding losses.

ii. Conquest, Entitlement, and the Popular Western

Like *The Rustler* and *Lonesome Land,* Mourning Dove's *Cogewea, The Half-Blood* is the story of a woman's initiation on the frontier and escape from a repressive marriage. When she published *Cogewea* in 1927, the Colvile[1] author was widely believed to be the first Native American woman novelist. Mourning Dove was born between 1882 and 1888. Her mother was Colvile, her legal father was either Lake or Okanogan, and she may have had Irish ancestry as well.[2] For most of her childhood, Mourning Dove lived on the Colville reservation in Washington State, which, like other Native American reservations, had recently been parceled into individually-owned tracts of land under the provisions of the Dawes Allotment Act. Educated sporadically in Canadian Indian schools run by French-Canadian Nuns, Mourning Dove read pulp Westerns as a child, and had completed her own Western by 1914. In that year, she met ethnographer and activist Lucillus McWhorter, who agreed to help edit and publish *Cogewea,* while also urging Mourning Dove to focus her literary efforts upon folklore-collecting. The result of her efforts in this area, *Coyote Stories,* was published in 1933. Although a very committed author, Mourning Dove rarely profited from writing, subsisting on piecemeal wage-labor for most of her adult life, and

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[1]The Colvile was the tribe of Mourning Dove's mother; it was one of many tribes included in the Colville reservation (spelled with two 'l's), where Mourning Dove grew up.

[2]Biographical sources include Mourning Dove, *Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography*; Jay Miller's introduction to this volume (xi-xxiv); Alanna Kathleen Brown, "Looking Through the Glass Darkly: the Editorialized Mourning Dove," and "Mourning Dove's Canadian Recovery Years, 1917-1919;" and Jay Miller, "Mourning Dove: The Author as Cultural Mediator."

suffering perpetually from bouts of illness and depression. She died a relatively anonymous figure in 1936, but has recently received more attention in the wake of renewed interest in Native American writers.

Set on the Flathead Reservation in Montana during the period following the Dawes General Allotment Act, *Cogewea* is named after its mixed-blood heroine, and tells the story of her pursuit by two suitors: Jim LaGrinder, an honorable mixed-blood cowboy; and Densmore, a scheming Euro-American tenderfoot. Its Great Plains setting, cowboy characters, ranch humour, and romance-adventure plot clearly establish its affiliation with popular Western fiction of the period, yet, by telling the story of a mixed-blood woman's successful struggle to repossess both her property and her identity, *Cogewea* re-opens questions that had become moot for many of Mourning Dove's contemporaries.

The eponymous heroine of Cogewea is the product of a miscegenated union between her Native-American mother, now dead, and her Euro-American father, who has disowned his two mixed-blood daughters. Cogewea seems doomed to repeat her mother's 'mistakes,' agreeing to disavow her Native ancestry, to marry Densmore, and, in so doing, to assimilate fully into Euro-American culture. Densmore's extravagant promises of wealth and security conceal sinister intentions: Tricked into believing that Cogewea is wealthy, he plans to seduce her, marry her, acquire her property, and then kill her. At first persuaded by Densmore's seduction, Cogewea narrowly manages to escape death and return, chastened, to the reservation, where she finally accepts the modest

but more sincere proposals of Jim LaGrinder. At the same time, Cogewea learns that her Euro-American father has died, and that the courts have determined that his vast mining estate is rightfully hers. Two related forms of repossession are articulated through this ending: Cogewea regains possession of her identity, formerly in conflict because of her desire to disavow her Native ancestry; and she regains possession of the resources her Euro-American father had appropriated from her Native ancestors.

That Mourning Dove used the popular Western novel as a model for her first major literary effort has not been considered significant by some critics, who read this kind of appropriation as inauthentic.[3] Trivializing Mourning Dove's appropriation of the Western, however, overlooks its importance as a point of literary access for Mourning Dove, herself born and raised a Westerner. She was introduced to popular Westerns by Jimmy Ryan, her "adopted white brother." Reading his "yellowback novels" was Mourning Dove's first exposure to Euro-American literary culture:

> Jimmy was a great reader of yellowback novels. It was from one of his books that I learned the alphabet. I could spell the word Kentucky before I ever had a primer because it occurred frequently in the novel Jimmy taught me from. One day Mother papered our cabin with Jimmy's novels. When he got home, he made no protest,

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[3]Writing about Mourning Dove and some of her male contemporaries, Charles Larson suggests, "If we did not know that these men [sic] were Native Americans, we might conclude from their novels that they were white. Taken together, the novels are conventional in form, traditional in subject, anything but innovative--indistinguishable from hundreds of other fictional works of the time" (34-35).

> but he got busy and continued to read from the wall, with me helping to find the next page. Mother used to secretly scold me for being so interested in books. She wished me to spend all my time in the backyard tipi with Teequalt learning our traditions. . . . [All] of my siblings learned to read English from Jimmy. (Mourning Dove, *Autobiography* 186-87).

Although reading popular Westerns distracted Mourning Dove from the traditional education her mother planned for her, Mourning Dove later used the form to challenge popular Euro-American beliefs about the inevitability of Native American assimilation--issues which she was not able to address as overtly in her capacity as a folklore collector. Mourning Dove was among many "Native informants" recruited by Euro-American ethnographers to collect and record Native American oral stories and folklore before they "disappeared." Although many Euro-America ethnographers opposed repressive policies toward Native Americans and criticized past abuses, their project accepted as inevitable the assimilation of Native American culture. This position implied that Euro-American expansion was inevitable, and, therefore, that Native dispossession was no longer a relevant political issue. The popular Western, on the other hand, could at least be mobilized to raise questions about Native American assimilation and dispossession because it represented Euro-American expansion as a dynamic process rather than a static finality.

iii. Miscegenation, Assimilation, and Literary Form

In *Cogewea,* Native-American dispossession and cultural assimilation are two homologous processes, represented symbolically by the potential marriage between the mixed-blood heroine and her Euro-American seducer--for whom assimilation means robbery and death. This union is ultimately rejected in favor of the more homogenous one between two mixed-blood characters. The novel's reactionary stance on miscegenation is in many ways identical to reactionary novels of the early nineteenth-century. Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and Ann S. Stephens' *Malaeska* (1839) both depict miscegenation as an unnatural and tragic union. In *Last of the Mohicans,* the romance between Cora and Uncas ends in death; in *Malaeska,* a mixed-blood character, raised to believe he is white, commits suicide when he discovers that his mother is Native American. Mourning Dove chose to reject miscegenation, however, for completely different reasons, which are related to her position on the twinned issues of dispossession and assimilation.

Mourning Dove makes her position quite clear in Chapter 10 of *Cogewea,* which summarizes in detail the plot of another popular Western novel of the period, Therese Broderick's *The Brand* (1909). Upon reading *The Brand,* Cogewea is so furious that she burns it. She is angered in particular by its mixed-blood protagonist, whose love for a Euro-American woman is consummated only after both are able to "forget" his Native American ancestry. This more 'progressive' position on miscegenation suggests that intermarriage between Native and Euro-Americans is desirable because it facilitates the 'disappearance' of Native American culture. This intertextual allusion

specifies that *Cogewea* reacts against miscegenation, not because Mourning Dove is afraid of or repulsed by inter-racial mixing, but because miscegenation is tied symbolically to assimilation. While the marriage between two mixed-blood characters in *Cogewea* still symbolizes cultural contact between Euro and Native Americans, it is more hopeful about the future survival of Native American culture. Miscegenation thus carries multiple levels of double-meaning in this text. *Cogewea* rejects miscegenation, like *Last of the Mohicans,* but for completely different reasons. Miscegenation produces tragic results, but it also produces heroic and righteous figures like Cogewea and Jim LaGrinder. It signifies the 'disappearance' of Native American culture, but it challenges the racism underpinning reactionary Euro-American texts.

Mourning Dove developed these ideas during a period in which United States Indian policy was aggressively assimilationist. By the time the first draft of *Cogewea* was completed in 1914, policies were in place which were designed to discourage tribalism and integrate Native Americans into the Euro-American political and economic system. Under the older reservation system, Native Americans could retain their tribal identities, and had some control over their resources, institutions, and laws. Late-nineteenth century policy-makers shifted their emphasis in favor of assimilating Native communities into the broader population. Under the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887, vast tracts of tribally administered Native American land were partitioned into individually-owned parcels, a policy designed on the surface to 'Americanize' Natives by socializing them into a yeoman-farmer lifestyle. These measures went hand-in-

hand with cultural policies requiring Native American children to attend boarding schools where, in order to facilitate their 'Americanization,' their traditional languages, dress, and rituals were forbidden. The material effect of these policies was that Native dispossession continued in a different and more insidious guise: Because most Native Americans did not participate in the cash economy, many were unable to pay property tax on the land, forcing them to sell their allotments to non-Native farmers more experienced in the ways of the cash economy.[4]

The way in which assimilation was promoted by its advocates resembles Densmore's representation of himself to Cogewea: he promises her a better life if she agrees to forsake her Native ancestry and become his wife, but his intentions define assimilation as theft and murder. Similarly, advocates of the Dawes Allotment Act claimed that it would liberate Native Americans by giving them the power, as property holders, to protect themselves from further exploitation by whites. In fact, Native land holdings diminished by nearly two thirds between 1887, when the Dawes Act was implemented, and 1934, when it was replaced by the Indian Reorganization Act (Limerick 197-99).

The conditions of Mourning Dove's everyday life and literary career were both overdetermined by these assimilating procedures. In her autobiography, Mourning Dove describes the year 1888, which she gives as the year of her birth, as one in which her people lived

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[4]Sources for this discussion of the Dawes General Allotment Act include Ronald A. Janke, "Population, Reservations, and Federal Indian Policy" (158-62); and Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest* (197-99). For a fictional treatment of the effects of allotment on Native American people, see Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*.

"in a pathetic state of turmoil caused by trying to learn how to till the soil for a living" (3). Between 1892 and 1905, Colville land-holdings had been drastically reduced: much of the reservation had been made available to outsiders for mining and homesteading, while the remaining land was allotted in 80-acre parcels to individual reservation members (Miller 1990, xxx). Exactly what Mourning Dove did with her own allotment is unclear; clearly, she did not live the mythical life of the yeoman farmer. Mourning Dove subsisted on piecemeal, wage labour for most of her adult life. Punished for speaking Salish[5] at the Indian schools she attended sporadically in her youth, Mourning Dove was dispossessed of her traditional language and culture, yet assimilation into the dominant culture by no means expanded her choices as a cultural producer; these were limited by the devalued status of her traditional oral culture, by a very narrowly defined concept of the Native writer, and by her reduced access to literary capital.

The dissonance in *Cogewea* between two literary forms, novel and folklore, register the conflicted conditions under which Mourning Dove's literary authority was constituted. Although early drafts of *Cogewea* have been lost, we do know that the novel underwent a number of revisions before it was finally published in 1927. In 1914, Mourning Dove showed the first draft of *Cogewea* to Lucillus McWhorter, an amateur ethnographer and activist well-known for his advocacy of Native American rights. Shortly after his first meeting with Mourning Dove in 1914, McWhorter prepared a draft of

[5]The language of tribes living along the Columbia River, including the Colvile and the Okanogan.

Cogewea for publication, but the project was shelved by the publisher because of the war. Efforts to publish *Cogewea* resumed in the 1920's, when McWhorter edited a second draft, inserting extensive annotations and changing the main text to emphasize its historical, ethnographic, political, and social relevance (Brown 1993, 278). The tension in agendas between Mourning Dove and Lucillus McWhorter has been well-documented by Alanna Brown, Susan Bernardin, and others. Despite the lack of the earlier drafts of *Cogewea,* the written correspondence between Mourning Dove and McWhorter suggests that the former cared less about whether or not the novel came across as an 'authentic' Native American narrative, and considered plot and characterization more important than historical and ethnographic details. In short, Mourning Dove viewed the work as a literary piece, while McWhorter, privileged its ethnographic value and scientific credibility (Fisher xiii-iv).

This tension engendered what Paula Gunn Allen has described as a "maimed" and "martyred" book (83): McWhorter did not simply make the text grammatical; he embellished it with lengthy and wordy digressions designed to educate the (Euro-American) reader about aboriginal history, culture, and politics. Detailed annotations engage the authority of 'science' to corroborate the authenticity of Dove's descriptions of tribal culture and history. McWhorter also invested the heroine Cogewea with a capacity for dramatically elevated speech in order to enhance her credibility as a heroine and to underscore Mourning Dove's literary capabilities.

In the same way that McWhorter assimilated the novel into his own ethnographic project, he also influenced the direction of

Mourning Dove's career. While assisting with the publication of *Cogewea,* McWhorter recruited Mourning Dove as a folklore collector, a task he believed more important than fiction-writing because the 'disappearance' of Native culture was immanent (Brown 1992, 165). "'I see many on this trail,' he wrote to Mourning Dove in 1915, 'They are bearing bundles which glow and shine like the gold that is washed from the river beds. These bundles are the traditions and history of the tribes.' But they 'pass with their bundles of light--the history of their people--into the cloud and are seen no more'" (qtd. in Brown 1992, 163). Receiving far more support for collecting traditional stories, Mourning Dove produced no more novels after *Cogewea.* Her early correspondence with McWhorter suggests that she was somewhat reluctant to trade fiction for field work:

> Dear Big Foot[6]
>
> I got a letter from McLean[7] requesting me to at once start an interduction [sic] for the Okangan [sic] Sweat-House[8] and I really do not know what to do. I have not leased my place and have not the money to collect my traditions at once as McLean has asked[.] . . .
>
> Well I don't know what to do. Whether to go and start my field work or start my story. ([March 1916], qtd. in Brown 1992, 165)

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[6]One of McWhorter's nick-names.
[7]Author and scholar J.P. MacLean was a close friend of McWhorter's, and became involved in securing a publisher for Mourning Dove's legends (Brown 1992, 164).
[8]Mourning Dove's working title for her collection of legends, later published as *Coyote Stories* (Brown 1992, 162).

By her own accounts, Mourning Dove gradually became more enthusiastic about her "field work." In her unpublished draft of the "Prologue" to *Coyote Stories,* she writes thankfully of McWhorter's influence on her writing.

> My interests were to write novels of the Indian view point. . . .
>
> I first wrote my lines of these stories much against my will, but as I worked and gathered among the oldest Indians of my people I found a rich feild [sic] that had never been hardly touch [sic] with the hand of the whiteman. . . . The work got my great sympathy and interst [sic] of my vanishing peole [sic]. (December 27, 1921; qtd. in Brown 1992, 172-73.)

Mourning Dove faced barriers as a novelist which she did not face as an ethnographer, because folklore-collecting assimilated her more seamlessly into the dominant culture, positioning her as a native-informant for Anglo-American editors and publishers, who had difficulty imagining her as a novelist. The same tension produced the dissonance in *Cogewea* between the living culture implied by the novel form and the static culture implied by folklore.

iii. Material and Cultural Dispossession

In *Cogewea,* Mourning Dove identifies homologies between miscegenation and assimilation, and between assimilation and dispossession, which can be extended to debates about her literary authority. On the one hand, being assimilated as a folklore collector did supply Mourning Dove with access to publishers, but it also

subjected her work to substantial revision by Euro-American editors, leading many critics to question her ownership of the text. These efforts backfired when Mourning Dove's literary authority was called into question immediately after *Cogewea* was published in 1927. The difference in voice produced by McWhorter's editing was not lost on Mourning Dove, who criticized his revision of her "Prologue" to *Coyote Stories:* "Don't, [sic] you think that it is rather a little too 'high toned' language. I cannot understand it all. unless I go back to old--Webster' for help [sic]" (December 1922, qtd. in Brown 1992, 173). More recently, literary critics have taken up the project of distinguishing Dove's literary voice from McWhorter's editorializing in the absence of an original, unedited manuscript, a project which implies that 'ownership' of the text is still at stake.

This issue was first raised shortly after *Cogewea* appeared in 1927. An Indian agent on the Colville Reservation claimed publicly that Mourning Dove's authority was facade--that McWhorter had merely used her name to lend authenticity to what was really his novel (Bernardin 20). These claims are echoed in more recent critical debates about McWhorter's role in producing the novel. Missing the original manuscript, scholars have used extant examples of Mourning Dove's unedited writing and letters from McWhorter summarizing his revisions to tackle the thorny question of *Cogewea*'s authorship. *Cogewea* is not the only one of Mourning Dove's publications to raise this question. Her collection of traditional stories, *Coyote Stories* (1933), was heavily influenced by its editor, Heister Dean Guie, and the editor of the posthumous, 1990 edition of Mourning Dove's unfinished autobiography found the original manuscript "full of

historical and ethnographic gems, but badly disjointed and ungrammatical." Accordingly, Jay Miller arranged the order of the chapters, "rewrote each sentence to achieve agreement of subject and verb, a uniform past tense, and appropriate use of pronouns" and applied "standard English conventions of syntax, spelling, and grammar while retaining Mourning Dove's words" (Miller 1990, xxxii-xxxiv).[9]

Because of the extensive editing required to make Dove's work 'publishable,' present-day critics struggle with the question of whether or not it represents Dove's 'authentic' literary voice. Positions on the issue of voice in *Cogewea* range from the conclusion that editor Lucillus McWhorter is the primary agent behind the text,[10] to recovery-oriented readings which locate Mourning Dove's voice in the novel's internal contradictions. For Mary Dearborn, Mourning Dove's voice is manifest in the critique of narrative authenticity that runs throughout the text (25). Susan Bernardin identifies a "trickster subtext" which "undermin[es] McWhorter's conception of *Cogewea* as an ethnographic, historical document" (495). That it is difficult to speak of Mourning Dove as an 'author' at all underscores the conflicted conditions under which her authority was established. Assimilation enabled Mourning Dove to access Euro-American fields of cultural production, but this field did not recognize Native Americans as legitimate literary authorities.

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[9]For an interesting discussion of the various approaches adopted by editors of Mourning Dove for both original and recent editions, see Alanna Brown, "The Editorialized Mourning Dove."

[10]For example, see Charles Larson, *American Indian Fiction* (5, 179), and Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Tradition* (85).

Mourning Dove's Euro-American editors, indeed, vied with her for status as authors of her texts. In an exemplary exchange between McWhorter and *Coyote Stories* (1933) editor Heister Dean Guie, Dean Guie negotiates for more credit as editor:

> I remember you saying that Mourning Dove wanted to get away from any indication that her book was edited. I would like to have her change her mind (women do) so I could get some recognition for any future work. Get my monicker before the publishers. I do not think it would reflect on M. Dove as author of the legends, as so many books and magazine articles are handled in that way. (qtd. in Brown 1992, 175)

As Dean Guie observes, standard editorial relationships gave the author full credit as the originator of the work in spite of any editorial interventions. The same standards did not apply to Mourning Dove, however, whose authority was questioned *because* the work was edited. The assimilating practice of ethnography promised, then, to create a space for Mourning Dove as an author within Euro-American culture but subjected her to double standards which enabled others to profit from her literary labour.

Present-day responses to these issues of literary authority imply that the 'problem' of *Cogewea's* authorship makes it alternately irrecoverable and unreadable. Some critics seem to feel that it is not worthwhile to subject the novel to extensive and rigorous critical analysis because of its literary 'flaws.' Discussions of the text tend to foreground its historical significance as an early

novel by a Native-American woman,[11] and its archival use-value as a well-documented collaboration between a Euro-American, male editor and a Native-American, female author;[12] but *Cogewea* is rarely taken seriously as *literature* without the proviso of pointing out its literary flaws.[13] This tendency *not* to subject Native texts to rigorous critical scrutiny, Arnold Krupat argues, implies a belief that they are not *worth* the effort.[14] More particularly in the case of *Cogewea*, the status of the text as 'literature' is directly related to its uncertain ownership: discussions of *Cogewea's* textual properties tend to focus on its many 'flaws,' which are assumed to have been introduced by heavy-handed editing, and which signify the extent to which the novel belongs to McWhorter.[15] For Charles Larson and Elizabeth

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[11]Thus Alanna Brown concedes that "Mourning Dove is not of the caliber of a Zora Neale Hurston, to be sure, but she is the literary grandmother of all the Native American fiction writers who have followed her" ("Mourning Dove's Voice in *Cogewea*" 11). Gunn Allen similarly maintains that "for all its "cowboy" English, contrived plot, and polemical pronouncements, it integrates ritual symbolic, thematic, and structural elements and as such is one of the first Indian books of its kind" (84).

[12]See Alanna Brown, "Looking Through the Glass Darkly: The Editorialized Mourning Dove"; and Jay Miller, "Mourning Dove: The Author as Cultural Mediator."

[13]For example, Dexter Fisher concludes his otherwise sympathetic introduction to the 1981 reprint of *Cogewea* with this observation: "Without question, the book is uneven, wrenched in parts, replete with clichés and unnatural language" (xxvi). Similarly, Paula Gunn Allen avers that *Cogewea* "is far from being great literature. Rather, it is a melodramatic dime-novel western" (83).

[14]Published in the mid-nineteen eighties, Krupat's indictment of 'uncritical' approaches to Native American literature is scathing: "The amount of unself-conscious twaddle about plots and characters and the poetry of place that goes on at the literary end of Native American studies would never be tolerated in the study of, say, Faulkner or William Carlos Williams, of Emily Dickinson or Thoreau" (*For Those Who Come After* xiii). A recent exception to this ongoing trend is Susan K. Bernardin's "Mixed Messages: Authority and Authorship in Mourning Dove's *Cogewea, The Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range."*

[15]To the question of whether the text is "literarily flawed," Alanna Brown answers "Yes. McWhorter intruded again and again into the text, even to the extent of claiming Cogewea's voice for ethnographic input and cries of outrage against a corrupt B.I.A. and a hypocritical Christian nation." Brown

Ammons, the problem of collaboration excludes Mourning Dove from serious consideration as an important literary figure. "[McWhorter] virtually obliterated Humishuma [16] as a writer," writes Ammons, "Unless manuscripts are found, the extent to which *Cogewea* is his and the extent to which it is hers cannot with certainty be determined. We simply cannot talk about this text as we can those of the other writers in [*Conflicting Stories*], no matter how constrained or compromised they were" (138). Charles Larson "regrettably" omits Mourning Dove from his "main discussion" of Native American writers for precisely the same reason (5). However well-meaning these readings of *Cogewea* may be, they forget that Euro-American writers have also been subjected to editorial control, yet are not presumed to lose their authority because of it.

These 'problems' of reading are also symptoms of the fact that *Cogewea* marks precisely the most salient boundaries of the popular Western novel. Understood historically, these boundaries are engendered by the historical legacy of Western mythology as a discourse which rationalizes Native dispossession, guaranteeing the 'exceptional' status of the American political economy by making a vast pool of 'public' land available to underwrite economic expansion and democracy. To perform its cultural work, this narrative excludes Native entitlement to occupy the frontier from its range of moral

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insists, however, that McWhorter did not "override Mourning Dove's voice" ("Mourning Dove's Voice in *Cogewea*" 13).

[16]Mourning Dove's original Salish name. She was born Christine Quintasket, and adopted 'Morning Dove' as her pen name. The original spelling, according to Jay Miller, signified "the dawning of her career" and also referred to a figure from Colville legend, who welcomes the arrival of her husband, Salmon, every spring. Mourning Dove changed the spelling after learning that she had misspelled it (Miller xvii).

possibilities. As cultural historian Richard Slotkin points out, the very fundamental level at which this exclusion was required made resistance almost impossible to articulate: "The dispossession and subjugation of the Native American was the precondition for establishing an American nation," Slotkin argues, "hence those who argue that savages have a right of self-government reduce "the patriots of 1776" to "a swarm of land pirates"" (109). That *Cogewea* challenges this boundary from a position doubly marginalized on the basis of both race and gender (by situating a Native woman at the centre of a narrative of entitlement, and by positing the prior literary authority of a Native women), accounts for the radical contingency of both the text and of Dove's literary authority. Unless certain historical contingencies are brought to bear upon our reading of the text, it can only be read as a 'flawed' Western: Cogewea's lengthy, erudite speeches, for example, read as heavy-handed, contrived, and generically inappropriate unless it is understood that Dove and McWhorter are writing against a boundary which defines Native people as savage and illiterate--and therefore not entitled to the land they occupy. Similarly, Dove's status as the author of the text is contingent upon a historical reading which recognizes the power relations Mourning Dove had to negotiate in order to access that authority--defined in relation not only to her role as the primary producer of the text, but also to the *public* recognition of that fact, achieved through a process of publication which specifically required McWhorter's intervention. The very mechanisms which enabled Dove to publish at all were identical to those which made her literary authority suspect.

ii. Against Assimilation: Mourning Dove's *Cogewea*

Mourning Dove writes in her autobiography that she was inspired to write *Cogewea* after witnessing the roundup of the remaining free-ranging Buffalo on the Flathead Reserve in Montana in 1908, where Mourning Dove lived for a time while married to her first husband. Using Jimmy Ryan's "yellowback novels" as a model, Mourning Dove set her story on the Flathead shortly after the Buffalo roundup, and featured a cast of characters recognizably 'Western' in the popular sense. The novel's heroine, Cogewea, has come to stay on her sister's ranch after graduating from an eastern Indian school. The ranch foreman, a half-blood named Jim LaGrinder, is in love with Cogewea, but the free-spirited heroine is meanwhile taken in by the seductions of Densmore, an upper-class eastern tenderfoot who convinces Cogewea to give him a job as a ranch-hand. Tricked by the other cowboys (fond of tormenting those uninitiated in ranch life) into believing that Cogewea is wealthy, Densmore orchestrates a plan of seduction and murder. Although attracted to Densmore's illusory promises of marriage and a refined life, Cogewea is also under the influence of her maternal grandmother (Stemteemä), whose ability to see through Densmore from the beginning is connected to her access to traditional Native knowledge systems. The central conflict of the novel revolves around Cogewea's struggle to negotiate the conflict between 'Native' and 'white' influences, represented by Stemteemä and Densmore respectively. Densmore eventually persuades Cogewea to elope with him, only to find out that her wealth is a fiction. Enraged, Densmore beats her, ties her, and leaves her to die in the

wilderness, but Stemteemä witnesses the incident in a dream vision and sends Jim LaGrinder to Cogewea's rescue. The novel's happy ending delivers an extra dose of poetic justice, when an impoverished Densmore learns from a newspaper report that Cogewea has inherited her father's vast mining estate (284).

Mourning Dove appeals to the sympathies of her predominantly non-Native audience by using familiar narrative devices and character types to represent Native American history and culture as simultaneously foreign and familiar. She depicts Native figures, for example, as character types common in popular Western fiction: Celluloid Bill is a "half-blooded" Cheyenne fond of practical jokes, while Jim LaGrinder, also a mixed-blood, is legendary for his horsemanship and sharp shooting.

The trope of the disappearing frontier identifies the allotment system with frontier closure, inviting Euro-American readers to identify with the dispossessed Native American. The second chapter, for example, depicts a familiar staple of the Western novel, the roundup scene. Before the action even commences we are reminded that the author is bearing witness to a disappearing way of life: "Since the opening of the Flathead Reservation to settlers it was no longer possible for the stockmen to keep large numbers of either cattle or horses on the open range. Even the buffaloes, owned by private parties, were, because of a Departmental edict, disposed of to the Canadian Government" (20). Traces of the former 'glory' of the reservation still exist: Cogewea is able to take long adventures on horseback without encountering farms or fences, and there is enough livestock still loose on the range to necessitate the excitement of the

roundup, but the process of settlement portends the inevitable passage of this rather tenuously constructed frontier.

Certainly, the Western framework Mourning Dove chooses to play out her narrative of assimilation privileges Euro-American cultural authority. In some ways, her bi-cultural ranch setting fulfills the desire underpinning more liberal positions on "the Indian question"--that Native people would integrate into Euro-American society simply by becoming more 'like us.' A Western ranch is indeed an ideal vehicle for assimilating the Native because it exists on the frontier between the 'civilized' world of the Euro-American and the 'natural' world of the Native-American. The peripheral characters who inhabit Mourning Dove's HB Ranch include whites, mixed-bloods, and full-bloods, who live together in harmony. One of Cogewea's two sisters is happily married to the white owner of the ranch. Cogewea herself is represented as the end result of a 'civilized education', having graduated from an eastern Indian school with "high honors. . . fond of books" by "the best authors" (16-17). As if to validate the authenticity of these characters as "real Westerners," the HB ranch also includes an Anglo-American cowboy of the more conventional stripe known as "Silent Bob," who is completely at home among these Native and hybrid characters.

To present-day readers these strategies may not read as particularly challenging, given their appeal to a Euro-American world-view. Yet the complex history of the publication of *Cogewea* suggests that the text did not fit seamlessly into existing avenues of cultural production and distribution. Although the simplest way to account for the delay in its publication is to point out its literary

flaws, I am suggesting that *Cogewea* is not simply 'badly' written, but that it is 'bad' in a particularly radical way--that there is an underlining politics inhering in the novel's 'flaws.' The more radical dimension of the novel is manifest in the very process of appropriating the Western to articulate the experience of its conventional 'other'--the dispossessed Native. As Susan Bernardin observes, the very setting for the novel--an open range depicted within the confines of the reservation--constructs the text on an ironic foundation (497). Its subtitle dubs it "A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range," but in fact there are no cattle to be seen in Mourning Dove's descriptions of the Flathead landscape. Like the novels of B.M. Bower, *Cogewea* also contains various references to popular Western narratives which signal an ambivalence about its own position within this field. Early in the novel, references are made to Cogewea's desire to become a writer. She is, however, "uninterested" in the "topic" of "friction between the unpretentious homesteaders and the larger stockmen"--a reference to the tradition of Western novels, including *The Virginian* and *The Rustler,* which respond to the 'rustler wars' of the 1890s. Cogewea prefers instead to ponder the need to place "her people's philosophy . . . on record" before it is "irretrievably lost" (33). Cogewea's meditation invokes the two traditions--popular Western mythology, and popular ethnography--which determine its own generic orientation. Cogewea then likens herself to Columbus after Jim LaGrinder teases her for wanting to write a book. "Even if I am a 'squaw' as you call me . . . I may use the pen! The wiseheads laughed at the theories of Columbus. They insisted that the world was flat while the great explorer

contended that it was round. Who was correct? Columbus is now honored by all nations for the correctness of his ideas" (34). The meaning here is loaded, for it implies that the very idea that a "squaw" can wield a pen is fundamentally revolutionary, and it positions this figure at an originary moment in the Euro-American mythology of discovery/conquest. Subsequent references are more explicit about the cultural politics here implied. Cogewea reflects on "how her race had the worst of every deal since the landing of the lordly European on their shores; how they had suffered as much from the pen as from the bayonet of conquest; wherein the annals had always been chronicled by their most deadly foes and partisan writers" (91-92).

The mixed-blood characters supply the basis for a critique of romanticized and essentialist representations of Native people produced by this partisan history. Densmore's objective "to rough it a while among Indians and cowboys" is based on romantic expectations which are belied by his first sighting of the local population: "Fresh from a great eastern city, he had expected to see the painted and blanketed aborigine of history and romance; but instead, had only encountered this miniature group of half-bloods and one ancient squaw." Appalled by the sight, Densmore appeals to Silent Bob--who more easily conforms to his expectations of what a 'real' Westerner should look like--and voices his disgust for "the writers who had beguiled him to the 'wilde and woolly.'" Sensing that Densmore is a "truly *verdant* tenderfoot," Bob invites him to the HB ranch, promising that there he will find "wil' Injuns an' wil'er range riders; all a wearin' big hats an' silver spurs; an'a totin' of a six-shooter or

two, with maybe notches in th' han'els" (43-44). Easily taken in by Bob's ranch humor, Densmore convinces Cogewea to hire him as a ranch hand, only to find that he has once more been misled. "Where were those picturesque Indians that he was promised to meet? Instead, he had been lured into a nest of half bloods, whom he had always understood to be the inferior degenerates of two races" (48).

Existing scholarship on *Cogewea* tends to point out how its many internal contradictions unsettle the very mythology the novel inscribes, but relatively little attention has been paid to its sustained and clearly articulated argument on the issue of assimilation and dispossession. More often, *Cogewea* has been read as a text which tends to collapse under the weight of its shifting narrative authority and conflation of disjunctive discourses;[17] alternatively, critics have singled out specific chapters, scenes, or devices which appear to originate from the agency of Mourning Dove, such as the storytelling scenes taking place in Stemteemä's tepee,[18] or the ironic undercutting of McWhorter's ethnographic discourse.[19] Yet it is at the level of the plot that Dove maps out a very precise and sustained response to debates about Native-American dispossession and assimilation. Indeed, if we can bracket off for a moment the question of whether or not it is sound critical practice to mark off Mourning Dove's authentic voice as it is manifest in the text, it might be argued

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[17]See Susan K. Bernardin, "Mixed Messages: Authority and Authorship in Mourning Dove's *Cogewea, The Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range."*
[18]See Alanna K. Brown "Mourning Dove's Voice in *Cogewea."*
[19]See Susan K. Bernardin, "Mixed Messages: Authority and Authorship in Mourning Dove's *Cogewea, The Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range;"* and Mary Dearborn, *Pocahontas's Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture* (25-26).

that Dove's agency is particularly resonant at the level of plot, given the fact McWhorter makes no references in his correspondence to having changed the plot in any significant way. Moreover, the one documented editorial battle Mourning Dove fought and won with McWhorter was plot-related: McWhorter believed that a tragic ending would be more accurately reflect the 'reality' of white-Native conflict, but Dove's preference for a happy one prevailed (Bernardin 503).

These 'authorial intentions' are flagged by Cogewea's critique of Theresa Broderick's *The Brand*, another popular Western set on the Flathead, and featuring a miscegenated relationship between Euro-American woman and a mixed-blood man. Cogewea summarizes the plot:

> The scene opened on the Flathead, where a half-blood "brave" is in love with a white girl; the heroine of the story. He dares not make a declaration of his affection because of his Indian blood. He curses his own mother for this heritage, hates his American parent for the sake of the girl of his heart. He deems himself beneath her; not good enough for her. But to cap the absurdity of the story, he weds the white "princess" and slaves for her the rest of his life. (91)

Cogewea's response to *The Brand* has been called a misreading, because the hero in *The Brand* actually treats his mother with nothing but respect throughout the novel, even though he is ashamed of his 'Indian half' (Beidler 57-8). Moreover, probably because *The Brand* is 'mere formula fiction', it is rarely used as an intertextual

framework for reading *Cogewea,* even though chapter 10 clearly invites such a reading. But if Cogewea's objections to *The Brand* are taken seriously, it becomes clear that the novel *Cogewea,* for all of its 'tensions' and 'dislocations,' is in fact quite legible and consistent in its resistance to the assimilationist cultural politics of Native/White relations as represented by *The Brand.*

Densmore's seduction of Cogewea reverses the formula for miscegenation depicted in *The Brand,* in which the female figure represents the assimilating culture. Henry West, the mixed-blood hero of *The Brand,* has improved his social standing by attending Harvard, but Bess Fletcher cannot forget the fact that Henry's other 'half' is Native American. Bess is meanwhile seduced by Dave Davis, not knowing that Davis' womanizing has led to the death of Henry's sister. Just as Bess and Dave are to be married, Bess' best friend recognizes Davis as her sister's seducer as well, and the wedding is called off. One year later, Davis returns to abduct Bess and exact his revenge. Henry West rescues Bess, and in a fit of rage brands Davis with his initials HW, which, he instructs Davis, also mean "Honor Women." At first appalled by Henry's 'savage' behavior, Bess decides to leave the ranch, but a final desperate plea from Henry persuades her to stay. "Some-day," he begs her, "some-time, will you come back--when you can forget that tragedy--when you can forget--*That I am an Indian?*" (270). Bess relents in the novel's final passage. "I cannot go--I cannot leave all this. I cannot live without you now! Henry--Henry West! *I--have forgotten!*" (271).

Although Peter Beidler considers *The Brand* progressive for its time (55), Bess's act of forgetting is in fact a conventional response to

the "Indian Question" which dates back to the Colonial period, when intermarriage was proposed as a more 'merciful' way to address the 'inevitable' demise of the Native--a kinder, gentler form of genocide which would produce the same results as violent conflict because the "superior" race would eventually dilute the "inferior" one until the latter simply 'disappeared' (Barnett 9-11). The same thinking later governed social-Darwinian ideas about the role of women in reproducing the so-called Anglo-Saxon race: Woman's alignment with 'nature' determined the 'natural' evolution of a racialized American identity, because she would naturally be attracted to the superior man (Slotkin passim). Because Bess's capacity to "forget" that Henry is a Native effectively assimilates him, Henry embodies the 'success' of a prior miscegenated marriage. While reactionary positions on miscegenation were often based on fears of inter-racial mixing, arguments for and against miscegenation often shared the premise that the disappearance of the Native American was both good and inevitable.

If Cogewea is particularly vehement in her criticism of Henry's "hatred" for his mother, it is because *Cogewea* the novel is especially invested in exposing the sinister subtext of 'liberal' positions on miscegenation which both predict and endorse the 'disappearance' of the Native through assimilation. Like Henry West, Cogewea occupies a liminal position on the boundary between 'Native' and 'white' identities and therefore represents the national body politic with respect to Native/White relations. The marital possibilities available to Cogewea represent possible ways in which relations tied to the present will play out in the future, and frame the identity politics of

culture and ethnicity in the biological terms of reproduction. When possible matches for Cogewea are discussed by the cowboys in the bunk house, Jack Galvin, "a quarter-blood Texan of uncertain qualities," describes her as a

> plum' fine gal, best ever walked an' spunk'er nor hell! Can sho' hold her own! Talk 'bout roastin' th'whites! She can sho' arg'y with any of 'em. An' S'ciety! Jus' watch her a usin' them there han' rags at th' table! she sho' ain't for any of us fellers an if Jim lan's her, it's cause of his more Injun 'plection as well as blood-'finity. Some times them there high toned 'breed' gals are fer harnisin' up with th'r own kin', an' I don't blame 'em. Not many white men wo'th any thin' shine up to a squaw, 'less she has lan' an' some herds. I ain't stuck on no gal, but I know a lady when I see one an' this here gal is sho' of that cast. I'low as how I'm a leavin' nex' week, it ain't no slam to own up me 'temptin' bein' sof' with her once. An' say! I thought a blizzard busted loos'; such a col' wave struck me. Hones'! I wished for a overcoat on that there July day. An' it sho' took a quart of th' hottest to quaker the' chill. She's too long dis'ance for my rope. (34-35)

Celluloid Bill also admits that he is attracted to Cogewea,

> But Lord! there ain't no chance! Yo' can't mash with that there gal! One day she beat me in a hoss race on th' upper trail, an' she bested me with th' rope. I kinda hinted splicin' lariats. I go no furder! She went in th' air like a

wil' bronk at th' fust cinchin'. Jim's th' main guy an' it must be 'count his shade bein' a little darker'n mine. (35)

The way in which possibilities are raised and ruled out during this bunkhouse discussion underlines a set of principles that determine the 'right' match for Cogewea. One possibility is that Cogewea will not marry at all. Cogewea's virility--her association with horses, spurs, and guns--signals her social displacement and suggests that she may not be eligible to 'breed.' In turn-of-the-century race mythology, virility also functioned as an expression of racial dominance, usually associated with white men, but virile white women were also figured as more desirable for 'breeding' so long as they retained enough feminine qualities to make them submit to the right man for the purposes of reproduction. Thus unions between a virile white man and an independent white woman--The Virginian and Molly Stark, for example--represented continued supremacy of the 'Anglo-Saxon race' (Slotkin passim). Cogewea's virility, on the other hand, is associated with her 'Indianness': she is not accessible to the other half-breed cowboys because of her masculine qualities, but Jim LaGrinder's darker complexion makes him 'Indian' enough to qualify as an appropriate match for Cogewea. This possibility resists the position which predicts the 'disappearance' of Native identity as the 'natural' outcome of assimilation. Marriage between Jim and Cogewea embodies an integration of Native and white in which Native culture will survive and reproduce.

Mourning Dove does not so much reject miscegenation as she does appropriate its racialist discourse in order to expose its hidden agenda of assimilation. Moreover, throughout the text, the radical

instability of racial categories contradicts the racialism of the seduction plot. In one particularly compelling chapter entitled "The Races," Cogewea enters horse races at the fourth of July celebration. These races are classified according to race and gender, but Cogewea defiantly enters both the "squaws'" and the "ladies'" races. "If there's any difference between a *squaw* and a *lady,*" she declares, "I want to know it" (58-59). The ambiguity of Cogewea's racial status challenges the arbitrary boundaries which determine the rules of the 'race.' To compensate for this lack of difference, Cogewea wears elaborate costumes, exposing race as a situational and constructed category. For the "squaws'" race, Cogewea rents an elaborate Native costume; for the "ladies'" race, she wears an elegant riding habit. By winning both races, Cogewea also exposes the hidden agenda of the ritual, which is not about demonstrating the merit of individual participants, but about ritualistically inscribing racial difference. Both of her victories are contested, revealing that her transgression ultimately matters more than the fact that she is the winner. When Cogewea is disqualified from the "ladies'" race, she refuses, in protest, her prize for the "squaws'" race, fully recognizing the real purpose of the ritual. "Since you are disbursing *racial prizes* regardless of merit or justice, pass it on to the full-blood Kootenai woman who, like your white protégé, won second place only" (70).

Cogewea's ability to highlight, in different situations, aspects of her identity which others desire to be static and univocal calls into question the various ways in which she is racialized. The seduction plot implies the opposite, however, insofar as race determines the appropriate match for Cogewea. During their bunkhouse discussion,

the cowboys allude to signs of Cogewea's refinement which raise the possibility of marriage to a white man, but decide that "not many white men wo'th any thin' shine up to a squaw." These comments foreshadow Cogewea's seduction by Densmore, implying that his attraction to her marks him as an inferior man. On the one hand, the fact that the cowboys' predictions are born out suggests that *Cogewea* endorses the racial basis of their speculations. Yet marriage between two mixed-blood characters also challenges the more conventional formula for miscegenation involving one white character and one of mixed blood--a union underpinned by the desire to annihilate the racial minority.

Annihilation is precisely what Cogewea faces if she chooses to marry Densmore. Seducing her by offering "a life of social elegance and untrammeled gayety," Densmore argues that

> the day has come when the Indian must desist from his wild, savage life. The government is working hard for his betterment, and he should respond with a willingness to advance by adjusting himself to the new order of things. The opening of this reservation to settlement, tends to mingle him with his white brother, leading to an inter marriage of the two races. The tribesman will learn wisdom from his new neighbors, who will teach him how best to wrest his food supplies from the soil. The change was inevitable, and why should you go on the warpath? (143-44)

Densmore's rhetoric is virtually identical to that underlining the constellation of policies implemented under the Dawes act, designed

to eradicate aboriginal culture through a combination of economic and cultural measures. His professed admiration for the 'strenuous life' on the ranch conceals his real ambition to exploit its wealth. "There must be wealth somewhere in this new country--mines of it among the Indians--requiring only brains and strategy to possess" (84). When Densmore is led to believe that Cogewea is wealthy, these ambitions take shape in the form of a plan to seduce and murder Cogewea. Densmore's insidious motives, given his defense of assimilationist state policy, establish continuity between developments in the present, and the historical legacy of conquest and dispossession, suggesting that the present allotment system is just another land-grab cloaked in attractive but false promises.

Driven by the struggle between two rivals for Cogewea's affections, the plot articulates an argument in which assimilation is structurally identical to dispossession. This narrative challenges the 'liberal' attitudes claimed by assimilationists, who, because they advocated non-violent policies, considered themselves enlightened and benevolent (Limerick 197). In fact, these non-violent measures shifted the primary mode of dispossession from the battlefield to cultural arenas by imposing Euro-American models of land-ownership onto Native Americans, who lost even more land because most were excluded from the cash economy. Moreover, the Allotment system was predicated on an agrarian ideal which did not reflect the reality of most American farmers, plagued by fluctuating prices for their crops, overproduction, crop failure, debt, and foreclosure (Limerick 130-33). The tension between Native and Euro-American models of ownership is manifest in the slippage between two

different ways of understanding Cogewea's wealth: Although it is in one sense a fiction perpetuated by the cowboys in order to play a practical joke on Densmore, it is simultaneously real in the Native sense--that is, by inhabiting the land, Cogewea owns it. But property ownership is not something that Mourning Dove defines in a very precise way. The ranch where Cogewea lives is owned by her white brother-in-law, but for some reason Cogewea is empowered to hire Densmore as a ranch-hand. We are told that Cogewea also has her own allotment, but it does not seem particularly important to her. While the concept of property in *Cogewea* takes on this somewhat unreal quality, this does not diminish its importance as a source of conflict: Densmore may be after property which doesn't exist--at least, not in the way that he imagines it--but the threat to Cogewea's life is real.

However vaguely defined, the concept of property ownership supplies a frame of reference for articulating the less tangible but more important struggle for cultural survival. Well-read and literate, Cogewea has her "war bonnet" on during her scathing critique of *The Brand* (95). Similarly, Densmore acquires knowledge of Native traditions, stories, and rituals in order to seduce Cogewea. In particular, he plans to marry Cogewea in a tribal ceremony, both to convince her that his intentions are sincere, and to extricate himself from both the legal and moral complications that a Christian ceremony would involve. The outcome of Densmore's plan, if successful, is identified with genocide by virtue of the fact that Cogewea stands to lose both her identity and her life.

One of the more insidious tools in the Anglo-American struggle for cultural dominance is the symbolic economy, which appears to include a place for Native American culture, but actually commodifies it for Euro-American pleasure and profit. The perception that Native culture would soon be irretrievably lost fueled the 'need' to preserve it through print and performance, transforming it into yet another appropriable resource--such as, for example, the war dance, which *Cogewea* represents as a tradition co-opted into the commercial framework of the Fourth of July celebration. "These ceremonies, held sacred by the more primitive tribesmen, are now, shame to say, commercialized and performed for a pittance contributed by white spectators who regard all in the light of frivolity" (59). Although these passages resonate with McWhorter's ethnographic agenda, which stressed the recovery of 'authentic' culture uncontaminated by 'white' contact, the commodification of Native culture is also implicated in Cogewea's cultural dispossession. Having "no Native costume" to wear for the "squaws'" race, for example, Cogewea must rent one. The stakes are considerably higher with respect to the seduction plot: Densmore's plan to exploit the tribal marriage ceremony for his own profit means death for Cogewea.

The primary basis for Native resistance in this 'culture war' is their access to cultural capital in the form of 'authentic' traditions, rituals, and stories. The authenticity of popular mythologies of Native history and culture is called into question throughout the text, but especially in relation to Cogewea's critique of *The Brand.* Not only is the writer of *The Brand* (Theresa Broderick is never named) "wholly

ignorant of her subject" (88), but we later learn that the local cowboys have had a hand in her inaccurate representation of Native culture, as Jim LaGrinder explains:

> I was there when the boys was a stuffin' one poor woman. It was at the first buffalo roundup when lots of people come to see the sight. A bunch of us riders was together when this here lady come up and begins askin' questions 'bout the buffaloes; and Injun names of flyin', walkin' and swimmin' things and a lot of bunk. Well, you know how the boys are . They sure locoed that there gal to a finish; and while she was a dashin' the information down in her little tablet, we was a thinkin' up more lies to tell her. We didn't savey she was writin' a real book, or maybe we would a been more careful. Yes, *maybe!*

Some critics feel that these allusions to tactics used by Native informants to subvert Euro-American cultural authority inscribe Mourning Dove's resistance to McWhorter's editorial control over the novel, not to mention the way in which he redirected Mourning Dove's career away from fiction in favor of collecting folklore (Bernardin 500). But the passage also fits into the more broadly conceived cultural politics which underlines the seduction plot. Like the author of *The Brand,* Densmore is 'locoed' by the cowboys. Led to believe that Cogewea owns vast amounts of land and livestock, when in fact her holdings consist only of the modest tract of land allotted to her and a small bank account, Densmore, like the author of *The Brand,* is vulnerable where his knowledge is lacking. Densmore is predisposed to believe that Cogewea is wealthy because he is caught

up in the mythology of the frontier as a vast pool of resources waiting to be claimed by 'heroic' entrepreneurs such as he fancies himself to be. This mythology is undercut in the text by virtue of the fact that Densmore's flattering self-image makes it possible for the HB cowboys to exercise their power over him, using practical jokes exploiting his desire to possess knowledge of the strenuous life they lead. They persuade him, for example, to mount the most dangerous bucking horse on the range in order to expose his ignorance of horses. There are limits, however, to this use of satire as a form of resistance to cultural colonization, because it is circumscribed by the system of commodification, which might empower a Native informant to "loco" a tenderfoot, but does not bring about any radical upset in the status quo. The author of *The Brand* might unwittingly expose her ignorance to a well-informed reader such as Cogewea, but this weakness will not prevent mainstream readers from taking her cultural authority at face value, nor does it constitute a significant barrier to the distribution of the work. Similarly, Densmore's ignorance does not stop him from doing real harm to Cogewea.

Cogewea's full-blooded Grandmother, on the other hand, occupies a position of relative autonomy from the commercial framework which otherwise circumscribes cultural politics on the reserve. She refuses to live anywhere but in her tepee, does not eat "the white man's food," and her cultural authority as a storyteller is determined outside of the system of commodity capitalism. While often read as isolated examples of Mourning Dove's relatively 'unmediated' voice--both because they are associated with 'authentic'

oral culture,[20] and because their language more closely resembles extant examples of Dove's unedited writing (Fisher, "Introduction" xvii)--Stemteemä's stories are also integral to the novel's broader argument: Aside from the reader, Stemteemä is the only figure in the novel who knows Densmore's motives from the beginning. While the reader acquires this knowledge via the omniscient narrative, Stemteemä's knowledge is derived from stories handed down from her ancestors by oral transmission, and from visions she has in the sweat lodge and in dreams. These supply the basis for her distrust of Densmore. That her stories and visions correspond with what the omniscient narrative reveals to be true identifies Stemteemä as a primary authority in the text. The problem, however, is that Cogewea does not recognize Stemteemä's authority. Although she "prefer[s] the Indian," and is vocal in her opinions of Euro-American conquest, she is also attracted to the 'civilized' life she associates with Densmore: "a home--a husband who loved books and who would appreciate her efforts at making their domicile a place of endearment and happiness" (137).

The struggle between Stemteemä and Densmore for influence over Cogewea is also a struggle between cultural survival and cultural genocide, resolved only when the seductive fictions of assimilationist rhetoric are finally exposed as yet another form of dispossession. This is precisely the cultural work Stemteemä's stories perform. They recount various phases in the history of conquest--from the earliest prophesy of the arrival of "a pale-faced nation," to

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[20]Brown, "Mourning Dove's Voice in *Cogewea*" (10); and Bowering, "The Autobiographings of Mourning Dove" (34-35).

the arrival of the Lewis and Clark expedition--and are often prefaced by remarks about Densmore which indicate that her instincts about him are based on her knowledge of past conquests. "I do not like this Shoyahpee, who tries to steal my Cogewea from me and my people. I want her to marry some one of her own kind and class. I do not want the white man with his marked tongue. He will only cast her aside for one of his own race after he tires of her" (216). To warn Cogewea, Stemteemä tells her "The Story of Green Blanket Feet," a woman tricked into marrying a "Shoyahpee," and then brutally abused and abandoned by him. "The fate of *Green-blanket Feet* is for you," she tells Cogewea, "unless you turn from [Densmore]" (176). Cogewea replies that "the wisdom of the Stemteemä is of the past. She does not understand the waning of ancient ideas" (176). Cogewea's belief that Stemteemä merely represents a dying culture is undercut by the plot, in which Stemteemä's "wisdom" is absolutely relevant.

Cogewea is rescued from Densmore only after Stemteemä's warnings become the basis for a form of agency which resists Densmore in a more profound way than the practical jokes of the HB cow-punchers, who at first under-estimate the implications of Cogewea's relationship with the tenderfoot. Jim LaGrinder, Stemteemä's agent in the rescue, begins to suspect what Stemteemä has known all along after discovering material evidence to support Stemteemä's suspicions: A fragment of a letter written by Densmore to an eastern friend which discloses the plot, and reports from two cow-punchers that Densmore had been tricked into believing Cogewea to be wealthy. On the basis of these discoveries, LaGrinder concludes that Cogewea is in immediate danger. By this time,

however, it is almost too late: Densmore has already beaten Cogewea and left her tied to a tree after discovering that she is not as wealthy as he has been led to believe. Jim reports his suspicions to Stemteemä, only to find that she already knows more: "My son, you have brought me no news!" Stemteemä tells him,

> Last night I saw in vision the grandchild and I knew that something fearful was to happen. To me the spirits revealed Cogewea, child of my daughter, suspended over the dark swirl of rushing waters. She was struggling in the grasp of a frightful monster--a human serpent whose eyes were the glitter of gold--whose voice was the clinking of silver. His face gleamed with delight at her torture; at her cries for the help that did not come. I was powerless to reach her, and my screams were as but the summer breeze in the moaning pines. At last I recognized the Shoyahpee--he of the luring voice--a vulture whose talons were rending my Cogewea, whose beak was buried in her weakening heart. (271)

Stemteemä's vision resonates with both the truth of her knowledge (the reader has also seen what she sees) and the powerlessness of her position, both of which originate from an identical source. Stemteemä knows the truth, the text's internal logic implies, because she has not been assimilated. Signified by the fact that she rarely leaves her tepee, Stemteemä's autonomy entails a lack of participation in the main events of the plot: it is up to the mixed-blood characters to act upon her warnings. This dynamic negotiates a double-bind which associates Native cultural autonomy with

powerlessness. The mixed-blood characters are in a position to act by virtue of the power associated with whiteness, which enables them to engage in the social world in a way which Stemteemä does not. They use this power, however to reverse the tide of assimilation. Jim LaGrinder's rescue of Cogewea, and the couple's ensuing marriage, are events which signify Native cultural survival and predict its reproductive capacity in the future. Moreover, by choosing to act in accordance with the wishes of her grandmother rather than emulating the example of her mother, Cogewea symbolically skips the mistakes made by the previous generation and actually changes the course of history. To signify this reversal in the legacy of dispossession, the text concludes with Cogewea's repossession of her inheritance. But because Cogewea has, in the Native sense, 'owned' the land all along, the real change signified here is that Cogewea's wealth has finally been validated by the dominant culture.

This utopian ending was especially important to Mourning Dove, who successfully resisted McWhorter's advice to change it to better reflect what he regarded as the tragic reality of Native-American history. The significance Mourning Dove attached to the ending implies that the plot mattered to her--that she had a particular story to tell, and was not simply using the Western romance form as an awkward vehicle for making Native folklore and culture available to a mainstream audience. That story, moreover, is coherent and legible: Mourning Dove appropriated the Western romance to re-articulate dispossession as repossession. It is also a story that has been eclipsed by the history of Dove's collaboration with McWhorter. Certainly, as Arnold Krupat points out, it is crucial

for literary analysis of Native American texts to engage a critique of their mode of production, because collaboration between Native-American authors and Euro-American editors and ghostwriters has underwritten the production of Native-American literature (4-9). The study of oral literature is similarly bound up in issues of cultural production because its distribution in the academic community-- in the form, for example, of taped performances or written translations--requires mediations that are not fundamentally different from those governing the production and distribution of *Cogewea*.[21] But the fact that Mourning Dove may have used McWhorter as a ghost writer to tell her story does not necessarily obviate her agency in the text; this collaboration does, however, require reading strategies which resist dispossessing Mourning Dove of the authority for which she struggled.

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[21]For an overview of issues and approaches related to the analysis of Native American oral literature, see Andrew Wiget, "Native American Oral Literatures: A Critical Orientation."

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Conclusion: Redefining the Relationship Between Women and the West

When I began researching Western writing by women, I was particularly interested in work by popular writers because the dominance of a "male myth" was associated with popular culture in particular. This premise tended to influenced the kind of material that was associated with "women and the west" in that discussions of Western writing by women rarely situated their work in relation to popular culture except to remind us of the dominant mythology women writers had to contend with. Exemplary of the assumed relationship between women writers and popular culture was the extensive scholarship on unpublished writing by Western women produced during the 1980's, which looked for women's voices in a field that was as distant from popular fiction as one could possibly get.[1] Meanwhile, the immensely popular B.M. Bower was almost entirely excluded from discussions of Western American writing by women, even though she was probably the most widely published female Western writer in American literary history.

My related interest was in the connection between Western American fiction and American national identity, a link which implied that women writers who chose to write about the West were, by definition, participating in the production of a national culture. I considered this an inherently transgressive act in the context of

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[1]Examples include Christiane Fischer, ed., *Let Them Speak For Themselves: Women in the American West 1849-1900;* Lillian Schlissel, ed., *Women's diaries of the Westward Journey;* and Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices From the Kansas Frontier.*

Western American fiction before 1920 (when the Nineteenth Amendment was passed), because women did not have status as voting citizens--a symptom, I believed, of a national culture which defined citizenship as exclusively masculine. When I learned that a woman author, B.M. Bower, was among the first to popularize the Western formula established by Wister's *The Virginian* in the years leading to the Nineteenth Amendment, I wondered if her activities as a western writer were in any way homologous to the activities of woman suffragists. That is, were women Western writers the literary equivalent of woman suffragists? Did they revise mythologies of American nationhood in the same way that suffrage activity did, and was this revision a necessary antecedent to the political empowerment of American women as voting citizens?

In many ways, the result of my inquiry bears little resemblance to the way I had envisioned it in the beginning. This thesis does not, for example, equate suffrage with feminism. It does not focus exclusively on popular writers, and it does not contextualize Western writing by women solely in relation to the woman suffrage movement. This is not to say that my initial hunches were not born out by my research; in some cases they were. Rather, I found the literary activity of women writers far richer and more complex than my initial line of inquiry would allow for. Gradually, I shifted my emphasis toward a case-study model, which would allow me to maintain some sense of the complexity of the material I encountered, and to broaden the scope of my inquiry beyond the deterministic assumptions I had initially brought to it.

The first phase in this shift in emphasis came about as I struggled to define "the popular Western." Because I was interested in national mythology, and because I believed popular culture to be the primary arena in which mythologies are produced and perpetuated, I concluded that my investigation should focus in particular on women who wrote popular Westerns. I began researching women authors active during the rise of woman suffrage as an independent political movement (1880-1920), and was immediately confounded by the task of deciding who wrote popular Westerns and who did not. This task required some working definition of the popular Western: Should it be defined on the basis of its fidelity to a certain formula? Its level of circulation? Its mode of production? There was no shortage of research on the subject, yet I was profoundly dissatisfied with existing taxonomies of the popular Western. Defining the genre according to a certain formula made it difficult to situate women writers in the field because prevailing scholarship defined the formula as masculine, leaving me with two alternatives: I could produce a revised definition of the formula which included more women writers, or I could theorize a separate formula exclusively for women writers. Neither approach seemed appropriate. Many of B.M. Bower's novels, for example, depart quite dramatically from "the formula," yet it seemed unsound critical practice to categorize her separately when, in her own day, she was considered on equal footing with the likes of Owen Wister, Zane Grey, and William McCloud Raine. Moreover, the more I learned about "the formula," the more slippery and undefineable it became: Is it determined by setting, plot, characters, language, or some

combination of these? Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *Oxbow Incident* (1940) contains many elements considered formulaic--a Western setting, cowboy characters, a lynching--yet I have never seen it classified as formula fiction. Likewise, Sergio Leone's 'spaghetti' Westerns self-consciously display their formulaic properties, yet Leone is considered an innovator. He, like Clark, somehow managed to transcend the limitations of formula, yet the precise point at which this transcendence is achieved has never been completely clear to me.

An alternative approach relies on circulation figures to mark certain texts as popular culture. These texts may represent the needs, desires, and beliefs of the populace, those of the culture industry which controls the production and distribution of popular culture, or the competing interests of both producers and consumers. Regardless of whether one maintains that popular texts reflect or determine popular needs, desires and beliefs, the most important texts are those which circulate on a massive scale because they speak to the experience of most participants in the culture. But does this mean that texts which do not circulate widely are necessarily disengaged from popular culture? This assumption marks certain texts, such as Francis McElrath's *The Rustler,* as irrelevant to research in popular culture even though their formal properties invite comparison to other popular texts. Yet the literary critic in me was profoundly intrigued by the startling connections between *The Rustler,* an unknown text by an unknown author, and *The Virginian,* a recognized Western 'classic.'

The problem, I realized, was that the category 'popular' is a relational one, defined through exclusions as well as inclusions, and meaning different things in different social and historical situations. Generic taxonomies of the popular Western are therefore inherently limiting. The term 'popular culture' can refer, for example, to forms of culture produced by and for "the people." In industrial settings, popular culture is sometimes associated with the mass media and the culture industry, forming the basis for critiques of certain pervasive racial, gender, and class stereotypes. It is often defined in a binary relation to "high" culture: popular culture is accessible, simple, and familiar; "high" culture is elitist, complex, and removed. To address popular culture as a fluctuating and relational category, I decided to broaden the scope of my inquiry to include women writers from different positions in the cultural hierarchy, not only to serve my own initial interests in popular culture in particular, but also to demonstrate how research in popular culture is relevant to literary studies as a whole. As well, I wanted to produce a more nuanced model of popular culture as itself a field of distinctions-- between, for example, ephemeral authors, such as Frances McElrath, who barely outlast their initial arrival in the marketplace; 'classic' figures, such as Zane Grey, whose reputation as a 'bad' writer did not detract from his staying power; and marginal authors, such as Mourning Dove, who were enabled by the popular Western despite its links to the interests of the dominant culture.

In situating my project in relation to the field of Western American literary studies, I was deeply influenced by the work of John Guillory, who articulated many of my own reservations about

the broader relevance of the work I was doing. Guillory's *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (1993) clarified these concerns by making explicit the liberal-pluralist conventions inhering in much debate about canon revision during the late 1980's and early 1990's, when I began my academic career. Guillory argues that "the participants in the 'symbolic struggle' over representation in the canon . . . overestimate the political effects of this struggle" because they misrecognize the relationship between the academy and the broader society (viii). In the liberal pluralist version of canon formation, "a group of readers, defined by a common social identity and common values, confronts a group of texts with the intention of making a judgment as to canonicity." It is, Guillory avers, "an *imaginary* scene" (28), and, moreover, one which, because of its liberal pluralist underpinnings, systematically represses the category of class (14). For Guillory, class is crucial to the debate about canon formation because "the fact of class determines whether and how individuals gain access to the means of literary production, and the system regulating such access is a much more efficient mechanism of social exclusion than acts of judgment" (ix). Guillory therefore recommends understanding canon formation "as a problem in the constitution and distribution of cultural capital," and this has been the sense in which I have understood my own recovery of Western American writing by women.

The objective of this project has been to make a select group of women writers accessible to students and scholars of Western American Literature. Although I still maintain that women writers were not on a level playing field with their male counterparts, I have

avoided presenting them as "excluded" from the canon on the basis of their social identity as women. Rather, I have attempted to address the question of how women gained access to the means of literary production, to what purpose, and the conditions under which they have been marginalized (or not) in both academic and non-academic settings. I believe that my approach has more potential for arriving at progressive paradigms for research and pedagogy because it does not produce a separate category for women's writing; rather, it assumes that engaging a discussion of women as Western writers entails rethinking Western American literature as a field.

Although I do not pretend to have addressed, in a comprehensive way, the possible directions in which a rethinking of this field can or should play out, my case studies do unsettle certain pervasive assumptions about the relation between women writers and the Western American novel. In its broadest sense, this project disrupts prevailing histories of the 'rebirth' of the Western novel at the turn of the century. 1902 is considered a watershed year in the history of the Western novel because it was then that Wister's *The Virginian* successfully recovered the genre from its dime-novel ghetto. Wister's supporting cast in this history includes Remington, Roosevelt, and Turner, yet Wister occupied a literary field initially constituted by Mary Hallock Foote. Zane Grey is widely acknowledged as Wister's early successor, yet the first cowboy character, after The Virginian, to achieve celebrity status was created by B.M. Bower, not Grey.

Each individual case study also raises questions of its own. Whereas early recoveries of Western writing by women tended to

assume that men made all of the rules, I have emphasized the culturally productive aspects of women's literary activity. My comparative reading of Francis McElrath's *The Rustler* and Owen Wister's *The Virginian,* for example, revisits an originary moment in the evolution of this 'classic' Western to recover some of the overlooked historical connections between the Western novel, women's politics, and women's literary activity, articulated by the association of the novel form with women's politics and culture. My discussion of B.M. Bower locates gendered constructions of the Western in the institutional framework of the mass-market press, suggesting that the construction of the women's romance Western was a reaction to the fact that women had already become visible in the field. Both of these case studies point to the ways in which women writers have been active in determining the history of the genre. My case study of Mary Hallock Foote challenges the assumption that the 'literary' Western is more enabling for the woman writer than the 'popular' Western. Although the 'fiction factory' is more often conceived as a site in which authors are subject to the joint control of consumer and editorial demands, Mary Hallock Foote experienced similar constraints in her relation to both her editors and her public, despite her status and reputation as a 'literary' woman.

For all of the ways in which Foote, Bower, and McElrath were marginalized as authors, all of them had significantly more opportunities in terms of acquiring literary capital than did Mourning Dove. The value of their work may be uncertain, but their status as authors is not. Mourning Dove, on the other hand, relied

heavily upon on Euro-American editors, making her status as an author unstable, and severely curtailing her choices as a writer. Of all the authors discussed here, Mourning Dove is perhaps the most instructive in terms of mapping out the Western novel as a field, because she crossed its most salient boundary.

These authors should not *replace* 'canonical' authors in discussions of Western American literature; rather, Western American literature should be presented in a way which explores the social relations through which certain authors and texts are privileged and others are not. This process requires discussing *both* 'canonical' and 'noncanonical' texts in *relation* to each other. As well, we should be mindful of the distinction between those who are marginalized and those who are excluded entirely. As Guillory points out, the mark of exclusion assigned to 'noncanonical' authors is not a genuine absence. The fact that critics have had difficulty discussing Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* as 'Literature' is symptomatic of conditions which determine absence--that is, limited access to what Guillory calls "*linguistic* capital, the means by which one attains to a socially credentialed and therefore valued speech, otherwise known as "Standard English" (ix). Mourning Dove's career therefore supplies a rare opportunity in the classroom, because it give students a concrete example of exclusion as a social process affecting real people, rather than as an abstraction which reduces certain groups to the level of an empty category.

I have purposefully avoided making judgments about the aesthetic value of the texts considered in this study. This is not to say that these texts have not affected me as a reader, or that I do not

enjoy them (I do). But my goal has been to explore the conditions under which certain texts are valued and others are not, rather than to make my own claims about their 'merits.' Yet, by using theories of literary value as a social relation, my hope is that students of Western American literature will recognize their own reading as a social experience. I believe that this recognition is inherently empowering because it demystifies existing cultural authorities and therefore enables subjects to value their own responses, and to make their own judgments about literary works. For, as Guillory concludes, "the point" of the canon debate "is not to make judgment disappear but to reform the conditions of its practice" (340).

The field of Western American Literature emerged from a similar 'canon debate' during the 1950's and 1960's. Important works such as Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950) and Fiedler's *The Return of the Vanishing American* (1968), as well as the literary journal *Western American Literature*, first appearing in 1966, represented attempts to broaden the definition of 'American Literature' in ways which recognized the importance of the West as a national symbol and as a distinct and important region. The result of this process is in keeping with what many critics of the more recent 'canon revision' debate have predicted: the production of a new selection process which looks new but is not fundamentally different from the one it has replaced. Recently, researchers in Western American Literature have begun opening up the Western American canon by looking more closely at marginalized literatures. In order to prevent history from repeating itself, we need to ensure that the

way in which we present this material is consistent with our progressive intentions.

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