

# UC Berkeley

## UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

"Against the real dangers of modern life the home is no safeguard": Examining Spheres of Affect and Coercion in the Home in Nineteenth Century California Literature

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5f41f6gf>

### Author

Tejeda, Carla Alicia

### Publication Date

2010

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

“Against the real dangers of modern life the home is no safeguard”:  
Examining Spheres of Affect and Coercion in the Home in Nineteenth  
Century California Literature

By

Carla Alicia Tejada

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Genaro M. Padilla, Chair  
Professor Mitchell Breitwieser  
Professor Richard A. Walker

Fall 2010



## Abstract

“Against the real dangers of modern life the home is no safeguard”:  
Examining Spheres of Affect and Coercion in the Home in  
Nineteenth Century California Literature

by

Carla Alicia Tejeda

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Genaro M. Padilla, Chair

This dissertation examines representations of domestic discord in California literature with the argument that scenes of coercion in the literature's multiethnic households enact the aggressive dynamics of U.S. expansion and governance in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The literary representations of political and familial forms of coercion presented here hinge upon the multiple scales implied with the term “domestic,” which include but are not limited to the private home space and the nation state. Between these spatial scales, the literary narrative of coupling and marriage on a private scale is then writ large as a national narrative of statehood and citizenship. Those writing in and about California in the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War were narrating a geography already inscribed with discourses of U.S. domestic policy with regards to its territories. The resulting U.S. narrative of migration and desire – enabled by the influx of gold rush speculators in 1849, the completion of the trans-continental railroad in 1868, and the various land booms and busts of the 1870s and 80s, came to define the region. The works examined here highlight the significance of California as a site of both national and international conquest. Almost all the homes depicted in this study house people who represent both the aggressors and casualties of westward migration and national expansion. The domestic spaces presented here are then sites of tension that symbolically enact the aggressive political and military campaign of westward expansion within an affective context. The focus on the home is a powerful symbol for this commentary, as it is an economic object imbued with affective expression. It is the material product of the emergent middle class, providing the means for exploring identity through the artifacts of culture, and in an era of homesteading, it serves as both the symbol and the instrument of national expansion.

For my family

Carlos, Leticia, Sandra, Elsa  
and in memory of Rebeca

## Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
1. “The home of so much hardship and suffering”: The Creation of a Region and its Literature.....	6
2. “They have made you homeless in your home”: The Architecture of Affect in <i>Ramona</i> .....	38
3. “The evil spirit has not left our house”: Spheres of Intimacy and Conflict in <i>Who Would Have Thought It?</i> .....	95
4. “Peering into the closets of the bedrooms”: Degenerate Domesticity in Frank Norris’s <i>McTeague</i> .....	137
5. Staking a Claim in the Literary World: Fiction in <i>The Overland Monthly</i> .....	173
Conclusion.....	201
Bibliography.....	204

## List of Figures

1.	Abbot Kinney's home, Kinneloa.....	41
2.	Frontispiece to Helen Hunt Jackson's children's book, <i>The Hunter Cats of Connorloa</i> .....	42
3.	Picture postcard of Rancho Camulos, reputed inspiration for the Moreno home in <i>Ramona</i> .....	77
4.	Floor plan of a Christian home, Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, from <i>American Home Life</i> .....	91
5.	Manuel Dominguez.....	112
6.	Pablo de la Guerra.....	114
7.	Frontispiece to Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe's <i>American Home Life</i> .....	140
7.	Grizzly illustration from the cover of <i>The Overland Monthly</i> .....	177

## Acknowledgments

This project would not have come to completion without the guidance and help of several individuals who in one way or another contributed and extended their assistance throughout this process. First and foremost, my heartfelt appreciation goes to Genaro Padilla, whose careful attention to my work was most appreciated. Your thoughtful and at times very entertaining comments made the editing process bearable. Many thanks also to Mitch Breitwieser and Richard Walker, who found time in their busy schedules to sign off on this project. There are others who have helped me along the way with whom I have crossed paths either as a student or as a teaching assistant, and whose work served as a model of scholarship, thanks to José David Saldivar, Hertha Sweet Wong, Joel Altman, Oscar Campomanes, Don McQuade, Samuel Otter, Richard Hutson, and Jenny Franchot. Anne MacLachlan, our conversations were invaluable, thanks for the advice. Friends in the department were there with cups of tea and conversation, providing insight and support, thanks Tony Hale, Tina Chen, Solomon Ireland, Margo Ponce, Jeannie Chiu, Mary Knighton, Jillian Sandell, Jeff Santa Ana, Melissa Fabros, and Phil Kiekhaefer. Antoinette Chevalier, those writing sessions were the beginning of it all, you are such a model of productivity. Jean Chu, your friendship has meant so much to me through the years. And, of course, my co-conspirator as I completed this project, Jean Vengua, our conversations and rants about our respective dissertations have kept me sane through the last leg of this journey. Many years ago, as an undergraduate at Occidental College, I had the privilege to work closely with two dedicated teachers and scholars, Warren Montag and Gabrielle Foreman. Their enthusiasm for scholarship and our many, many long and thoughtful conversations were the inspiration for my own work.

Those friends and family who lent an ear and a kind word, it meant more to me than you'll ever know: Lisa Smeenk and Pablo, Patti Blanco, Saúl Bolívar, Luis Fernandez, Mare Schumacher, Michelle Tellez, Anna Guevarra, Annie Retamal, Tina Kasid, Jim Morehead, John Flynn, Matthias Reinsch, Greg Keaton, Darryl Richardson, José Tejeda, Ronaldo Fermin, Eva and Ramón Bermúdez, Isela Bermúdez, Alex Tejeda, Armando Tejeda, Donnett Flash, Brent Turner, Maryanne Choi, Kathleen Wilder, Jay Schwartz, Mildred Matthews, Nancy Sours, Claire Ortalda, Mickie Christiansen, Barbara Hamm, Jin Lei Chang, Kerry Dolan, Don Hofvendahl, Nushi Safinya, Michael Rodriguez, and Janice Albert, who so loved California literature.

Finally, my dear family, to whom this project is dedicated, and my husband Jeff Juris, my partner in all things, to you I owe the deepest debt of gratitude.



## Introduction

And there is the house to be kept; and there are poverty and sickness<sup>1</sup>

The quoted phrase in the title of this dissertation is taken from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Home: Its Work and Influence*. The phrase, "Against the real dangers of modern life the home is no safeguard," expresses a sentiment that runs through the works examined in this dissertation.<sup>2</sup> Covering the period between 1870 and 1900, these novels and short stories reflect a distrust of the concept of the home as a refuge from the pressures and anxieties of the public sphere. This dissertation examines representations of domestic discord in California literature with the argument that scenes of coercion in the literature's multiethnic households enact the aggressive dynamics of U.S. expansion and governance in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. This study further proposes that the texts under analysis are representative of a larger public discourse about the role of affective expression in public and private life. Given the presence of force or coercion between family members and couples in these domestic spaces, these literary representations construct an uneasy connection between affect and violence. This affective expression in turn defines spheres of relations - including some while excluding others from the "national family."<sup>3</sup> California serves as the locus of this expression in the wake of the U.S.-Mexican War and the Civil War because a number of situations converged to bring a large cross section of people to the region primarily for the exploitation of resources. The ensuing U.S. narrative of migration and desire – enabled by the influx of gold rush speculators in 1849, the completion of the trans-continental railroad in 1868, and the various land booms and busts of the 1870s and 80s, came to define the region.

The literary representations of political and familial forms of coercion presented here hinge upon the multiple definitions of the term "domestic," which include but are not limited to the private home space and the nation state. Those writing in and about California in the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War were narrating a geography already inscribed with discourses

---

<sup>1</sup>Helen Hunt Jackson, *Bits of Talk About Home Matters* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1873), 238.

<sup>2</sup>Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 32.

<sup>3</sup>During his State of the Union Address, in the midst of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln used the phrase to great effect: "That portion of the earth's surface which is owned and inhabited by the people of the United States is well adapted to be the home of one national family, and it is not well adapted for two or more." in Abraham Lincoln, "Annual Message to Congress, December 1, 1862," in *The Language of Liberty: The Political Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Joseph R. Fornieri (Washington, D. C.: Regnery Publishing, 2009), 643. Lincoln's use of the language of domestic fealty was meant as an appeal to national political unity.

of U.S. domestic policy with regards to its territories. Between these spatial scales, the literary narrative of coupling and marriage on a private scale is then writ large as a national narrative of statehood and citizenship. When passionate conflict between lovers serves as a symbolic enactment of the negotiation of political or military force in tumultuous geographies, public expressions of violence in turn become imbued with the affective discourse used in fiction. As such, the national narrative of home acquisition through westward expansion positions California as a site of both national and international conquest. Almost all the homes depicted in this study house people who represent both the aggressors and casualties of westward migration and national expansion. The domestic spaces presented here are then sites of tension that symbolically enact the aggressive political and military campaign of westward expansion within an affective context. The focus on the home is a powerful symbol for commentary, as it is an economic object imbued with affective expression. It is the material product of the emergent middle class, providing the means for exploring identity through the artifacts of culture, and in an era of homesteading, it serves as both the symbol and the instrument of national expansion.

In California, homesteading encountered a fully documented opposition in the legal cases brought against emigrant squatters by Mexican and Native American landholders. It is precisely this expressed conflict over land and over domestic spaces that makes the California home a unique artifact in nineteenth century U.S. culture. As we will see in this dissertation the home becomes a symbol of the imperial nature of national development in a country with expanding borders. Those homes already in the region are subject to the colonizing forces of westward expansion. Those built afterward are the material enactment of that expansion. As all the works examined in this dissertation reveal, domestic dysfunction and coercion arise in this environment.

Chapter one, “‘The home of so much hardship and suffering’: The Creation of a Region and its Literature,” provides a historical and literary context for the works examined here. After a brief outline of the social transformation of post-annexation California, the chapter then offers a brief assessment of the discursive uses of the term “domestic” as it relates to the argument of this dissertation. In considering the concept of “domestic violence” in nineteenth century discourse, I then examine the aggressive home dynamics represented in the region’s literature. These expressions of private-sphere violence are metaphoric representations of social discord. This literary expression speaks to the extension of the tropes of domesticity – in literature and in social reform work – beyond the domestic sphere. I also consider these works as regionalist, and as such, they must contend with the conventions of that genre and with expectations about western regionalist literature in particular. They must also contend with what I see as the predecessor to these other texts: Richard Henry Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast* served as an unintended guidebook for the region for decades after its publication and its influence is profound. I present a brief reading of Dana’s representations of Mexican and Indian domesticity in an effort to contextualize what I posit as a discourse of coercive domesticity in the region’s literature.

Chapter two, “‘They have made you homeless in your home:’ The Architecture of Affect in *Ramona*,” looks at the trajectory of author Helen Hunt Jackson’s writings about domesticity. From *Bits of Talk About Home Matters*, a reflection on forms of physical and emotional familial abuse, there emerges in her work a clear attention to the way that this abuse is enabled in the private domestic sphere and in national domestic affairs. I relate this work to her later travel writing on southern California and consider how it provides the groundwork for what I see as the most trenchant symbol of injustice in the region – the dismantling of Indian households and

occupation of their homes by emigrants. Then in *Ramona*, by looking at instances of narrative attention to domestic design, I consider how the novel engages the way space is inscribed with meaning. I argue that Jackson's representation of Indian domesticity is as much a treatise on design and aesthetics as it is a blueprint for the architecture of Indian subjectivity. This is especially important in a novel such as *Ramona*, which was penned as a form of advocacy for Native American rights.

Chapter three, "'The evil spirit has not left our house:' Spheres of Intimacy and Conflict in *Who Would Have Thought It?*" considers a novel that is not set in California but that is nevertheless engaged in the regional debates on statehood, citizenship, race, and rights for Mexicans in California. I examine how the author María Amparo Ruiz de Burton addresses these issues through a fictional metaphorical narrative. By presenting instances where the political discourse in California contends with the question of U.S. citizenship for Mexicans and their rights as white citizens, this chapter engages the association between race and affect in the debate on the integration of Mexican Californians into the Union. The young protagonist of Ruiz de Burton's novel, a Mexican girl rescued from kidnappers and brought to live in an abolitionist New England town, provides the occasion for questioning that connection between race and affect. The family's uneasy and at times cruel acceptance of the young girl provides a critique of the aggressive domestic policies of northeastern republicanism. This young girl's presence in this family reconfigures the dominant North-South narrative of American politics and introduces an international, and far western perspective on American domesticity and identity.

Chapter four, "'Peering into the closets of the bedrooms;' Exploring the Naturalist Domesticity of Frank Norris's *McTeague*," considers a novel that veers from the works discussed up to this point in that it represents a shift in aesthetic intention. I touch briefly on the genre debates that informed Norris's work and served as commentary on the legacy of domesticity for realist and naturalist writers. The chapter examines the way that Norris deals with the inheritance of domesticity in his depictions of working class characters. Norris's dismissal of realist aesthetics, by claiming that the naturalists depict people and places not deemed appropriate for realist fiction, is a key aspect of his break with realists. This section addresses the novel's representations of working class identity, from their aspirations to middle class domesticity to questions of public comportment. I consider these issues in the context of Norris's depictions of racial types, particularly his representations of ethnic whites who people his San Francisco.

Chapter five, "'Staking a Claim in the Literary World: Fiction in *The Overland Monthly*," considers the work published in *The Overland Monthly*, a cultural and literary magazine that aspired to be in California what *Scribner's* and the *Atlantic Monthly* were to northeastern readers. The magazine's initial success, thanks to the popularity of Bret Harte's fiction, provides a set of expectations about what California literature should be. The short fiction presented in this study, published in *The Overland Monthly*, deals overtly with these questions, as these stories of domestic abuse, murder, and suicide extend commentaries on the consequences of California's annexation after the war. The themes addressed vary from assimilation and miscegenation to the extent to which amorous relations engage in coercive action that mirrors the social relations of larger populations in the region. Starting with Ambrose Bierce's "The Haunted Valley," I consider how issue of Chinese and white relations creates an uncomfortable model for domestic relations. Then I examine Kathryn Jarboe's "Doña Dolores," a story about a Californiana unhappily married to an Anglo American. The author's depiction of Californio anger, stemming from the U.S. conquest of the region, is aestheticized in a gesture toward literary nostalgia. J.A.

Rhodes's "Lolita Lavegne" is a sensationalist story that depicts Native American sexuality as a violent and dangerous. This story's depiction is degrading and abhorrent, but it provides a historically relevant example of such representations. Sui Sin Far's "A Chinese Ishmael" provides a powerful commentary on the difficulty that Chinese men and women faced at this time in establishing normative domestic situations. The two protagonists, who meet by chance, encounter insurmountable legal and situational obstacles to their love. Their violent end speaks to the hopelessness of their situation.

With so much injustice and violence and abuse present in these works, the question of author advocacy must naturally arise. While both *Ramona* and *Two Years Before the Mast* had a reformist message, one often overshadowed by their works' success, this is not the case with all of the works examined in this dissertation. The class consciousness of Dana's memoir, and advocacy work of Jackson's novel are not easily mirrored in the naturalist works of Frank Norris. Though it is possible to read a social commentary in *McTeague*, the novel doesn't argue for any form of advocacy for the working class. *The Octopus*, a work that I do not address in this project, is more likely of the two to be called politically engaged, with its criticism of the consequences of corporate and personal greed. Though Norris's ultimate critique of the farmers' battle with the railroad complicates any outright identification with their plight. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's novels *The Squatter and the Don* and *Who Would Have Thought It?* are certainly impelled by political injustice. *The Squatter and the Don* fully identifies with the patriarchal Mexican landowners who are politically disenfranchised in this new society, while squatters on their land, the yeoman farmers so integral to the U.S. myth of national expansion, are seen as thieves benefitting from their privileged status in the U.S. court system. Entirely missing from Ruiz de Burton's analysis and identification with Mexican Californians is the fate of the Native Americans, who do not figure as active agents in the region, or of ones deserving any consideration. Those who dismiss Ruiz de Burton on these grounds do so without truly considering the compromised position of Mexicans in California during this time. Her novel *Who Would Have Thought It?* completely identifies with a New England patriarch who has Southern sympathies during the Civil War. Her scathing critique of the culture and hypocrisy of the North, especially when it comes to the racist underpinnings that denigrate the sanctity of the home, expresses anxiety about the consequences of Yankee hegemony.<sup>4</sup> The short stories discussed here, "Lolita Lavegne," by J.A. Rhodes, "The Haunted Valley," by Ambrose Bierce, "A Chinese Ishmael," by Sui Sin Far, and "Doña Dolores," by Kathryn Jarboe, all have violent and tragic ends. All of these stories center on romantic relationships that suffer under the stress of accommodation, or coercion, all representations of a geography in flux. Of the writers whose work appeared in *The Overland Monthly*, only Sui Sin Far and Ambrose Bierce are still read and studied. Sui Sin Far's writing was certainly a form of advocacy. Ambrose Bierce's work as a muckraking journalist helped expose railroad industry abuses against farmers in California. Critical readings of these authors' works have often hinged on whether these writers sympathized with what modern scholars would label progressive or conservative social discourses. Queries into the overt social and political commentary of the texts certainly merit attention. While

---

<sup>4</sup>For a brief history of New England cultural dominance in the US., see Marcus Cunliffe, "New England: The Universal Yankee Nation," in *American Literature to 1900*, ed. Marcus Cunliffe (New York: Penguin Books, 1987).

Jackson and Ruiz de Burton openly wanted to affect change at the legislative and social level, it is their works' representative constructions of affective bonds that reveal the ideological underpinnings of those activist impulses. Key to this analysis will be the interrogation of the clash between representations of regional experience and the overriding discourses on place, space, and subjectivity in light of economic and physical aggression. With that in mind, this study aims to assert that love and passion are themselves assertive literary representations that must negotiate the imposition of national discourse on cultural identity and subjectivity in California. The California household becomes a powerful subject for examining this tension between the centers of literary production and the subjects of literary expression. The region's homes provide a means for examining the tension between private desire and public expressions about forced assimilation at the personal, regional, and national level.

## Chapter 1: “The home of so much hardship and suffering”: The Creation of a Region and its Literature

America has never been a blood-home-land.  
Only an ideal home-land. The home land of the  
idea, of the spirit. And of the pocket. Not of the  
blood.<sup>5</sup>

Early U.S. travelers to California – those venturing out in the decades after Mexican independence from Spain in 1821 – had to sail by ship around the horn of South America. It was an expensive and arduous journey, which had the effect of creating a self-selecting group of adventurers and merchants. Most were sojourners who participated in the hide and tallow trade, carrying raw goods to the east, and returning with finished products: shoes and clothes. Those emigrants who chose to reside in California had to abide by the Mexican government’s laws to convert to Catholicism and speak Spanish. Throughout this period of Mexican rule, California, and the rest of the northern Mexican region that now makes up the modern-day American southwest, remained a distant backwater. But the region entered the U.S. political and imaginary consciousness at a fevered pitch after its annexation at the end of the U.S. – Mexican War (1846-1848). The discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill, within days of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ushered in a wave of emigrants to the port of San Francisco to try their luck.<sup>6</sup> The struggles that developed over access to resources quickly established the region’s reputation for opportunity and lawlessness.

It is in this context that Anglo-phone fiction writers begin to formulate the region’s literature, in effect creating and immortalizing certain perceptions about the place. As artifacts of culture, the works examined in this dissertation reveal tensions over genre (which are actually debates over how to perceive the world and its problems and possible solutions), and over geography (in a land peopled with emigrants, all eyes were on the east). The coincidence of their setting or subject matter brings them under the umbrella of California literature. And yet, they reveal similarities in their representations of domestic discord – an indication that the symbolic enactments of literary representation are a profound commentary on experience at the private, regional, and national level. The representations of the homes of the native inhabitants in particular are fraught with colonialist voyeurism, as the bodies of women become imbued with a discourse of conquest expressed as desire and violence. Love and hate, passionate emotions that are often confined to the private sphere, are themselves insistent representations that must subjectively negotiate national discourses on race, corporeal agency, and domestic self-determination in California.

It was speculation about the interiors of homes, and what occurred inside them, that

---

<sup>5</sup>D. H. Lawrence et al., *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105.

<sup>6</sup>This was the peace treaty signed at the end of the U.S. – Mexican War that ceded the northern part of California and the New Mexican territory to the U.S.

determined the reformist concerns of the era. This was not merely as a benevolent regard for households within the republic, but also as a concern for the way that degenerate households could contaminate the civic domestic space. This is a concern that began to express itself as a national project with the domestic advice literature of the antebellum era, but always as a private sphere concern that placed the responsibility of national development on individual households.<sup>7</sup> The link between the private home and the republic continued to evolve in the latter part of the century as a national project headed by professional advocates and public policy enactments – it was a move to dictate standards for private homes through legal and public regulations. This is a shift that could only happen through the engaged representation of the public sphere as a civic domestic space. This preoccupation with the link between the private domestic sphere and the civic domestic realm is a key element in my analysis of California literature.

This chapter will begin with some historical context, providing social, literary, and cultural settings for the works to be analyzed. Also, it will be necessary to first discuss the influence of the most prominent antecedent of regional California Anglophone literature – Richard Henry Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast*. The influence of Dana’s memoir was far-reaching, and its depictions of the native California populations was notably referenced by the authors of the works that I will be discussing. I will provide a reading of Dana’s discussion of Californian domesticity, which he characterizes by its lack of discretion and discreteness. It is a place where affect and coercion are the dominant tools of housekeeping.

### Historical Background

Though much has been made of the influx of gold rush emigrants into California, much of this population was transitory, overwhelmingly male, and international in origin. It was not until after the Civil War that westward U.S. migration occurred on a grand scale, including whole families and groups of families that formed into emigrant societies. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 redefined conceptions of time and space: track-laden routes and schedules systematized emigrant movement with greater accuracy and swiftness. The emigrant phenomenon that it enabled actually enacted the most defining transformation on the landscape, economy, and population of the western states. United States census figures of the period demonstrate the effect of population growth in the west relative to urban centers in the east: from 1860 to 1870, the population of San Francisco went from 56,802 to 149,472, constituting a 263% increase in population. By contrast, New York City, the largest city in the U.S. and main entryway of the nation, saw population figures rise from 813,669 to 942,292, resulting in a

---

<sup>7</sup>A perfect example of this is the dedication printed in Catharine Esther Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes* (New York: J.B. Ford and Company, 1872). It implies a causal relationship between domestic didacticism and national development. It reads: “To the women of America, in whose hands rest the real destinies of the Republic, as moulded by the early training and preserved amid the maturer influences of home, this volume is affectionately inscribed.”

greater absolute number, but amounting to only a 15% increase in overall population growth.<sup>8</sup> These population figures lend some perspective on the dramatic shift in cultural influence and practice in the region during this period. Almost immediately the emigrants outnumbered Californios and Native Americans by a large margin.<sup>9</sup> Mexicans went from being a substantial portion of the population to being a small single-digit percentage of the population in a matter of years. This was especially noticeable in northern California, where the gold rush drew the most people. San Francisco became the locus of mineral wealth and industry and the entryway for those seeking to reach California by rail. On the other hand, the southern part of the state was a world apart. The Californio communities around San Diego and Los Angeles operated much as they had before the war, only they were now isolated from the civic and political life that had once been theirs. The pastoral economy of the Mexican ranchers had a short reprieve before the land speculation booms of the 1880s. Historians have noted that the massive influx of U.S. emigrants into California tilted the scales of influence, creating anxiety over shifting economic and political authority in the region.<sup>10</sup> For it is in times of flux that the various factions of a

---

<sup>8</sup>Subsequent decades yielded equally significant population growth in San Francisco with a 57% increase from 1870 to 1880 and 28% from 1880 to 1890. These figures do not account for the difference between population increase due to childbirth and immigration or migration. The numbers are substantial enough that childbirth rates would be negligible by comparison. For other raw population figures, see Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790-1900," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 1998).

<sup>9</sup>"Californio" is a class and geographic-specific term used to describe the native-born sons and daughters of emigrants from Mexico who arrived as land-grant recipients after the secularization and dismantling of the missions. Their isolation and distance from Mexico City made them strident regionalists. Their land-wealth and native status distinguished them from other "Mexicans" who were recent arrivals mostly from Sonora. When the region was annexed by the U.S., Anglo arrivals used the term "Mexican" to describe all of the area's denizens, with the descriptor "Spanish" reserved for those of the old elite families. "Spanish" is problematic because it denies Mexican sovereignty in the region between independence and the war with the U.S. It also implies an exclusive European ancestry, which stemmed from a desire to erase any Amerindian ancestry. Today historians use the term "Californio" to describe the land-owning class, and I use it in the same manner. But it should be noted that none of the nineteenth century authors I examine here employed the term; they preferred to use the term "Mexican" with an occasional "Spanish."

<sup>10</sup>Several historians have addressed this issue. See Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Carey McWilliams and Matt S. Meier, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1990); Douglas Monroy, *Thrown among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and David J. Weber,



society vie for the ability to determine the political and economic objectives of a region and in turn the cultural markers that define that region's past, present, and future. Ever mindful of this, this dissertation aims to consider how a number of fiction writers attempted to define their respective convictions about what the history and future of the region should be.

### **Scales of the Domestic**

Much as we use the word “domestic” today, late nineteenth century social critics and policy makers used it to describe both the home space and the nation state. *The Continental Monthly*, a short-lived magazine out of Boston devoted to literature and politics, commented as much with a pair of articles entitled “Our Domestic Affairs.” The passage below serves as a testament to the common use of the varied scales of the term “domestic” as it lists the sundry affairs that are modified by that adjective:

Not of those affairs which are domestic in a broad, national sense; not of any of our home institutions, ‘peculiar’ or otherwise; not of politics in any shape, nor of railroads and canals, nor of interstate relations, reconstructions, amnesty; not even of the omnivorous question, The War, do I propose to treat under the head of ‘Our Domestic Affairs;’ but of a subject which, though scarcely ever discussed except flippantly, and with unworthy levity, in that broad arena of public journalism in which almost every other conceivable topic is discussed, is yet second to none, if not absolutely first of all in its bearings upon our domestic happiness. I refer to the question of domestic service in our households.<sup>11</sup>

The terminological equation between regional strife in “The War” with the dynamics of household service, (both hired and enslaved, as indicated in the terms “domestic service” and the reference to “peculiar” institutions), is an example of the discursive engagement with the multiple scales of the “domestic” which proliferated then and which inform my analysis of domestic spaces in the works under consideration in this study. The term's multiple meanings allowed for and encouraged parallel discourses with regard to both familial and national governance, with scale-specific debates over discrete comportment and the discreet geographies of home, region, and nation. Discourse about the private domestic sphere and national foreign and domestic policy debates of the time make parallel arguments about governance and affect – both entities are bound by affiliations that are defined in relational terms. It is this attention to the boundaries that define autonomous regions and actions, and authors' sometimes nervous or giddy response to U.S. expansion that is congruent with the expanding and expansive private home space, that informs this study.

---

ed., *Foreigners in Their Native Land; Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973).

<sup>11</sup>“Our Domestic Affairs,” *Continental Monthly: Devoted to Literature and National Policy* 6, no. 3 (1864): 241.

To clarify this connection between scales of the domestic and discretion (the governing of comportment) and discreteness (governing of geographic boundaries): understand that one common thread that occurs in the literature examined here is that the role of governing bodies is to control comportment and enforce boundaries, even while those rules of comportment and those boundaries are being questioned by subjects. While usually that dynamic is expressed in gendered terms, with husbands imposing their will on women through physical or psychological abuse, there are several instances in my study where the abuse is performed by women on young girls. The literature examined in this study deals with one party's expressed desire for discretion and discreteness that ultimately creates domestic discord and strife, all the while engaging the varied scales of the domestic. Through such representations the California home, housing both the aggressors and victims of westward U.S. expansion, becomes the disputed locus in narratives of conflicted subjectivity.

Given that “domestic” applies to entities of varying scales – home and country – then the factors that define the domestic do so by creating discrete economic or geographic boundaries. The domestic space is circumscribed by affective bonds, and those boundaries are defined by discreet behavior that protects the domestic through affect, governance, and loyalty. The love that holds a home together is expressed not unlike the patriotism that binds a nation together in this emerging discourse, as this following example shows. At the 1893 Columbian Exposition, the relatively new field of Anthropology brought a scientific tint to the question of culture and progress in the debate on American national identity by drawing a direct conclusion about degrees of human progress based on peoples' culturally figured scales of affect. Noting the peculiar ability of “civilized” cultures to feel affection for abstract entities such as the nation state, Otis T. Mason, curator of the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology from 1884-1908, wrote:

Among the civilized communities there has grown up a reference for the government, called patriotism, and from this, combined with the love of one's native land, comes a strong motive in holding the people of a nation together.<sup>12</sup>

Opining that the absence of Native American nation-states was a sign of their savagery, their “most civilized bond that of kinship,” Mason, and those of his ilk, used a vocabulary of affect to draw a direct relation between the capacity to “love” on grand or abstract scales and the capacity to govern along the varied domestic scales. Mason's proficiency in using this vocabulary of affect to describe patriotism provides an interesting example of the common acceptance of the multiple scales of the domestic. In this case the home and nation are both sites defined by affective relations, the “love” of country creating a brotherhood of affiliation. But it is that extra step that he defines as a sign of cultural progress – that love for country – that separates the colonizers from the colonized. Following this line of thinking, emotional conduct becomes emblematic in both cooperative and conflicting endeavors at both the national level and in the private home. In other words, expressions of love or hate or anything in between that occur within the private domestic and the national domestic sphere are not just private expressions of private emotions,

---

<sup>12</sup>As cited in Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 59.

but public articulations that make the conflict symbolic and material, or personal and political.

The scenes of domestic discord I examine in this dissertation pointedly reference the idealized antebellum northeastern middle class domestic space that was a fixture in domestic advice literature, sentimental or domestic fiction, and social reform discourse.<sup>13</sup> As California writers dealt with the legacy of that sentimental literary tradition that helped forge the metonymic relation between home and nation during the antebellum period, their own representative far western home spaces served to question the cultural primacy of that eastern urban site of middle-class aesthetics and affection. On several occasions, this comparison shows the California home space and domestic union as a site of negotiation between conflicting interests. Like much other regionalist writing, California literature articulates the coercion that underlies its marginalized status. These works do so through expressions of physical and emotional intimacy that negotiate desire under coercive conditions: private desire for autonomy counters forced assimilation in a number of these texts. It is in literature where we see both northeastern and California authors' attempts to imagine the California psyche and to construct regional character through fictive subjectivity. It is also in California literature where we see the most prominent representations of nineteenth century U.S. intercultural, interethnic, or multiethnic households, as is the case in all of the households examined here. These domestic spaces house both the aggressors and victims of westward migration and national expansion, whose relations are literarily figured through narratives of passion. What better way to imaginatively contain an exotic land – what German-born booster writer and journalist Charles Nordhoff called “the first tropical land which our race has thoroughly mastered and made itself at home in” – than by imagining its peoples “strange customs,” and intimate actions, and by taking “inventory” or “peep(ing)” into their homes?<sup>14</sup> It is this American literary fascination with the private spaces of exotic sites of contention that makes the California home one of the most contested of imperial spaces in this period as it embodies an emotional world that filters the wreckage of domestic and international conquests.

“Domestic discord,” the term I used earlier, conjures up images of “domestic violence,” a term that is used in twentieth century social work and popular culture to describe the use of force or manipulation in familial or affective relationships. The term “domestic violence” was used in the nineteenth century, but not to describe the anguish and sublimation that occur in intimate and familial relationships and within the most private spaces within households. Instead, it was

---

<sup>13</sup>One of the most well-known examples of domestic advice is the oft-cited Catharine Esther Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes* (New York: J.B. Ford and Company, 1872). The book attempts to address the utilitarian and moral imperatives behind the practice of good housekeeping. Mid-nineteenth century sentimental literature, referred to here as “domestic” literature, following literary historian Nina Baym's lead, was forthright in its argument that a solid home life built a solid nation. Both genres dominated book and magazine publishing until the early 1870s. See Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-70* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>14</sup>Charles Nordhoff, *California for Health, Pleasure, and Residence: A Book for Travellers and Settlers* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1973), 11, 157.

always used in reference to regional conflicts within a nation, particularly within the United States, as stated in the Constitution.<sup>15</sup> Domestic violence took on a different meaning in the U.S. after the war with Mexico and subsequent Civil War, when the country contained within its own borders coercive relations with regional strife, subjugation, or exploitation.

By extension and inference the term “domestic violence” encompasses the varied geographic scales of the domestic to also reference the other domestic – the home. If the term “domestic violence” had referred to aggression within the private home during the late nineteenth century, it would have added another dimension to the varied scales of the domestic which I listed at the beginning of this introduction – one that would engage the power dynamic expressed in literary scenes of abuse and in historical records. But the varied scales of the domestic already allowed that implication to exist. The modifier “domestic” would by implication have engaged the nature of affective discretion and would have reconfigured how that affective discretion set the discrete boundaries of violence, determining each region's role in the evolving national geography.<sup>16</sup> Whenever the question of affect comes into play, the familial bonds of the home are necessarily implied. It was the strategy of reformers and abolitionists to point out the violence within a home that practiced corporal punishment and slave-owning. While the conflict between the North and the South during the Civil War was considered an example of domestic violence (a discordant exchange within the confines of the national domestic sphere), newly acquired lands

---

<sup>15</sup>Article iv, section 4 of the Constitution states: “The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government, and shall protect each of them against Invasion; and on Application of the Legislature, or of the Executive (when the Legislature cannot be convened) against **domestic Violence**.” In a discussion of the U.S. imperial project, the following example considered the way that territorial expansion would expand the U.S. borders, and in effect extend its “household”, including new populations that might have been formerly hostile: “The United States . . . would be bound to . . . protect them against invasion, and, upon proper application, against **domestic violence**. In other words, this republic would admit them as equal members to its **national household**, to its family circle, and take upon itself all the responsibilities for them which this admission involves.” Carl Schurz, “Manifest Destiny,” *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 87, no. 521 (1893): 739. (Emphasis mine) For a few examples, some specifically citing the Constitution, others addressing the concept of domestic violence in general, see: Rev. L. Bacon D.D., “The Political Outlook,” *New Englander and Yale Review* 37, no. 142 (1878): 86; John Fiske, “Completed Work of the Federal Convention,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 59, no. 356 (1887): 817; “The Rhode Island Question,” *United States Democratic Review* 11, no. 49 (1842): 81.

<sup>16</sup>See Charles Sumner, “Our Domestic Relations; or How to Treat the Rebel States,” *Atlantic Monthly* 12, no. 71 (1863). Or this response by Charles Russell, “Our Domestic Relations; or, How to Treat the Rebel States,” *Continental Monthly: Devoted to Literature and National Policy* 5, no. 5 (1864), for examples of this use of language. Russell even implores the reader to approach the topic “lovingly.” Also see recent scholarship about the litigious land grant battles in the Southwest in Maria E. Montoya, *Translating Property: The Maxwell Land Grant and the Conflict over Land in the American West, 1840-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

such as the southwest and California created a jarring effect on the discreteness of violence and the boundaries that defined scales of the domestic. The initially foreign or international violence of the Mexican American War turned into domestic violence as the U.S. government enacted laws that allowed for the abuse of its own citizens, recently acquired through treaty or conquest.

Remembering the resonance of a term such as “domestic violence” helps ground this study of varied scales of affective coercion. Domestic coupling or marriage then acts as the private expression of public institutions of governance. In turn, these romantic ties serve as the threshold between private desire and public expression about that desire. This is because to love someone is a personal choice (driven by romantic notions of love rather than pre-modern traditional pragmatic alliances) that is sanctioned by state and religious institutions in many cases. Domestic coupling is both public and private, and discourse about the household's discrete realm of influence is key to understanding the larger debates about U.S. discreteness – especially since its borders prove to be malleable. It takes on a deeper meaning as the symbolic imaginary enactment of a public institution – marriage or housekeeping – that in a coercive context passionately negotiates geographic trauma. When the households represented here have coercive dynamics, it is an expression of the personal toll enacted by grander economic and political mechanisms.

This dissertation's analysis of the literary representations of intercultural housekeeping, or domestic coupling, might bring to mind the work of other scholars who have examined historical romances. Literary expressions of passionate or affective bonds have been the subject of study by a number of scholars, most notably Doris Sommer's examination of nineteenth century Latin American imaginary national consolidation in *Foundational Fictions* and Nina Silber's study of the novels of Reconstructionist reconciliation in *The Romance of Reunion*. This study differs from those previous ones in that it does not seek to examine the symptomatic nature of fictive love bonds within a historical conciliatory framework. Both Sommer's and Silber's studies focus on the romance as a narrative form of conciliation, with courting between enemies and symbolic consummation a balm for past grievances between opposing camps. My own work is not a study of historical romances per se, though Jackson's *Ramona* and Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* fit that description. Instead I examine the literary negotiations of affect and violence in literature in order to address how coercive emotional bonds are symbolic enactments of the workings of the U.S. political economy. Interweaving local politics, migration history, and economic development in the region, these works present affective bonds that are emblematic extensions of a regional identity; coupling becomes an expression of a national narrative defined by migratory desires, particularly in California, a region increasingly peopled by emigrants. Despite stereotypes, Californians of the time would often assert that California is “more settled than “almost any State in the Union,” having “much less of a frontier population than New York,” with all of its immigrants.<sup>17</sup> The works in this study understand the irony of the myth of westward migration: it is fueled more by eastern wanderlust than by western liminality.

---

<sup>17</sup>Nordhoff, *California for Health, Pleasure, and Residence: A Book for Travellers and Settlers*, 19.

## Domestic Literature

While my dissertation examines the representations of discord and affect in domestic settings, the domestic novel of the previous generation seems a logical precursor. That is the case to some extent, but the works discussed here are products of a different world that has altered the relation between writer and reader in the intervening years. So while the authors I examine must contend with the legacy of idealized domesticity of sentimental literature, they do so from a vantage point altered by historical and economic developments in the intervening decades. Harriet Beecher Stowe's entreaty to "feel right" when confronted with the perversions of slavery speaks to a strategy that is more emotional and theological than it is active.<sup>18</sup> When Helen Hunt Jackson penned her work of advocacy thirty years later, it was with the expressed interest to enact legislative changes to help the disenfranchised California Indians. Even still, Jackson considered Stowe's sentimental legacy and the power of fiction when writing her novel. In deference to the cultural influence of Stowe's novel, Jackson hoped *Ramona* would: "do for the Indian a thousandth part what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did for the Negro."<sup>19</sup> Her recourse to fiction shows how the themes and narrative strategies of sentimental fiction had far-reaching influence and remained persuasive metaphors for the social reform discourse of national development long after the genre's heyday. Furthermore, authors questioning the political and economic methods of national expansion through violent land appropriation used the home as the focus of their criticism precisely because the home was an economic and affective symbol that tapped into the *raison d'être* of the novel: the examination of the self through the artifacts of culture.

The popularity of domestic literature resulted from a combination of material factors but was foundationally dependent upon one: the growth of the publishing industry due to technological advances which in turn lowered production costs, democratizing book-buying. As a cottage industry economy gave way to large-scale manufacturing in commercial and agricultural production, book publishing also experienced rapid growth thanks to steam powered presses and the large-scale vision and aggressive growth of the grand publishing houses. By 1840, a nearly ninety percent literacy rate of the native-born population guaranteed a sizeable consumer pool, and the literary market became more sophisticated in its profit-motive, catering to those who had the economic means and the time to read for leisure.<sup>20</sup> So while domestic advice books can be

---

<sup>18</sup>Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: New American Library, 1966), 472.

<sup>19</sup>Letter to Thomas Bailey Aldrich in Helen Hunt Jackson and Valerie Sherer Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 258. However, this is a strategy, as she considers the "people will read a novel when they will not read serious books," 298.

<sup>20</sup>Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing About Domesticity, 1830-1860* (New York: Copublished by the Institute for Research in History and The Haworth Press, 1982), 14. Consider also at this time that literacy rates were geographically weighted. Poorer western states such as Indiana or Ohio, often drawing an uneven mix of educated New Englanders and poor emigrants from Kentucky, would have shown a much lower overall literacy.

traced to the ministerial advice books published and sold at a local level in the early decades of the century, through to the reform association publications created by temperance and anti-corporal punishment groups during the reform era of the 1830s-40s, it is the rise of the big publishing houses in the 1850s-1860s where the literature about domesticity reached its cultural and productive apex.

But this was a time of great geographic and cultural flux, and the U.S., particularly the northeast, had a highly mobile population.<sup>21</sup> The sons and daughters of New England's yeoman farmer class exchanged that inheritance for factory jobs or white collar work, often leaving behind their entire social network. This mobile population did not have the benefit of family and friends when those had been left behind in a bid to stake out a better life. The popularity of domestic advice literature expressed the general cultural anxieties over a newly developing set of social practices that reflected not only a growing stratification of society by class, but also revealed that those familial mentors who would normally instruct in such cases were not around. According to historian Mary P. Ryan, "the central purpose of the cult of domesticity was to provide a familial refuge from the frenetic movement of the American people, to shore up at least one small set of human relations against the forces of change, movement, and discontinuity."<sup>22</sup> So, rather than representing the world as a mirror, the domestic advice literature that was so popular throughout the early to mid-nineteenth century was an attempt to provide narrative order to a world that seemed chaotic. The development of the domestic novel marked the creation of a commercially successful expression of a generational shift in familial dynamics and their material experience.

As noted earlier, nineteenth century definitions of "domestic" encompass varied spatial scales – the most prominent being the middle class home. Given this cultural emphasis on the home space, this study's attention to literary representations of affect and conflict in domestic spaces necessitates an acknowledgment of the cultural influence of domestic or sentimental literature and the cultural expression labeled the "cult of domesticity." There is no one monolithic expression of the domestic or sentimental novel, but the general goal of that genre must be defined to point out the subsequent generation's acknowledgment of and reaction to sentimental domesticity's appeals to sympathy and moral integrity – values that define the idealized antebellum home. The monikers "domestic" or "sentimental" used to describe the genre create the perception that the concerns of the domestic novel are limited to the home and that the literature explores emotion and affect to unparalleled depths. These perceptions, as now three decades of evaluation by revisionist literary scholars have shown, are only vaguely correct. First, domestic literature and the "cult," or cultural discourse about domesticity, are distinct. The cult of domesticity is exemplified in the advice literature of the 1830s-1870s that defined rules of social comportment and house management for proper middle-class behavior, such as the domestic advice of Catharine Beecher, or the magazines *Goody's Lady's Book* or *The Ladies' Home Journal*. By contrast, domestic fiction presents a home life that is not ideal; the genre is situational and is generally about the struggle of a young girl or woman to free herself from the tyranny of an unhappy home in order to create her own home and attain the status of matron and

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 45.

to be a part of that class of families referenced and counseled in domestic advice literature. At times the cult of domesticity and domestic fiction operate at odds, with the cult creating an ideal that the literature, by necessity of plot, must disparage in context.

Contrary to what the genre descriptors “domestic” and “sentimental” would imply, this literature is not only about the home, nor is it a genre that simply “elevates feeling above all else.”<sup>23</sup> In her book *Woman's Fiction*, Nina Baym notes that the genre, which she calls “woman's literature” posits “that feeling must be controlled,” since “merely to feel strongly is to be self-absorbed and passive.”<sup>24</sup> A popular book of the time, *Etiquette for Ladies*, expressed as much, saying that:

excessive gaiety, extravagant joy, great depression, anger, love, jealousy, avarice, and generally all the passions, are too often dangerous shoals to propriety of deportment . . . It is to propriety, its justice and attractions, that we owe all the charm of sociality.<sup>25</sup>

While it is true that a number of domestic novels are morality tales of the wages of uncontrolled emotion, oftentimes they define the parameters of conduct through objectionable, rather than acceptable, examples. The passionate storyline is irresistible, as evidenced by the popularity of the books that contained examples of unacceptable comportment. But despite the guilty pleasure of delving into expressions of passion, the genre's emphasis on control, or discretion and discreetness, most exemplify standards valued by the cult of domesticity and most embody the legacy of domesticity that carries over into the latter decades of the nineteenth century. This requirement for discretion is articulated in the need to control emotions. While the emphasis on discreetness applies to one's negotiation of space, the way that space takes on meaning, and the economic factors that define and enable that space also come into play as authors express those effects on the home. In a turbulent home, control – the concept so fundamental to the genre – comes in the form of duress, and the negotiation of that force.

This imperative for control is present in domestic literature's reaction against romanticism and emphasis on pragmatism, making it a sober “blueprint for survival under a specific set of political, economic, social, or religious conditions.”<sup>26</sup> As such, domestic fiction provides the standard for understanding white middle-class women's negotiation of agency and subjectivity. For young heroines from unhappy homes, their attempt to create the domestic ideal which has so eluded them in their formative years is the enactment of that desire for agency in a world that has

---

<sup>23</sup>Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-70*, 26.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>Cited in Katherine C. Grier, *Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 100.

<sup>26</sup>Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xvii.



limited it. For that reason it is a genre marked by a sense of optimism about the domestic sphere: it is not the institution of the home that is at fault, but individuals who use their power to abuse the helpless. But in pointing out the possibility of abuse within the home, and by its very general plot trajectory, domestic literature is implicitly most critical of the very institution that it apparently most idealizes. Far from being the monolithic private-sphere centered literature by turns praised or vilified by the realists and by subsequent generations of scholars, it is contradictory – self-critical, and yet self-congratulatory. Conflicting impulses aside, though, in the end it is the genre's didacticism, resolving optimism, and melodramatic flourishes that determine its fall from critical aesthetic grace in the 1870s. It is the genre's perceived lack of complexity that leads proponents of realism and naturalism to shun these bestsellers of the previous generation. While domestic literature might involve plot twists with similar romantic dynamics to literature that receives the label of “realist” or “naturalist,” as a genre it has distinct goals and concerns – ones often dismissed by later critics. But to say that Norris, Bierce, or other rarified writers are not attempting to reconcile that antebellum home with their own latter-day home spaces would be dismissive of domesticity's “cultural work” or “the way (it) has power in the world,” expanding the genre's sphere of influence.<sup>27</sup>

The critical attention to domestic literature and its cultural significance has generated an extensive amount of scholarship concerned with the question of whether this genre offered a liberating form of expression for women about their sphere of influence or a reaffirmation of a stifling social structure.<sup>28</sup> While the foundational work of Ann Douglas's *Feminization of American Culture* (1977) disparaged the greater cultural influence of domestic literature, Jane Tompkins's *Sentimental Designs* set the tone for a reconsideration of domestic literature that examined its complexity by taking into account literary strategies in a social context. The reassessment of domestic literature, after a century of canon-formation that excluded the genre, has yielded mostly grudging advocates. Another wave of works by scholars critical of initial feminist assessments has surfaced in the past several years. Works such as the edited collection *The Culture of Sentiment* have done much to examine problematic aspects of domestic fiction and its extra-literary influence through “race- and class- impelled subtexts – and institutional contexts – of Anglo-American domesticity.”<sup>29</sup>

### Civic Housekeeping

The final decades of the nineteenth century were characterized by what Laura Wexler has

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., xv, xiv.

<sup>28</sup>See Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 4-5.

<sup>29</sup>Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States*, 3; Shirley Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

termed the “afterglow of sentimentalization,” where public institutions – “schools, hospitals, prisons” – enacted the deeds and manners exemplified in sentimental literature, often with coercive results.<sup>30</sup> It is a period when the public “agenda advanced middle-class notions of gender and family relations, focusing as it did on bettering the lives of women and children” with not only the language of sentiment but with direct references to the literature that influenced it.<sup>31</sup> Domestic literature – while no longer a great publishing powerhouse or the darling of the cultural and literary powers-that-be in the latter part of the nineteenth century – could still exercise influence over the discourse of social reform that characterized the early social reform work of the Progressive era. It is that public discourse on reform and on the role of the state in determining the norms of social comportment, that are referenced in this analysis of California regionalists. As such, this study is not an attempt to extend the parameters of the sentimental or domestic genre to include texts that have been labeled naturalist or realist literature. While domestic literature definitely brought the ideals of domestic serenity into public discourse about social reform, the genre's emphasis on young female protagonists who must undergo financial and emotional hardship in their quest for a home, is not the intended point of comparison. What the literature does reveal is a culture's anxiety over a host of social ills that accompanied industrialization. And as an expression of the era, it speaks of a culture preoccupied with the utopian ideals that could feed public and private desires. Through narratives of affective bonds, the genre links private desire with public appeals for reform, and as such it serves as a textual threshold in the U.S. imaginary between affect and rationalism.

Civic housekeeping, an increasingly common form of social activism for middle class women during the antebellum reform era, became a social outlet for civic-minded women in the late nineteenth century. It softened the shift between private family-oriented housekeeping and public civic housekeeping by applying the metaphor of the domestic sphere on public acts of social reform. This metaphor for women's work imposed middle class standards of comportment articulated in the literature of domesticity. This created the conditions for attempts to assimilate, often coercively, the recipients of public benevolence such as Native American children or immigrants. This is what some scholars have found so troublesome about the legacy of domesticity, particularly with regard to the fate of the recipients of public acts of benevolence. As for the agents of domestic didacticism – educators, social reformers, or health workers – the question is maybe less insidious but not any simpler. This dynamic is mirrored in the cultural uses of sentimental discourse. This is because the vernacular used to express an exalted private-

---

<sup>30</sup>Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 102-03. Wexler's book provides a cogent study of the imposition of the domestic ideal upon people who are impelled through structural reform programs to conform to the middle class northeastern ideal. In one chapter she discusses the fates of Native American children who are put into Indian schools to assimilate into mainstream Anglo culture.

<sup>31</sup>Kathryn Kish Sklar, "The Historical Foundations of Women's Power in the Creation of the American Welfare State, 1830-1930," in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993), 45.

sphere experience is no longer of use to the cultural arbiters of the late nineteenth century. Instead, its tropes and metaphors have been relegated to public acts of benevolence and social reform projects. The affective domesticity of the antebellum private sphere has by the end of the century become very public, on a grand scale. Literary depictions of coercive domesticity are the subsequent generation's acknowledgment of the problematic nature of idealized domesticity as it is depicted literarily and enacted in public policy. The extension of domestic idealism into the public realm, of social reform discourse rooted in sentimental charity, contributes to the public expansion of the domestic sphere, enabling a metaphor of public or civic housekeeping to describe national development and expansion in the form of imperialist ventures. The extra-literary influence of the genre is evidenced in the institutions of public assistance that operated with the same tropes and concerns outlined in the genre and which used those ideals as standards for moral assessment which in turn determined assistance based on assimilationist concerns for recipients who existed outside of that ideal. In the end, reformers sought to engage social problems through a reformist structure that often demanded more from beneficiaries than it could compensate in return.

### **Romance and Domesticity**

For some of the characters examined in this dissertation, proclamations of love in the midst of societal disapproval have been interpreted as acts of defiance. This defiant love is the scholar's ideal. It is a romantic notion, an emblem of uncontrolled, and therefore anti-rational action, now marshaled by an author to make a social or political statement. Much of the scholarly criticism of *Ramona* does in fact see the protagonist's cultural identification with her Luiseño lover as a call to political and social identification with native Californians. Such scholarship advances the romantic notion that affect, the more passionately expressed the better, is not only deeply personal and liberating, but politically and socially revolutionary. But must we not at least tentatively call into question the assumed subversiveness of defiant expressions of affect, especially given the nature of romanticism's aesthetic treatment of affect? The issue is especially relevant for critics who hope to champion social underdogs in their scholarship by engaging works in a critical progressive manner. If excessive passion and feeling, a characteristic associated with both the romantic and domestic literature of the antebellum period, (the first in celebration, the second in condemnation) could be by turns liberating and stifling, could latter nineteenth century attempts to redefine passion be revolutionary?

One thing passionate expression in literature does reveal is the underbelly of socially acceptable normative emotional expression. The literary expressions of passionate bonds in the works under discussion here probe the realm of secret subjugation and anguish that was often excised from the world of domestic literature. The violence enacted within domestic spaces in these texts is not the stuff of genteel parlor chitchat; it is instead relegated to whisper-tones in darkened bedrooms and hallways. California domesticity, with its radically different architecture of low slung adobes and open patios veers from the standard of northeastern domestic spaces of secrecy and expression. This disassociation of place, space, and expression then provides the perfect foil for a double critique of U.S. idealized domesticity and of national development. It also provides, even if only temporarily, a new model for understanding the mainstream narrative of domestic life. And while the common boarding house depicted in Frank Norris's *McTeague*

may not seem very different to his eastern readers, its context provides a shift in geography and perspective where the usual symbols of sentimental expression are overturned. When Trina mourns the loss of her precious gold, stolen by her abusive husband Mac, the empty sacks that had once held those coins become the objects of a new and re-interpreted sentimental practice: “day after day she took them from her trunk and wept over them as other women weep over a dead baby's shoe.”<sup>32</sup> Norris's association of Trina's greed with one of the most common rhetorical devices of domestic fiction, the scene of a mother's mourning over her dead baby's shoe, seeks to disengage the act of mourning from its sentimental context. While Trina's loss is tragic, her affective attachment to the gold coins is multivalent. First, the narrative imbues them with a meaning and emotion reminiscent of the affective relations depicted in domestic fiction. But Trina's admiration of the coins is sexualized: she puts the coins in her mouth, and in one scene famously rolls on them naked. With these multiple forms of affection, Trina's mourning becomes a commentary on antebellum values and practices that in this context are construed as the fetishization of gold. Norris has turned the mourning scene, one of the most powerful functions of domestic literature, into a farce. And while in domestic fiction a baby's death creates a disjuncture, disrupting household harmony, here in Norris's world a new truth is revealed: it is economic security that is most important to the home, and its absence should most definitely be mourned.

### **Regionalist Literature: California in the Scheme of Things**

The regionalist literature emerging in the final decades of the nineteenth century often expressed anxiety about the facile grouping of far-flung regions under the yoke of an urban industrial economy. Regionalist writing, through its preoccupation with cultural difference, exposed the myth of discrete geographies. Scholarship on regionalist literature has focused almost exclusively on northeastern, southern, or midwestern rural identity in the face of migration and outside influence. Bringing California literature to bear on the discussion of American regionalism alters our understanding of the works under analysis; and recontextualizes regionalism's production and consumption from the point of view of the far west. As California authors negotiate eastern assumptions about discretion, public expression, and home spaces, their works confront those ideas with portrayals that are a metonym for the internal conflicts within the nation. At stake is the fate of regional identity and its significance in nineteenth century American culture.

A cursory glance at an American Literature anthology will reveal that many of the texts examined in this dissertation, with the notable exception of Frank Norris, are labeled regionalist, or local color literature, a subheading under the broad and very general genre of realism. This sub-genre has historically been associated with women writers of New England and the South. The designation “local color” has been a bone of contention with scholars who find the term dismissive, and a sign of the manner that literary scholarship has traditionally denigrated writing

---

<sup>32</sup>Frank Norris, *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1977), 198. Two bestselling sentimental novels that contained such scenes are Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* and Susan Warner's *Wide Wide World*.

by women or men who do not represent the normative cultural standard as defined by the literature's readers, who are characterized as urban-dwelling, northeastern, and middle class magazine readers.<sup>33</sup> Regionalism as a topical and thematic development was emblematic of a new emphasis in literary publishing that mirrored a shift in the national economic infrastructure. By the time regional literature began appearing in the more prominent cultural and literary magazines, railroad construction, mostly funded by northeastern capital and with grants from the federal government, had already developed a travel infrastructure in order to facilitate industrial expansion beyond the northeast, especially in the South during reconstruction. The economic conditions that allowed for touristic travel were several. A large northern middle class had the disposable income and time to visit economically depressed proximate regions. These regions in turn sought tourists. And the railroad, built to facilitate the movement of goods, accommodated travelers just as well. These factors enabled the cultural conditions for literary tourism. This sort of consuming gaze on these peripheral regions – aided by northern industrial capitalist development – determined the tone of touristic travel. The dominant publishing houses at the time were located in the mid-Atlantic cities of New York and Philadelphia, and Boston, the cultural and intellectual center of New England. As the cultural outlets of northeastern capitalist development, the magazines published for readers whose economic and social interests found expression on an ever-evolving literary landscape that expanded to mirror U.S. military and economic imperialistic ventures. Rural communities, like the former whaling villages described in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), or conquered lands, such as the former Confederate states, came to be seen as retreats from the “commodified uniformity of northern society.” With the development of a tourist economy and an emphasis on leisure, “in the tourists' eyes, the south ceased to be a sectional problem and became more of a regional antidote to northern distress.”<sup>34</sup>

For a literary culture that had long been defined by the dominance of domestic or sentimental fiction, the gradual emergence of realism appeared to be a move toward a conscious engagement with a social world affected by economic and political forces. Whether or not one agrees with this consensus by the cultural arbiters who edited and published literature or the literary historians of the early twentieth century who created the American literary canon, what was evident was that this aesthetic shift coincided with increasingly stratified publishing practices. This parceling of readers is the hallmark of an industrialized nation, as it accommodates the commercialization of tastes that reflect economically and socially determined

---

<sup>33</sup>A number of scholars have examined the reader/subject dynamic of regionalist literature. A few notable examples: Richard H. Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Anne E. Goldman, *Continental Divides: Revisioning American Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); and Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>34</sup>Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900*, 70.

audiences.<sup>35</sup> And while publishing houses sought to address increasingly stratified readers, writers faced increasing pressure to accommodate those distinctions.

Helen Hunt Jackson's own writing career spanned the thin divide between domestic advice literature, sentimental fiction, travel literature, reportage, and reform literature, marking the path from literary domestic nation-building to imperial housekeeping. Understanding *Ramona* as a work of regionalist writing, in a time when travel literature was very popular, helps to ground the work in order to then assess the author's narrative strategies. Consider, for instance, that Jackson's first forays into California were to meet an obligation to *The Century Magazine* for a series of travel pieces about the region. This is helpful for exploring Jackson's language and use of local coloring in *Ramona*. *The Century Magazine* had a large circulation, approximately 200,000 in the 1880s, and by that time it had become the most prominent magazine of middle class culture and literature, read by highly literate and well-traveled readers. As an example of regionalist fiction, *Ramona*'s conscious representation of regional culture, and theme of disenfranchisement, were formulaic responses set by the genre to express social and cultural concerns of readers, editors, and writers. When Jackson's representation of exotic customs and the theme of dislocation seem like colonialist interpretations of California and its Mexican and Indian inhabitants, it is important to remember that those themes and her own literary strategies were well-employed in regionalist literature and in her own travel writing from Europe and the greater U.S. on several previous occasions.<sup>36</sup> At times that colonialist dynamic was not in place and what Jackson was expressing was an anti-industrial lament. While my analysis is not meant to overturn other scholars' charges of Jackson's condescending exoticization of Native Americans, it is an attempt to understand these author/subject dynamics along a different trajectory. The tension in the novel is not only one of racial and cultural subjugation. It is a tension that must be examined through the multi-faceted lens of historical occurrences that affect life in California: eastern industrialization, rural migration to urban industrial centers, immigration (into eastern urban centers, not to be confused with westward migration, which was of great concern to the native inhabitants of those regions as well), increasing discrepancies in wealth by region, the consolidation of a middle class with disposable income that could allow for some luxury, the development of leisure travel and subsequent attention to rural tourist centers. To all of this must be added the consolidated specialization of publishing houses and subsequent factioning of readers. Those reading Jackson's critique of Anglo emigrant greed in *The Century* were not likely the same people who read Ned Buntline's dime novels.

Regionalism provided a literary expression of urban nostalgia for forgotten villages that for the most part were economically depressed and seemingly isolated but in reality were already on the travel itineraries of city-dwelling families as vacation spots. With the democratization of literature in the mid-nineteenth century due to the increasing affordability of books, and the locus of popular literature on the middle class home, it seems counter-intuitive to think that regional literature was anything other than the voicing of oppressed and marginalized rural populations, as

---

<sup>35</sup>Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*.

<sup>36</sup>For a detailed survey of Jackson's early regionalist writing see Kate Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson: A Literary Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

a progression of that democratizing movement. But scholar Richard Brodhead contends that while it is certainly the case in its expression, in its publication and reception and staging, regional writing was a calculated attempt by publishers to forge and promote regional difference in a manner that was increasingly commodified and presented to readers of means.<sup>37</sup> It is intriguing to think that the subsequent appeal of regionalism could in part be attributed to an urbane interest in the quaint folk who peopled a quasi-pastoral, post-industrial bucolic land. But given the change in the northeastern urban landscape, specifically New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, the pastorals of Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Charles Chesnutt, or Hamland Garland could very well meet a certain nativist imaginative need. These were in the popular imagination insular worlds free of immigrants and of the manifestations of rapid homogenization, industrialization, the railroads, indeed they existed outside the march of time. But as all authors are individuals who make their own concessions for publication, or who interject their own convictions as protestations to counter that urban nostalgia and its attendant leanings toward condescension, there are authors whose works do not fit into that mold. One author not examined in this study but worth considering is Charles Chesnutt, whose stories certainly complicate that metropole/satellite dynamic. As a black southern author writing about black southern culture for northern magazines, his work had to negotiate any accommodation to middle class, northern, and white urban readers while maintaining the author's own dignity of place and person.<sup>38</sup> This poses a complicated question of the role that literature has in changing or perpetuating the perceptions of marginalized populations. While most of the writers examined in this dissertation write with some degree of advocacy in mind, even through the act of representation alone, their own role as outsiders must come under scrutiny here.

### **Western Regionalism and California**

Before the Massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890 that marked the end of the Indian Wars, western showmen like Buffalo Bill Cody, dime novelists, and politicians, and historians had capitalized on the public's fear of Native American aggression by promoting images of violent clashes between whites and Indians. After Custer's fall in 1876, many representations of Native Americans were particularly negative. This is because while most enactments or narratives followed the general scheme of manifest destiny, with whites as the inevitable victors in a grand struggle, Custer's fall served as a reminder that intelligent, passionate, and sometimes victorious forces opposed this vision. Custer's military defeat remained a rallying cry for the fallen, much like the narrative of the Alamo (1836) had during the U.S.-Mexican War. This impression was so indelibly marked on the popular imagination that it was the standard by which white/Indian relations were represented in every facet of American mass culture. It also tainted the association of "west" or "western" for those who lived in the eastern regions. The geographic designation

---

<sup>37</sup>Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*.

<sup>38</sup>Richard H. Brodhead, introduction to *The Conjure Woman, and Other Conjure Tales*, by Charles W. Chesnutt (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

“west” had ever-changing connotations, as westward expansion by way of the Louisiana purchase, the U.S. – Mexican War, and the Indian Wars allowed the U.S. to extend the boundaries of its map and add yet more material for the American imaginary landscape. Indian removal and the geographic fact of Anglo-American expansion across the continent also meant that there was an intrinsic correlation between westward migration and violent or coercive encounters between white settlers and Native Americans. This mythic construction of region and populace is important to understanding many of the standard American conceptual myths about itself. Henry Nash Smith's *The Virgin Land* and Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence* explore this idea quite well.<sup>39</sup> And certainly this has been studied with respect to the development of the western genre of literature and film in the twentieth century, from such predecessors as James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking tales or the dime novels of the late nineteenth century. Certainly women's literature addressed the way that white American women negotiated their presence in the western U.S., as discussed in *The Land Before Her* by Annette Kolodny.<sup>40</sup> The common denominator in much of this scholarship is the focus on the violence resulting from the westward migration of whites. Lora Romero's assessment of the American Renaissance's masculinist tendencies, articulated in a rejection of the middle class hearth, addresses the issue from the perspective of the northeast.<sup>41</sup> But there is freedom from and freedom to. If white eastern men freed themselves from the bonds of domesticity, they did so at the express imposition on the natives whose lands they explored. Jackson turns the U.S. narrative of westward migration on its head by focusing on the “freedom to . . .,” where from the native Californian point of view, voiced by Alessandro, the most marked masculine desire of the Luiseño men is to establish and secure their home, not to run from it.

There is no question about the fact that Jackson's novel of Indian love and loss appears on the heels of a very different type of California literature – the 1860s and 1870s saw a flourishing of gold rush emigrant literature by Bret Harte and his contemporaries. Perceptions about California and its Indians were influenced to such a degree by this literature, news coverage of the Indian wars, and dime novels set in the Plains region and the Southwest, that Jackson felt impelled to address this issue on several occasions. The literary magazines of the late nineteenth century are also marked by their conspicuous predilection for gold rush and rough-and-tumble topics with respect to California in the 1860s and 1870s. Jackson's own taste and regional expectations did not tend in that direction. Instead, her work was drawn by the same tendencies that distinguished most regional literature, engaging in a nostalgic rummaging through the landscapes and linguistic reliquaries of isolated enclaves for the entertainment of urban readers. The turn to Mexican and Indian settings – the drama of their dispossession – makes Jackson's *Ramona* the quintessential California narrative in the end.

---

<sup>39</sup>Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

<sup>40</sup>Annette Kolodny, *The Land before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

<sup>41</sup>Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States*.



Bret Harte's stories, first published in the late 1860s, enjoyed great success and served as the standard by which western regionalist literature was read and published. The genre was defined by a certain brand of folksy humor, most famously echoed by Mark Twain's *Roughing It* (1872). Harte's own works often had a light-hearted tone, and his stories were about the dominance of a domestic sentimentality triumphant amidst the harsh elements of western living and the even harsher population of rough and tumble prospectors. One of his most famous early stories, "The Luck of Roaring Camp," was the story of a prospecting settlement's adoption of the child of a prostitute, Cherokee Sal, who has died. One of the prospectors is presumably the father, but since no one is sure who the father is, all the men take care of him and curb their swearing and other rough behaviors. It is a story of the triumph of domesticity even in the most unrefined masculine spaces. But neither Harte's works, for all their folksy regionalism, nor the western cowboy and Indian melodrama ever sought to establish or explore Native American subjectivity. Harte's works, for all their emphasis on an exceptional western and specifically California setting, were about folks who were new to the region, or just passing through. Harte's stories were often about inhabitants of a liminal space – a gold rush boomtown or the wilderness, for instance – without regard for a native local culture or people. In her own writing, Jackson was certainly less interested in these new Californians. By her contemporaries' way of thinking, anyone anywhere was a possible future Californian. And if that was the case, what was a work of California regionalist literature to look like? If regionalist literature is conspicuous for its underlying preoccupation with migration, Jackson's California is the most shining example of that preoccupation. While the northeast experienced the exodus of young and able residents who found opportunity out west, California by contrast experienced an influx of so many new souls.

While the gold rush did influence much of the subject matter and characterization of the region, there were those who sought to explore the stories of residents who were not speculators or emigrants. For them, Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* served as an outlet for another imaginative possibility. Dana's popular account of life aboard a merchant ship off the California coast in the 1830s set the standard for literary representations of the region's Mexican and Indian populations. And while the memoir spends a great deal of energy in describing the harshness of a life at sea, there are fascinating glimpses of the folk life of Mexican California, with descriptions of character types, customs, celebrations, and mourning rituals. For the purposes of this study we will focus on those moments when Dana steps onto shore and recounts his experiences with the Californios. But it is important to note that Dana did not set out to write an exhaustive description of the region, instead his memoir attempted to chronicle the abusive practices of merchant sea captains on their crews. That he couched his reformist message in the guise of an adventure novel, one with hints of a captivity narrative and a redemption memoir, speaks to the conflicting religious and imperialist impulses of U.S. identity. Torn between the exhilarating freedom of a life at sea, and faced with realities that were at odds with his own austere New England upbringing, Dana's message becomes one of ambivalence. Dana's own commentary on the memoir's success, published twenty years later on a return trip to a California very much altered from the place of his youth, acknowledges the shortcomings of his message. For while his intention had been to pen an exposé on the abuses suffered by seamen, the majority of his readers found the work to be the exposition of a grand adventure and a necessary guidebook to those who would venture to the Pacific coast of the continent.

Interestingly, of the two mass produced editions currently in print, neither editor mentions the ethnographic nature of the sketches of California life. This oversight is striking, given one

editor's acknowledgment of the memoir's successful sating of a nostalgic interest in the "genteel idealism of New England culture in the century's latter decades."<sup>42</sup> For a memoir that spends no time in New England, the editor's interpretation of the book's sustained popularity demonstrates the overpowering cultural influence that the northeast has in discussions about regional identity in the U.S. It is true that Dana was a New Englander traveling abroad, and as such he painted a picture of the Mexicans tinged with a certain hint of puritanism. This might be what Thomas Philbrick speaks of when he talks of the work's "New England culture." While Philbrick's comment here on the popularity of regionalist literature (and his tie-in with Dana's memoir is vague), it seems to reveal that Dana's memoir remained popular because it described the now-defunct shipping industry that had been the vital economic backbone of the northeastern coastal region. The notion that Dana's readers would approach this book with a romantic yearning for simpler days by remembering a New England that was still an economic force, with a thriving merchant industry, and redirect that nostalgia onto a foreign land, not yet "American," that was itself isolated and characteristically exotic, is intriguing because it re-frames the memoir's reception in the latter nineteenth century as an expression of two regions within this liminal imaginary space known as Mexican California. Dana's memoir allows for the easy transference of a New England nostalgia onto California, more so because the account encompasses both sites: California physically, with New England serving as the vantage point, or lens.

While Dana's initial visit to California in 1834 gave him a sense of the economic void left by the dismantling of the mission system, his memoir helped establish the romantic image of the place, complete with the already-crumbling adobe buildings that served as a source of interest for those who would appreciate such sublime ruminations. It doesn't hurt that the northeastern fishing villages and Mexican California towns in the southern part of the state were perceived as being in decay, or in decline at this time. That fifty years later regionalist writers, major and minor alike, would mirror Dana's representation of ruination and of decayed splendor is a sign of this impressive legacy. But the late nineteenth century's cultural fascination with regionalist aesthetics and themes also speaks to an urgent nostalgia spurred by a distrust for the trappings of the age of the dynamo. Helen Hunt Jackson's similar history as a New Englander encountering California with eastern eyes is paralleled in the *Century Magazine* articles discussed in detail in chapter two. Much like Dana's memoir, the novel *Ramona* is the imaginative commingling of eastern regionalist conventions and western geography. Much has been written about the Spanish "fantasy heritage," most adeptly by Carey McWilliams, who located its most prodigious work in the early twentieth century.<sup>43</sup> What I am referring to is not that particular phenomenon, but instead a nostalgia characteristic of romanticism with the early inklings of an emerging U.S. imperialism made all the more grand by its weakened neighbors. In Anglophone writings of the nineteenth century, California has always already passed its prime or been in ruins. There is a fleeting quality to its beauty. Dana's California is already a relic in 1834: the missions are abandoned, in decay, and the Indians have scattered. It is the scene of a population "on whom a

---

<sup>42</sup>Thomas Philbrick, introduction to *Two Years before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea*, by Richard Henry Dana (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 7.

<sup>43</sup>See McWilliams and Meier, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*.

curse had fallen, and stripped them of anything but their pride, their manners, and their voices.”<sup>44</sup> In this assessment, the signs of genteel decay, “pride,” “manners,” and “voices,” become symbols of a disembodied and defeated people. In such a case, the Mexicans are painted as dramatic, impassioned beings: the women are untrustworthy, the men otherworldly beings forever mounted on horses in a show of manliness, virility, and brutality.<sup>45</sup> Dana's influence, one that later writers had to contend with when representing California to an eager readership, created an almost unfair standard. In this place the rational eastern urban mind came up against a netherworld of romantic dilapidation and decayed and brutal elegance. But I would argue, as stated earlier, that this literary yearning springs not from western liminality but from eastern wanderlust.

### **Dana's Nautical Abode; or, The View From the Forecastle**

A pretty pickle, truly, thought I; abed here in a  
strange house in the broad day, with a cannibal  
and a tomahawk!<sup>46</sup>

It is telling that when Richard Henry Dana wrote of his exchange and friendship with a group of fellow-sailors, Pacific Islanders, that those friends were curious about his homeland, “Boston (as they call the United States).” Dana provides no further commentary on their equation of Boston with the United States. The pervasive presence of Boston, both onboard the *Pilgrim* and as a representative stand-in for the United States, reveals the extent of this city's cultural and economic influence in these years. The trade in hide and tallow that carried Dana to California was established to travel along the Pacific coast gathering raw goods to then sell those goods to the shoe manufacturing towns around Boston. The two sites were connected by manufacturing trade. In this memoir they are also connected by Dana's experience. As a product of New England, his own perspective on California is informed by that region's standards of culture and behavior.

Dana's representations of California households during the Mexican era set the groundwork for subsequent literary representations written by the California regionalists in the late nineteenth century. Their own works reference the public cultural nostalgia for Dana's California. Helen Hunt Jackson and Frank Norris make their appreciation of Dana's legacy obvious in direct and indirect references with their use of imagery and metaphor, while Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton shows unrestrained disdain for Dana-esque depictions of Mexicans by

---

<sup>44</sup>Dana, *Two Years before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea*, 128.

<sup>45</sup>The similarity in Jackson's and Dana's observations is striking. See *Ibid.*, 131-32. and Helen Hunt Jackson, "Echoes in the City of Angels," *The Century Magazine* 27, no. 2 (1883): 198.

<sup>46</sup>Herman Melville, Harrison Hayford, and Hershel Parker, *Moby Dick: An Authoritative Text* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967).

countering with her own idealized Californio domesticity. It isn't as if these writers are responding to an obscure historical account; Dana's memoir was at this point ingrained in the public imagination. The landscape he penned was the one that occupied Anglo-phone readers' minds; the natives he depicted were immortalized in romantic images of fandangos, courtship, and scenes of mourning and extreme violence. Such brilliant fodder, expressed through the romantic ruminations of a young man in 1834-1835, encounters a different world in 1884, when Jackson writes her recreation of Californio life in the romantic novel *Ramona*. Dana's description of Mexican California domesticity, packed into a few pages throughout his book, shows a preoccupation with order and lawlessness. In one memorable instance, the description of Californian home life comes up in the context of a list of legal transgressions in the region. Dana's observation is notable for its parallel depiction of public sphere vigilante violence and the brutal order of Mexican homes. As we'll see, much of this coercive governance revolves around the anxiety over women's sexuality, indicating that Dana's memoir retains the northeastern discursive tropes about domesticity and women's purity while also engaging in colonialist representations of othered women. This preoccupation, as I noted earlier in the introduction to this chapter when discussing the attention to discretion and discreetness, appears as a critique of malevolent governance but instead becomes a critique of California domesticity. As a future lawyer, Dana's observations on the management of the household and the management of passions reflect a personal concern with order that is reflective of the workings of U.S. social experience. That concern with governance, and his representation of domestic governance, is at the core of his evaluation of Californians. Dana's attention to the management of households reveals a psyche that is in keeping with the tenets of Catharine Beecher's *American Home Life*, or *Domestic Economy* and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, both expressions of northeastern domesticity.

Based on a diary he kept while working as a sailor aboard the *Pilgrim*, Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s *Two Years Before the Mast* chronicled the abuse of merchant seamen by captains in a bid to effect marine legislative reform.<sup>47</sup> It was an immediate success, making it the most widely-circulated book of its day that talked about California.<sup>48</sup> The book offered readers a realistic glimpse of sailor life on the California coast, suggesting that the exotic world accessible to American merchant seamen was by extension accessible to American readers. In the process, it established a model for the subsequent trend of maritime adventure fiction that would ensure the early success of such authors as Herman Melville, whose *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846) was widely admired. Along with its portrayal of sailor life, Dana's memoir also provided

---

<sup>47</sup>While the book did not do much to change the rights of merchant seamen, it proved "useful" for Dana's career. "Clients in duck trousers and tarpaulin hats, smelling of tar, salt water, and strong tobacco, soon filled his tiny office" in Boston in those early lean years of law practice. While in effect he became an advocate for the rights of merchant seamen, specializing in maritime law as an attorney, he sometimes took cases defending abusive captains. Samuel Shapiro, *Richard Henry Dana, Jr., 1815-1882* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1961), 11.

<sup>48</sup>The memoir immediately passed through several editions, and was reprinted in England, where it was even distributed to sailors in the navy by the Board of Admiralty.

a Yankee's view of "stately" penniless dons, embodiments of the decayed gentility of the region, and crumbling missions, which he represented as vestiges of a once vibrant economic and social structure – all of the trappings of romance.<sup>49</sup> Although Dana presented the memoir as an "accurate and authentic narrative" that he hoped would tap into the reformist movements of the time – a conduit for the "strong sympathy" he sought to "awaken" in the general public in behalf of sailors – the work was primarily enjoyed as adventure literature.<sup>50</sup> While the memoir appealed to an audience increasingly interested in the exotic western coast, in later years it served as both an ethnographic record of pre-gold rush California and as an artifact of New England merchant shipping culture, which was much more cosmopolitan than one would initially imagine. Melville's Pequod is actually representational, and Dana's ship is also peopled by merchant seaman from all over the world. Also, while giving a perspective on the life of those who labored at sea, the memoir explores the adventure of meeting people in foreign ports who by commercial exchange were becoming inculcated into the expanding global economy. For these reasons alone, this non-fiction account is the standout precursor to all of the fiction examined in this dissertation. The universal appeal of Dana's memoir stems as much from its eloquence and romanticism as it does from the fact that California suddenly becomes politically and economically important in the scheme of U.S. politics from the U.S.-Mexican War onward. It is this combination of political circumstances, coupled with eastern readers' receptivity to the aesthetics of violence and decay within the expanding republic that ensure the memoir's success at myth formation. This is the legacy that informs Frank Norris's demented domesticity, Helen Hunt Jackson's gothic households, and the subterfuge of Ambrose Bierce's interracial cross-gendered housekeeping, to just name a few.

Dana's influence on adventure literature is clear, and various scholars have noted his influence on Melville and other writers.<sup>51</sup> In this sense the memoir straddled the line between

---

<sup>49</sup>One very popular topic of California nostalgia was the deteriorating missions, particularly their bells, which between the 1870s and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were the subject of dozens of odes, stories, poems, essays, prints, and any other media that may have appeared in the *Overland Monthly*, the *Century Magazine*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, or any other of the number of magazines in print in the day.

<sup>50</sup>Dana and Philbrick, *Two Years before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea*, 38. Hereafter cited in parentheses.

<sup>51</sup>Sheila Post-Lauria, *Correspondent Colorings: Melville in the Marketplace* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996). Post-Lauria presents some parallel readings to show Dana's influence. Shapiro, *Richard Henry Dana, Jr., 1815-1882*. Shapiro provides excerpts of correspondences, and notes that the publishing world produced dozens of books with titles similar to *Two Years Before the Mast* in the twenty years after it was published, p. 190-91; See also Bert Bender, *Sea-Brothers: The Tradition of American Sea Fiction from Moby-Dick to the Present* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), David Thomas Konig, *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), Bryan Collier Short, *Cast by Means of Figures: Herman Melville's Rhetorical Development* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992).

fiction and history, as Dana “focused the American romantic imagination on the common sailor,” complicating the line between fanciful language and workaday subject matter.<sup>52</sup> But the romantic tone did not supercede the directness of his geography and the “ordinariness” of his narrative, which Jack London noted “brought a trained mind to put down with untroubled vision” the experience of sea life.<sup>53</sup> Historian Brian Roberts has noted how *Two Years Before the Mast* “provided the forty-niners with a literary template for the voyage to California.”<sup>54</sup> In effect, the memoir served as a guidebook while contributing to the collective myth about imperial travel in along the Latin south. This confluence of fiction and non-fiction is fitting because the literary representations of California and the Californians as I see them do not present a factual record of a geographic place, but instead a series of literary portraits of an idealized space in dialogue with other spaces.

Dana’s writing on domesticity has not received the same amount of attention, as surely his depiction of domestic life in the forecandle is just as descriptive in its relation of everyday life as Henry David Thoreau’s is in *Walden* (1854). While the aboard-ship world of merchant marines is nearly devoid of women save as occasional passengers, it is nonetheless a domestic setting. His depictions of California households, those he spies or enters while on land, become a running commentary on the state of the place and set the tone for these later texts that attempt to create literary representations of affective bonds for readers conversant with the discourse of domesticity as it reflects national expansion. His exposé on the abuse of underlings on merchant ships reads as memoir of life in an abusive home. It is a place conspicuous for its propensity for a rough unfairness, where sympathy is guarded and wrath is portioned out freely, and not just on a human scale. The Northeasters, winds off the coast of Santa Barbara, subject the *Pilgrim* to a constant struggle of divine proportions.

One scene Dana depicts shows the extent of the abuse. When one of the more kindhearted of the sailors, John, inquires about the beating of a man who has exchanged words with the captain, he too is put in chains. Dana’s response and description of John’s beating shows how the ship has become a site of affective violence. Considering John’s subjugation to the captain’s will, he writes: “A man— a human being, made in God’s likeness — fastened up and flogged like a beast! A man, too, whom I had lived with and eaten with for months, and knew almost as well as a brother.” (153) The claim to familial affection, and the connection through the everyday domestic act of breaking bread, come as reminders of the inhumanity of the violence onboard ship. As the beating continues, Dana gives an account of the event:

“No,” shouted the captain; “nobody shall open his mouth aboard this

---

<sup>52</sup>König, *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic*, 137.; Carl Van Doren, *The American Novel* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926). Van Doren seems particularly interested in interrogating the truthfulness of Dana’s and Melville’s depictions of life at sea.

<sup>53</sup>Jack London, *The Human Drift* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), 101.

<sup>54</sup>Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 122.

vessel, but myself;” and began laying the blows upon his back, swinging half round between each blow, to give it full effect. As he went on, his passion increased, and he danced about the deck, calling out as he swung the rope,— “If you want to know what I flog you for, I’ll tell you. It’s because I like to do it!— because I like to do it!— It suits me! That’s what I do it for!”

The man writhed under the pain, until he could endure it no longer, when he called out, with an exclamation more common among foreigners than with us— “Oh, Jesus Christ! Oh, Jesus Christ!”

“Don’t call on Jesus Christ,” shouted the captain: “*he can’t help you. Call on Captain T[hompson]* He’s the man! He can help you! Jesus Christ can’t help you now!”

At these words, which I never shall forget, my blood ran cold. I could look on no longer. Disgusted, sick, and horror-struck, I turned away and leaned over the rail, and looked down into the water. A few rapid thoughts of my own situation, and of the prospect of future revenge, crossed my mind; but the falling of the blows and the cries of the man called me back at once. At length they ceased, and turning round, I found that the mate, at a signal from the captain, had cut him down. Almost doubled up with pain, the man walked slowly forward, and went down into the forecastle. Every one else stood still at his spot, while the captain, swelling with rage and with the importance of his achievement, walked the quarter-deck, and at each turn, as he came forward, calling out to us,— “You see your condition! You see where I’ve got you all, and you know what to expect!” . . . “You’ve got a driver over you! Yes, a *slave-driver* — a *negro-driver*! I’ll see who’ll tell me he isn’t a negro slave!” (155-56, author’s emphasis)

The captain’s assertion of authority, for whatever trivial slight, shows that the ship is a place always informed by the possible danger of abuse. It is a whimsical aggression, as he states, beating John “because I like to do it!” The call and response, with John screaming “Oh, Jesus Christ,” and the captain replying scornfully that there is no salvation in that call, undercuts any hope of mercy. This beating is notable because it directly references the contemporary abolitionist depictions of southern cruelty. The captain’s insistence upon turning the crew into slaves, here through the beating and the imposition of will upon them, is a reproduction of the southern slave plantation. The captain says as much, when he boasts about his own background “I’m F[rank] T[hompson], all the way from ‘down east.’ I’ve been through the mill, ground, and bolted, and come out a *regular-built down-east johnny-cake*, good when it’s hot, but when it’s cold, sour and indigestible.” (96, author’s emphasis) The “down-east johnny-cake,” references to his own southern pedigree, serves to warn them of his deft hand with the whip. This coercive environment is what makes the ship “the home of so much hardship and suffering.” (158)

It is in this cruel environment, from this humbled vantage point, from this strange nautical home, that Dana’s gaze extends over the coastal cities and towns of Mexican California. Dana positions himself as an intermediary, at one point pretending to know more Spanish than he does, he comes to be known onboard as “a great linguist.” This affords him the opportunity to go onshore to run errands, saying this “gave me the opportunities of seeing the customs, characters, and domestic arrangements of the people.” (129) His description of the Mexican household, the result of knowledge gained through this opportunity, becomes a treatise on the nature of intimate

bonds between men and women in a world that dictates the rules of conduct and uses violence to mete out the consequences of transgression:

In their domestic relations, these people are no better than in their public. The men are thriftless, proud, and extravagant, and very much given to gaming; and the women have but little education, and a good deal of beauty, and their morality, of course, is none of the best, yet the instances of infidelity are much less frequent than one would at first suppose. In fact, one vice is set over against another; and thus, something like a balance is obtained. The women have but little virtue, but then the jealousy of their husbands is extreme, and their revenge deadly and almost certain. A few inches of cold steel has been the punishment of many a wary man, who has been guilty, perhaps, of nothing more than indiscretion of manner. The difficulties of the attempt are numerous, and the consequences of discovery fatal. With the unmarried women, too, great watchfulness is used. The main object of the parents is to marry their daughters well, and to this, the slightest slip would be fatal. The sharp eyes of a dueña, and the cold steel of a father or brother, are a protection which the characters of most of them – men and women – render by no means useless; for the very men who would lay down their lives to avenge the dishonor of their own family, would risk the same lives to complete the dishonor of another. (236)

The direct connection Dana makes between public and private conduct is indicative of a consciousness that sees the two as distinguishable by description but inseparable in estimation. It is Dana's perception of this interdependence between private and public life that is most telling, for here, private actions are windows to the soul of public morality. His assertion is also reflective of a developing stereotype about Mexican women that reflected U.S. writers' and travelers' "ideological justification of expansion, war, and conquest."<sup>55</sup> In this setting, the boundary that separates the home of the cult of domesticity from the public world does not apply. Women are not keepers of the hearth and men do not go out into the world for the benefit of the family. Oddly, Mexican men are not free to roam like their U.S. counterparts; they are subjected to their own homes. Watchful of transgressions, they are forced into a servitude to virginity and vergüenza.<sup>56</sup> And in a place where "revolutions are matters of constant occurrence," the household described here is a place that is in balance not because of women's virtue (a trait of idealized domesticity), but because of men's distrust. (234) Since in U.S. culture the household is considered the foundational institution of a rational society, this picture of depraved domesticity speaks of the volatility of the region. This passage paints a turbid picture, family peace and

---

<sup>55</sup>Antonia Castañeda, "Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish-Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California," *Frontiers* 11, no. 1 (1990): 9.

<sup>56</sup>Vergüenza directly translates into English as shame. Its grander meaning is the sense of shame that induces one to behave modestly or virtuously. In Spanish colonial and Mediterranean cultures it historically referred to the roles that men and women have in maintaining family honor.



tranquility guaranteed only by male jealousy and the threat of retribution. Also, the emphasis on the “sharp eyes” of the dueña – the chaperone – notes the very public nature of private desires and is indicative of a world where romantic alliances have political and economic consequences. A young girl’s, and by extension, her family’s best hope for a good match is dependent upon transparent, public courtship devoid of sexual passion. The dispassion of transparent emotion is a direct contradiction to Dana’s description of the jealous marriages. This also hints to the varied tension between foreign and domestic violence, with men attempting through force to secure the borders of their own houses while trying through subterfuge to infiltrate the boundaries of others’ houses.

Dana provides this social critique of Mexican domesticity, site of passion and violence, as a direct elaboration of a list of transgressions and punishments that demonstrate the unfair and arbitrary nature of Mexican and Anglo vigilante law enforcement in the region. He notes that this form of private sphere justice operates to the detriment of the Indians. It is a form of law that Dana sarcastically terms the “distribution of justice” in a land where people “know no law but will and fear.” (234) He notes that while the Mexicans practice a private form of law enforcement to ensure domestic tranquility (and thus a crude form of public morality), this is not the case with other Californians. The Dominican fathers – stripped of their official role as arbiters of justice in the public sphere after the secularization of power – have failed to enforce standards of respectable Indian domesticity. Secularization has opened up the public sphere to wanton sexuality, made possible through Indian and sailor indiscretion:

Of the poor Indians, very little care is taken . . . Indeed, to show the entire want of any sense of morality or domestic duty among them, I have frequently known an Indian to bring his wife, to whom he was lawfully married in the church, down to the beach, and carry her back again, dividing with her the money which she had got from the sailors. (237)

If the Mexican is too passionate in guarding the bedroom in Dana’s California, the Indian is too permissive, lacking the jealousy that would enable vices to be otherwise checked. And while Dana acknowledges the suppression and abuse of Indians at the hands of Mexicans and Anglos a few paragraphs before, he does not indict the conditions which have made prostitution a viable economic option for them: the market for sex by the merchant marine class. While Dana’s criticism of the laxity of Indian marital relations rings as preachy and superior, it actually elides the notion that pre-Mission Indians had taboos about sexual behavior, which in Dana’s world is a sign of civilization. The southern California native tribes were patrilineal and did, in fact, punish adulterers.<sup>57</sup> Whether Dana’s account is factual is beside the point, as this depiction of readily available native women has been naturalized through successive waves of colonialization. As an example, consider the sincere commentary of a scholar writing in the midst of the rediscovery of Herman Melville in the 1920s: “The valley of Typee becomes, in Melville’s handling, a region of dreams and languor which stir the senses with the fragrance and color of the landscape and the

---

<sup>57</sup> Albert L. Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 172-73; Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California*.

gay beauty of the brown cannibal girls.”<sup>58</sup>

But the overriding influence in this instance seems to be the woman’s earning ability, which while incidental here due to the demand of heterosexual sailors, was also an integral concept in Shoshonean familial relations. For many native peoples this meant that the wife “was responsible for cooking and maintaining the household,” and did most of the providing.<sup>59</sup> Whether this contradiction between the social codes about prostitution (an act of domestic indiscretion) and the material benefits of prostitution (economic maintenance of the household) created any tension in these households is hard to say. What this passage does reveal is the notion that Indian discretion is a subject of extra-domestic speculation, while the Mexican discretion described earlier is a private act, with the exception of Dana’s own voyeuristic musings. Despite Dana’s attempt to shock readers with this description of the prostituting couple, his description has a loving quality, as the man carries the woman from their home to the sailors on the beach who will pay to have sex with her. This easy intimacy between husband and wife, transferrable to the sailors, serves as Dana’s (and by extension, the literary world’s) primary entrance into the domestic relations of California inhabitants. This intimacy is class and race specific, as both parties are on the outskirts of what would be termed polite society. But this familiarity comes at a price, where money acts as the conduit for physical intimacy. Maybe that is what Dana finds most troubling. But it also speaks of another sexual code, where couples “lawfully married in the church” could collude to profit from the temporary intimacy between the wife and these foreign sailors. This observation, to Dana’s puritanical amazement, also highlights the church’s inability to impose a public morality by “lawful” means because at the private level people will not abide by that morality. But more than that, it also is a complete break with a social code that insists on the discreteness of domestic spaces. Here the Indian woman’s and merchant ship’s private business is made public. Sex is brought out of the Indian home and the ship’s forecandle and made a public act on the beach. It is an act performed for trade, obviously, but it also enacts the carnal aspects of international and intercultural relations.<sup>60</sup>

Extending beyond the parameters of the home space, Dana’s perception of region is immutable. While some have argued that Dana’s depiction of the peoples and the social structure as decayed or as in any way inferior to the U.S. is indicative of the emerging concept known as manifest destiny, his interest in the ruined landscape expresses a trace of aesthetic wonderment that cannot be easily subsumed by scholarly claims of imperialism.<sup>61</sup> Dana’s fascination with the

---

<sup>58</sup>Van Doren, *The American Novel*, 70.

<sup>59</sup>Monroy, *Thrown among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California*, 9.

<sup>60</sup>Conspicuous for its absence to many twentieth century readers is any mention of sexual activity aboard the ship.

<sup>61</sup>David Leverenz notes that “Though John O’Sullivan did not coin the phrase ‘Manifest Destiny’ until 1845, five years after Dana’s book was published, Dana’s enthusiasm for national expansion and dominance clearly welcomes such a destiny, which presumes the vitality of American manhood.” I should note that he provides an incomplete reading of the passage I quote

aesthetics of decay are clearly romantic, as they echo the sentiments of the English romantic poets.

He sees California as irrevocably Mexican, for better or for worse. This conflation of space and identity is firmly entrenched, with the region's characteristics immutable to emigrant influence. Of course this was before the massive waves of gold rush emigrants that no one could have prefigured. In the following passage it is immediately after his indictment of Mexican passions and Indian sexual promiscuity that he then waxes poetic about the fine features of the landscape, offering a survey of its assets, one would assume as a call for migration to eject the land's unworthy tenants. But one would be wrong. His is a praise severely meted with caution to those who would presume to move to California; the place will subsume Yankee thrift and vigor, it seems:

Such are the people who inhabit a country embracing four or five hundred miles of a sea-coast, with several good harbors; with fine forests . . . In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be! we are ready to say. Yet how long would a people remain so, in such a country? The Americans (as those from the United States are called) and Englishmen, who are fast filling up the principal towns, and getting the trade into their hands, are indeed more industrious and effective than the Spaniards; yet their children are brought up Spaniards, **in every respect**, and if the "California fever" (laziness) spares the first generation, it always attacks the second.(237, emphasis mine)

While Dana indicts Mexican passion and Indian wantonness in the previous paragraph, he counters it here not with American chastity but instead with American industry. Rather than speak of Yankee virtue and rationality, which would seem to be the logical counter, he chooses to present Americans' work ethic as a viable option to lust – but as he explains, it is a temporary antidote. Dana's California is still resolutely Mexican, and those male American emigrants who settle there become firmly assimilated, taking on Spanish names and converting to Catholicism. In this California, Anglo absorption into Mexican culture is linguistically set aside in his grammatical assertion ("in every respect") of the assimilation of even the unspeakable– through sex acts and cohabitation. As if to assure those with wandering minds that the author means to avoid such distasteful topics with respect to Yankees, he then affirms, in parenthesis, that this malady of assimilation called "California fever" is the dissipation of industry – "laziness."<sup>62</sup> But this "California fever," as is the case with any true virus, would in theory affect the body "in

---

at length below in order to further his argument for Dana's imperialist vision, stopping at "what a country this might be!" David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 207.

<sup>62</sup>Nearly forty years later, the same concern surfaces, but with Nordhoff the fault lies in the mild California climate, not in the coupling of Anglos and Mexicans: "Let (the emigrant) only keep his Eastern habits of industry, and beware of the curse of California – idleness and unthrift – to which no doubt the mild climate predisposes men. Nordhoff, *California for Health, Pleasure, and Residence: A Book for Travellers and Settlers*, 181.

every respect,” and by extension the body politic. Americans are contracting it by means pointed out by Dana himself: the sailors through the Indian women on the beach, and the middle class “Americans” through their marriages with Mexican women. Here, affect, sometimes in real unions and other times only a euphemism for sex acts, becomes the binding element between agents performing international relations on an intimate scale. The households here alluded to: the forecandle, the Indian home, the Mexican home, and the Anglo/Mexican home, are the building blocks of a new domestic and political architecture.

Dana’s California household, with its spying dueñas and its obsession with the honor of young women, is a precursor to Jackson’s more fondly and nostalgically depicted but equally surveilled and controlled hacienda. That both works present themselves as generalizations and embodiments of a California steeped in romance and violence is what merits this comparison. Both works are written for an audience that has not stepped foot in the region, Dana’s memoir strikes a chord in the age of western and nautical commercial exploration and Jackson’s novel pulls heartstrings in the age of industrial development’s conspicuous tourism and travel, even while both are representations of the collective imagination on the same locale. Both works are nostalgic for the same place, even across the divide of nearly half a century. The socio-historical conditions that determine that wistful tone in each text are specific to each work and each context, but that it is the overriding approach in a number of literary outlets is telling.

From Dana’s Puritanical inklings of the passions that determine and sustain affective bonds in early California, to those that Jackson finds most literarily relevant to enacting social change, is the gap that must be addressed. Both works are nostalgic and sentimental when discussing the ruins of the region – both the missions and the fading culture. But while both works deal with the contemplation of manhood in the region, each has a different response. Dana’s memoir, as the work of a laborer-traveler, finds it in his escape from domesticity and the shackles of middle class bookishness to roam about the world by the labor of his own hands, while Jackson’s Luiseño Indian farmer Alessandro only wants to exercise his manly ability and right to stay and establish a home. And there is the true difference between these texts, one evidenced by their respective views on the home. Horace Greeley’s proclamation to “go west, young man” did address a subculture from the American northeast that sought to escape the bonds of the home, and Dana’s memoir is the embodiment, albeit a precursor, to that edict. Jackson has seen that call’s effect, and as a champion of Indian domesticity her novel is a call to recognize the manliness of housekeeping. It is a call to recognize a different sort of Indian manliness too, not the kind championed by dime novels and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, the masculinity of the Indian wars, but the manliness of those who settle lands, plant farms, build houses, and raise children.<sup>63</sup> Throughout, these works become comparable in their attention to the politics and poetics of self-determination, for it is in the emotional realm that romance dictates that one must lose control. Anxiety over personal agency that is geographically and materially constricted is uttered through the emotive narratives in these texts. In turn these utterances

---

<sup>63</sup>Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 18-9. Bederman provides a helpful definition of manliness here, as the Victorian middle class ideal of restraint and moral integrity. Masculinity is a term that most resonates with the adventure novel and wild west show depictions of men.

highlight the tensions at the interstices of nationalist discourse, personal memory, and literary testimony to create imagined literary responses to trauma. These works problematize scholarly inquiry through their aestheticization of violence. After all the historical work, the imaginative literary spaces created by these works must be weighed as something apart, not only as artifacts of socio-historical significance, but as narratives in conversation over shifts in social influence. Our scholarly interpretations of the way that these authors understood and deciphered the world and crafted an artistic representation of it, or response to it, often yield more questions than answers about the cultural role of literature in the late nineteenth century.

## Chapter 2: “They have made you homeless in your home”: The Architecture of Affect in *Ramona*

The Indian, in this part of the State, is harmless. Being white, and of the superior race therefore, you have the privilege of entering any Indian’s house, and you will be kindly received, and if you want water out of his oya [sic], or wish to cook your own dinner at his fire, you are welcome.<sup>64</sup>

. . . everything is adobe here even the people<sup>65</sup>

In 1881 and again in 1883 Helen Hunt Jackson toured the Mission Indian villages of Southern California to document their decline in legal and economic status under U.S. governance.<sup>66</sup> The author used the first visit to conduct research for a series of light travel pieces for some general interest magazines. For the second visit, the author returned to the region in an official capacity as a representative of the U.S. government working in support of Indian land claims. Although each of these trips had a different sponsor, in both cases her intentions were motivated by a personal interest in the deterioration of Mission Indian domestic self-determination in the region. It was an issue that consumed much of Jackson’s attention and one that informed most of her writing in this period, as it struck at the very core of what proponents of middle class domestic culture had championed for several decades at this point: the inviolable and sacred home space.<sup>67</sup> Jackson’s dramatic responses to the houses of others, as demonstrated

---

<sup>64</sup>Charles Nordhoff, *California for Health, Pleasure, and Residence: A Book for Travellers and Settlers* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1973), 157.

<sup>65</sup>Hubert H. Bancroft in “Personal Observations During a Tour Through the Line of Missions of Upper California” as quoted in Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 173.

<sup>66</sup>I use the historical term “Mission Indian” to refer to Native Californians who lived in villages that were predominantly comprised of former neophytes or their children and grandchildren. At the time that Jackson was writing, the mission system had been long dissolved but the term still lingered. The Mission Indians referred to throughout this chapter are the Luiseño people, whose name post-conquest was derived from the San Luis Rey Mission. The Luiseño Indians figure prominently in *Ramona* and in Jackson’s advocacy work. When speaking more generally of the concerns and issues affecting indigenous peoples throughout a region or in the U.S., I use the terms Native Californian or Native American.

<sup>67</sup>Sacred, indeed. The shift from dominant Calvinism to the sectarianism that characterized the Second Great Awakening was marked by increased religious practice in the home and less church affiliation. Such practice fostered the notion that the home space was

throughout this essay, illustrate the symbolic power of the domestic space in debates over U.S. aggression in an emerging imperial age. It is through these responses, and through the author's representations of the domestic spaces of the middle class, the working class, and those who might be called destitute, that we see the way that private-life concerns – the intimate details of domestic life that were often defended against public intrusion – were impossibly tied to public sphere dictates on land ownership, sovereignty, and housekeeping.

Writing to a friend about her travel plans in Southern California, Jackson marveled at her auspicious friendship with Abbot Kinney, a like-minded gentleman who in time became her friend and served as her Spanish translator, travel companion, and co-author of a government report on the condition of the California Mission Indians.<sup>68</sup> While she had initial misgivings about Kinney due to what might flippantly be termed architectural snobbery, as indicated in the passage below, her first opinion of the man based on his house serves to demonstrate the significant role of the home space in assessing the politics and the character of its inhabitant: “I was just now thinking what strange threads weave into our lives — ” she wrote:

Here I am depending for my chief help in this Indian business, — — in fact, I could not have undertaken it at all without his help — on the very man about whom, only twelve months ago, I said to you — “don’t say anything to me about that man. I don’t want to know a man who would put a great staring white house on a hill like that”! — Was not that silly? — <sup>69</sup>

Kinney, the maligned owner of that ocularly-gifted house, was an asthmatic transplant from New Jersey who, like many of the leisure class who suffered from delicate constitutions, had moved to southern California for his health. Upon arrival he purchased 550 acres of land near Eaton Wash at the foot of the Sierra Madre less than fifteen miles northeast of what is now downtown Los

---

sacrosanct and it complemented the idea that “private morality created public virtue,” which was the overriding cultural opinion in mid-nineteenth century America. Colleen McDannell, “Parlor Piety: The Home as Sacred Space in Protestant America,” in *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*, ed. Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 163.

<sup>68</sup>Helen Hunt Jackson, Abbot Kinney, and United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Report on the Condition and Needs of the Mission Indians of California* (Washington, D.C.: Govt. print. off., 1883). In 1882 Jackson was appointed special agent of Indian Affairs by the commissioner of Indian Affairs, Hiram Price, as a result of her advocacy work.

<sup>69</sup>Helen Hunt Jackson and Valerie Sherer Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 252. Letter to Jeanne C. Carr. Carr lived in Pasadena at what is now the site of the Norton Simon museum. One imagines that without modern impediments (buildings and landscaping) that Kinney’s house would indeed be visible from Mrs. Carr’s.

Angeles, where he erected a “two story house with a tower on the highest point.”<sup>70</sup> No doubt his house was boastful, perched as it was on its hill overlooking Pasadena and the valley below, as it certainly cut a prominent figure on the landscape.<sup>71</sup> (Fig. 2.1) Jackson’s expressed aversion to the “great staring white house” – which she surely interpreted as a sign of its owner’s and his countrymen’s domineering character in California – encapsulates the author’s passionate opinions about the proper occupation of space in a colonized and contested land. It wasn’t just that Kinney’s “great staring white house on a hill” was an eyesore, a stylistic gaff at odds with its environment. For in a world with lingering Victorian notions about proper living, “architecture was not morally neutral, it actively created either a productive or a destructive society.”<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, the presence of this house was an act of architectural bravado in a region where Indian homes were being confiscated by Anglo squatters under the relatively new land laws of the U.S. government that favored emigrants who arrived to acquire land as homesteaders. Kinney’s house was a harbinger rather than an exception, and the author understood this well. As a critic of domestic tyranny in its various forms, from observations made for her travel writing or the social commentary she peddled as domestic advice, Jackson had already formulated an opinion about the coercive underpinnings of American domesticity, both in its operation and in its establishment. That house on the hill was the articulation of U.S. imposition in the region; ergo the dramatic reaction. (Fig. 2.2)

As it turns out, Kinney was not the shameless imperialist she inferred upon first sight of his home. But that initial misunderstanding is striking because it highlights her own amazement at the discrepancy between the imposing house and the kindly character of its inhabitant. It shows that this misunderstanding is not just a case of one person incorrectly judging a book by its cover. Instead, Jackson’s initial assumption about Kinney’s character reflects the importance that late nineteenth century social critics, positivists in their own right, placed on the home space as an interpretive artifact of an inhabitants’ convictions and desires within normative cultural parameters. If eyes were windows to the soul, to quote the architectural metaphor, then windows of a house were more than just a source for external light or a stylistic flourish, they were the entryway into the character of its inhabitants and the key to understanding a region or a people. By that same token these windows also provided the means of exchange between the private world of bedrooms, the semi-private world of parlors, and the public spaces of town squares and courtrooms. Jackson’s casual statement about the “great staring white house” reveals the social cues that adept readers often gleaned from the exterior architecture of a home: a manner of distinguishing the fashionable or modest from merely boorish moneyed folk, for instance. It is this perception of a symbiotic relation between the architecture of a home and the psyche of its inhabitants that exemplified assumptions about the link between an internal and external

---

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., note, 252. As in 1880, when Kinney purchased the land, the area is still unincorporated. For specificity it lies west of Altadena and north of the city of Pasadena, which at the time was very popular with asthmatic and consumptive eastemers.

<sup>71</sup>Kinney would go on to create the equally conspicuous city of Venice, California in 1904, complete with canals and imported gondolas plied by authentic Venetian gondoliers.

<sup>72</sup>McDannell, "Parlor Piety: The Home as Sacred Space in Protestant America," 164.



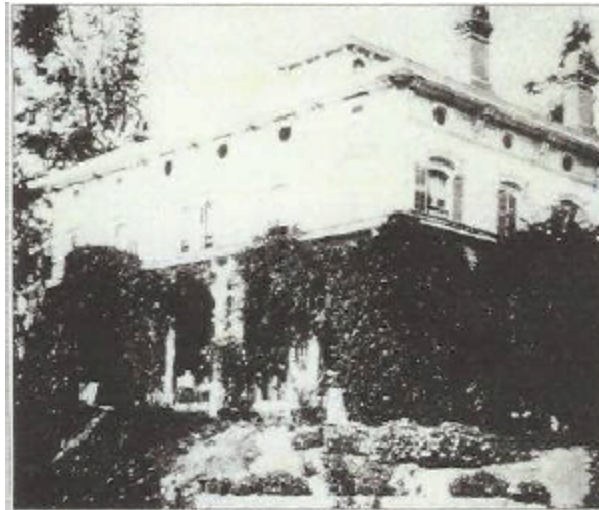


Fig. 2.1: A rare photo of Abbot Kinney's home. It was built in the Italianate style of Victorian architecture, defined by a flat roof, overhanging eaves, and arches. The estate was dubbed Kinneloa, the name being an amalgam of the proprietor's name and the Hawaiian "loa," meaning "mountain" or "hill."

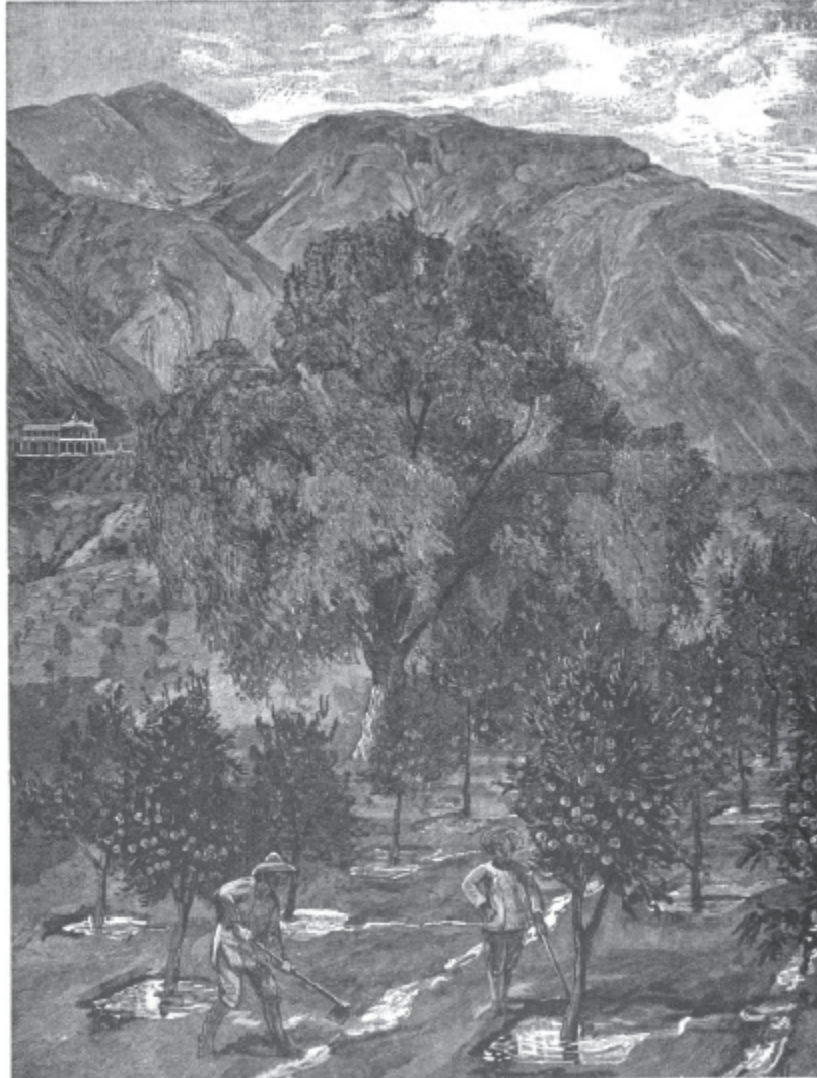


Fig. 2.2: Kinneloa, here immortalized as Connorloa in the cover illustration for Jackson's children's book, *The Hunter Cats of Connorloa* (1884). Note the great staring white house in the upper left-hand corner.

experience, and between the private home and the public national space (what I shall call the civic domestic realm). And because the domestic architecture of colonial Mexican homes is quite different from the standard northeastern Victorian home, key to this analysis will be the interrogation of the clash between representations of regional experience and the overriding national discourses on domesticity and subjectivity.<sup>73</sup>

While Jackson's earlier writing delved into the various forms of emotional tyranny that infected middle class homes in northeastern urban centers, it was her later work, with its deliberate focus on a national civic domestic space, that explored public forms of tyranny enacted by private citizens and by the institutions of governance upon other members of the national household. This civic domestic tyranny, as exemplified in removal campaigns and emigrant encroachment on Native American land, compromised the integrity of Native American domesticity. These impositions on inhabitants within the nation, examples of civic domestic coercion, were considered instances of *domestic violence* in the nineteenth century.<sup>74</sup> Regional strife, seen as an ailment and a hindrance to national unity, was called *domestic violence*. And while the period's vernacular use of the singular term "domestic" applied to both the home space and the nation state, the term *domestic violence* did not refer to the private sphere home in all of the research I conducted which, thanks to electronic archives, was quite substantial. That the term *domestic violence* did not carry over to include private sphere violence in the nineteenth century does not mean that the concept was not an issue of great concern both at the anecdotal and at the public reform level. Jackson's own writing demonstrates that corporal punishment and aggression within the home was indeed an issue. The anti-corporal punishment movement of the antebellum reform era had several prominent adherents, Henry Ward Beecher and Bronson Alcott among them, and much of their expressed concern did revolve around the public sphere consequences of private violence.

Jackson's own work demonstrates that same parallel between the domestic space bounded and ruled by kinship and the civic domestic space ruled by a national government, and her own criticism of private homes evolved over time and expanded into a criticism of the national or civic domestic space. Understanding how this parallel criticism evolves in her writing is an important step towards understanding the role that the domestic space occupied in public discourse about national development and national character in the latter part of the nineteenth century. A survey of her work shows the trajectory of reform movements during this period. These works also reveal the inspiration behind her bestselling romance *Ramona*. Reading *Ramona* alongside the author's earlier works such as *Bits of Talk About Home Matters*, published in 1873, a collection of domestic commentaries, helps contextualize the depictions of coercive affection in *Ramona* apart from the critical readings of race and whiteness in the novel that have

---

<sup>73</sup>For a contemporary expression of this concept, see "Evolution in Domestic Architecture," *The Manufacturer and Builder* 9, no. 12 (1887).

<sup>74</sup>*Domestic violence* was a term that was commonly used during Jackson's time – but only as it was used in the U.S. Constitution (Article iv) – in reference to public violence within the national space, such as violent clashes between agents of the state (soldiers) and private citizens within the state. See chapter one for more discussion on this idea.

emerged in recent years.<sup>75</sup> While these interpretations are engaging and helpful for understanding eastern U.S. notions about race and class, they often ignore the novel's attention to the distinct, regional, notions of race and culture that are expressions of Mexican colonial identity in California and the southwest. In doing so, they often overlook the novel's project as a work of California regionalist literature that acknowledges a Mexican colonial cultural framework as it confronts eastern U.S. sentiments on race and class that emigrants bring with them.

Focusing on the varied spatial scales of the term *domestic*, as used in Jackson's time, provides an entryway into the public discourse on power and coercion at all levels of society. Jackson's interrogation of coercive domesticity operates across the scale: involving the private-sphere "republic of the family" that is the subject of *Bits of Talk About Home Matters* and the civic domestic realm – the nation – that is the site of so much domestic violence.<sup>76</sup> It is in the equation of emotional coercion and physical punishment where her writing demonstrates the culture's preoccupation with affective influence: in several cases examined below, the discourse of affective familial bonds mirrors the language of patriotism that defines national identity in romantic and emotional terms, meaning that love for family is an affection expressed in language very similar to one's love of country. Similar terminology describes private forms of affect and patriotism – familial relations or nationalist alliances – to demarcate the boundaries of governance or alliance. Examining Jackson's early treatments of coercive domestic spaces in her book *About Home Matters* and her later attention to California land rights and their implications on Indian domesticity, to the tragic domestic spaces in *The Century Magazine* essays that in turn inspired her novel *Ramona*, we see that this attention to aggressive home dynamics, the inherent tyranny of housekeeping, and the violence underlying the American narrative of home acquisition are all critiques that hinge on the same impetus: the condemnation of those who abuse the powerless and a suspicion of the affective bond that creates and enables that abuse.

In a turn from the usual reading of *Ramona*, my examination of Jackson's work reveals a

---

<sup>75</sup>Some examples include Jesse Alemán, "Historical Amnesia and the Vanishing Mestiza: The Problem of Race in *the Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*," *Aztlan* 27, no. 1 (2002); John M. Gonzalez, "The Warp of Whiteness: Domesticity and Empire in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*," *American Literary History* 16, no. 3 (2004); Diane Price Herndl, "Miscegen(R)ation or Mestiza Discourse?: Feminist and Racial Politics in *Ramona* and *Iola Leroy*," in *Beyond the Binary: Reconstructing Cultural Identity in a Multicultural Context*, ed. Timothy B. Powell (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Margaret D. Jacobs, "Mixed-Bloods, Mestizas, and Pintos: Race, Gender, and Claims to Whiteness in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* and María Amparo Ruiz De Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?*," *Western American Literature* 36, no. 3 (2001); David Luis-Brown, "'White Slaves' and the 'Arrogant Mestiza': Reconfiguring Whiteness in *the Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*," *American Literature* 69, no. 4 (1997); and Debra J. Rosenthal, "Race Mixture and the Representation of Indians in the U.S. and the Andes: *Cumanda*, *Aves Sin Nido*, *the Last of the Mohicans*, and *Ramona*," in *Mixing Race, Mixing Culture: Inter-American Literary Dialogues*, ed. Monika Kaup and Debra J. Rosenthal (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

<sup>76</sup>Helen Hunt Jackson, *Bits of Talk About Home Matters* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1873), 76. Hereafter cited as *About Home Matters* or *AHM* with page numbers in parenthesis.

weariness regarding sentimental forms of expression. My analysis of Jackson's writing reveals a suspicion of sympathy because affect serves as a discretionary force: it has the ability to create discrete communities both at the private and national level. Why does this matter? It matters because it hinders compassion across discrete lines of identity or experience. It is this convergence of Jackson's literary and political impulses that most informs my study because it speaks to a concern at the time over the role of affect in the culture through this use of discretion. Also, it is important to examine such impulses because the narrative of affect, employed in domestic and sentimental literature to much success, is a means of expression in reform literature that has such aesthetic appeal, providing readers pleasure with their moral lessons and publishers a marketable product. To express her convictions in a form that was considered both conventional and highly marketable, the author was gauging her message and her audience. Her first published work of advocacy, *A Century of Dishonor* (1881), did not sell. *Ramona*, on the other hand, was a stellar success: "In my *Century of Dishonor* I tried to attack people's consciences directly," she wrote to a friend, "and they would not listen. Now (with *Ramona*) I have sugared my pill, and it remains to be seen if it will go down."<sup>77</sup> The result is evident in *Ramona*, which explores the personal private-sphere consequences of U.S. imperialist ventures. As an affective symbol of coupling, the home was the material structure that best defined affective bonds in public discourse, be it architectural criticism, the Homestead Act, or domestic advice. The effects of aggressive U.S. colonization in *Ramona* are then examined through the private sphere.

When Helen Jackson, seasoned critic of American domestic practices, turned her gaze on California, she found households whose integrity was determined not by the character of their inhabitants, but by U.S. national policy regarding westward settlement under the Homestead Act. While this policy worked to the detriment of the native inhabitants, it was not the only means of portioning land in the west. Railroads and other developers were the most strident and profitable speculators, and the promise of profit followed in their footsteps. Jackson had already chronicled several broken treaties between the U.S. and various Indian nations in *A Century of Dishonor*, a non-fiction work that is acknowledged for its brisk and impassioned advocacy. When writing *Ramona*, this advocacy was coupled with a travel writer's interest in the foreign and exotic.<sup>78</sup> From her work as travel writer abroad and within the U.S., she understood that political and economic hardships that occurred in distant and exotic regions could sometimes best be articulated through the quotidian rather than through legal declamations. It is this attention to the affective consequences of legal intimidation in California that most solidifies the author's faith in literature as a medium for change. From a twenty-first century perspective it has also been her Achilles heel, opening her up to criticism for her abstraction of land-grant legalities when compared with Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* for instance, which

---

<sup>77</sup>Jackson and Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885*, 341. Letter to "Unknown," probably Edward Abbott, editor of *Literary World*. Thursday, January 22, 1885.

<sup>78</sup>She calls this mixture of genres "the very perfection of coloring." Helen Hunt Jackson, Letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, as it appeared in "The Contributors' Club: How *Ramona* Was Written," *The Atlantic Monthly* 86, no. 517 (1900): 713-14.

quotes whole sections of laws ad verbatim in its critique of U.S. land apportioning in California.<sup>79</sup> But love stories have an appeal that cannot be denied, and the California home, a site of religious and state-sanctioned coupling, becomes the most expressive link between public governance and private desire in literature. And it is through these passionate designs, through courtship, coupling, marriage, and child rearing that the narratives of affective bonds between agents and casualties of westward expansion enact most profoundly the region's imperial relations. The children of such households are the embodiment of U.S. imperial relations, drawn between oppositional and accommodating forces with often disastrous outcomes.

The story of California's annexation by the U.S. and the eventual shift in cultural and economic control in the region was one that was quite traumatic for the native inhabitants, regardless of class or ethnic identity. That U.S. expansionist tendencies in the region were literarily represented in narratives of courtship and enacted through marital alliances and childbearing has spoken most eloquently to the cultural need for a familiar aesthetic construction – affect – as a response to the trauma and violence of those imperial campaigns. The California home, in effect, became the articulation of personal desire (through coupling and family) and government sanction through the laws that determined who had the right to maintain their home.

Jackson's reaction to Kinney's house serves as an my entryway into the author's participation in the public discourse on the role of proper homes in the republic in light of rapid urbanization, immigration, and westward expansion. That such issues of public policy could come to inform friendly conversation about the outside appearances of homes, (and through implication include conjectures as to what goes on inside them), is an indication of the civic debate on the role that reform-minded activism had over the private realm. Civic domesticity, or civic housekeeping, are phrases I use to describe the conditions and agents that enforce the material and emotional parameters of both private and public domestic spaces. The term civic housekeeping is particularly relevant, as it implies a sort of perpetual maintenance, or surveillance, of the civic domestic space and of the private domestic space through legal and economic means. So while Jackson's response to Kinney's house may at first seem "silly," as she puts it, or only an aesthetic whim, it is in fact a commentary on dissenting expressions about the significance of the American home and the space it occupies – not only the acreage, location, and materials that go into it, but also the space that it inhabits in American letters. In these expressions we see the way that private desires – those factors that determine partners, child-rearing, or the decision to welcome others into one's home – are often in conflict with public forms of governance. Jackson's reaction to Kinney's home, which was conceived and built through the legal channels established in California but through conditions that were beneficial to emigrants at the expense of the native Californio and indigenous population, provides a direct critique of both the material and physical invasion of California and the psychological and aesthetic transformation of home spaces in the region.

---

<sup>79</sup>Anne E. Goldman, "'I Think Our Romance Is Spoiled,' or, Crossing Genres: California History in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don*," in *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West*, ed. Valerie J. Matsumoto and Blake Allmendinger (1999), 74. Anne Goldman argues that *Ramona* values the affective private-life consequences of American hegemony in California at the expense of addressing the political actions that were so detrimental to the Californios and Native Californians.

Nowhere do the discourses on domestic control and discourses on government jurisdiction more triumphantly combine than in late nineteenth century California. The California households discussed in this dissertation are all inter-cultural, housing the agents and casualties of aggressive U.S. expansion. It was also a generation that within anecdotal and recent historical memory defined California with respect to the U.S. as foreign, then as domestic after the U.S. – Mexican War. Negotiating the rights and interests of populations that were native to the region and disenfranchised along with those who were foreign but citizens of the new government and legally privileged created seismic shifts in privilege, wealth, and hegemony upon a population that had experienced such shifts just two or three generations before with the large scale introduction of Mexican military families after the secularization of the missions. During the period of transition to U.S. hegemony, Californio and Indian homes became objects of contention and desire, their land grants sifted in agonizing detail while squatters settled on those lands in the hopes that such speculations would bear fruit. An oft-repeated refrain of Jackson's was that Mission Indians were "driven out of good adobe houses & the white men who had driven them out, settling down calm & comfortable . . . !"<sup>80</sup> Indian home ownership, most precarious because it was guaranteed by oral agreements with Californios, was even more vulnerable to squatters because U.S. courts saw fit to question all oral agreements, while giving greater consideration to the land grant papers held by Californios. The confiscated land was deemed public and was open for purchase. California homes in particular, of all the homes in the republic at this time, experienced these tumultuous exchanges of ownership and of inhabitants. Jackson herself entered a number of these homes, and given her northeastern Brahmin breeding and shorthand understanding of the cultural significance of the home as an expression of personal virtue, she portrayed California homes on several occasions in order to express the self reliance and dignity of the Luiseño people and other native Californians. That Jackson could confidently assess Kinney by the design and stature of his home (albeit incorrectly) is an indication of her faith in a public discourse about proper domesticity. Her response in California then, to represent the homes of those she sought to champion by describing the principles of design and ornamentation that defined their material existence, in effect, creating a blue print of the architecture of their souls, was an act of representative advocacy. It was not through mere affective expression of their plight, but through the affective rendering of their homes, that she sought to bring public attention to the plight of Native Californians and, in turn, sought to bring the question of the sanctity of the private domestic sphere to bear on the debate of the limitations of the civic domestic space. To illustrate, in her review of *Ploughed Under* (1881), a novel that outlined the ill-treatment of Indians, Jackson said that it "ought to convert every man that reads it into a 'partisan' who would never feel happy in his own home again so long as these helpless creatures remain in our borders without home, freedom, or the protection of the law."<sup>81</sup> That the happiness of homes of white northeastern readers should be tied to the fate of Indian homes speaks most

---

<sup>80</sup>Jackson and Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885*, 240. Letter to Charles Dudley Warner, October 31, 1882.

<sup>81</sup>Helen Hunt Jackson, "Ploughed Under by William Justin Harsha, Review," *The Critic* 1, no. 4 (1881): 47. This review came to my attention by way of Kate Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson: A Literary Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

eloquently to the connection between private sphere domestic desires for comfort and tranquility and the intrusions of the civic domestic agenda.

But in order to understand how and why Jackson used Indian homes as sites of affect and pathos, we must first examine how she portrayed other homes in the Republic, homes that were not under threat of seizure, but homes that were, nonetheless, certainly not happy.

### **Matters of the home**

Jackson's book *About Home Matters* is a study of the various forms of emotional and physical coercion that occur in U.S. homes. As a survey of "helplessness in the hands of power," the book examines both exceptional and common cases of abuse. Through it all the author asserts that it is the inherent imbalances of power within households that create "tyrants" and victims of abuse in affective relationships (76). She describes the murder and abuse of children by their parents, and parental "authority" over invalid sons or grown unmarried daughters who are now women kept in an "unnatural childhood" by parents who are following social convention when imposing such restrictions on their children. While some of the abuse described is physical, most of it is emotional, at times even coming from physically weak members of the family who impose a form of passive tyranny on the home (80). It is her argument that this sort of exercise of will undermines the emotional development of individuals and by extension the greater culture. And just as the private domestic sphere hides such abuse, relegating it to back rooms, the civic domestic realm also hides such abuses within its boundaries. We see echos of Jackson's critiques of the coercive home in *Ramona*, where the Luiseño Indians are restricted by U.S. law from determining their own fate, and by parallel the protagonist Ramona is emotionally abused and physically restrained in the Moreno house, even though she is given all the material comforts that one would ascribe to a home. Authorities in both cases seek to control the will of their charges – the Luiseños and Ramona – through means that have economic and material consequences. But it is Jackson's insistence on the affective – on the will of desire, by the Luiseños for a home and by Ramona for love – that requires exploration because it speaks of an intention on her part to fuse political and aesthetic discourses through the use of affect.

Describing the physical abuse of children in *About Home Matters*, Jackson tells the story of an extended stay in New York City during the "hottest weeks of a hot summer." (15) She boarded in a neighborhood with "blocks of buildings which had shops on the first floor and tenements above." (15) The hot summer nights compelled all the tenants to keep their windows open, which created an echoing arena. All noise and conversation taking place in the apartments could be heard because of the shared courtyard. Each day the households in the area, comprised of families of the "better class of work people," meaning "the families of small tradesmen, and mechanics of the better sort," enacted a drama of affect and control in a relationship that Jackson referred to as "the republic of the family." (15, 76) It is a phrase that is quite fitting because it syncretizes the discourses of familial and governmental affiliation and control. The architecture of the tenements, with windows open to a common courtyard, created a common space where all tenants could hear each other's business, magnifying these scenes of domestic experience, in turn multiplying these expressions of the American domestic experience. These homes are emblematic because of their middle-class aspirations. These are not the tenements that would later be immortalized in Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) as the homes of destitute



immigrants. Instead, they are homes that conjure some of the same comforts that Jackson's readers would know and value, and may have in fact been quite similar to their own homes. In fact, her discussions of domestic tyranny in this book are all set in middle class homes. The book begins with the description of the beating to death of a little boy at the hands of his minister father who is angered by the three year old's refusal to say his prayers. In the following passage, Jackson's description of the violence within the tenements reads not as a sympathetic appeal against corporal punishment, but as a negotiation of the language of social reform, scientific analysis, and as a critique of domesticity. Here she conjures an image of the "republic of the family" exposed, its most private acts laid bare for all to hear:

During those scorching nights every window was thrown open, and all sounds were borne with distinctness through the hot still air. Chief among them were the shrieks and cries of little children, and blows and angry words from tired, overworked mothers. At times it became almost unbearable: it was hard to refrain from an attempt at rescue. Ten, twelve, twenty quick hard blows, whose sound rang out plainly. I counted again and again; mingling with them came the convulsive screams of the poor children, and that most piteous thing of all, the reiteration of "Oh, mamma! Oh, mamma!" as if, through all, the helpless little creatures had an instinct that this word ought to be in itself the strongest appeal.(15)

While America's culture of spectacle is in its nascent exuberant stage, Jackson foregoes sensational imagery and instead presents her readers with a scene of auditory transparency. The "mingling" of "blows" and "screams" ring "out plainly" with "distinctness," eradicating the barriers between violence and affect and private and public space through auditory resonance. The economy of urban architecture makes the tenement a site where the agents of violence and their witnesses become complicit abusers: one through physical blows, the other through inaction. The echoing inner courtyard also makes it difficult to discern the source of the beatings, rendering them anonymous yet ever-present. Jackson describes her own role of listener as that of unwilling witness, the experience "almost unbearable," but her response is not sentimental for she does not cry, nor is it romantic for she does not rescue the children, instead it is rational – she counts the blows. And it is in that response, coupled with the mothers' physical response to their children's repeated appeals for mercy, that we see her critique of the discourse of sentimental domesticity. The tropes and formulaic expressions of sentimental novels had an extra-literary effect in defining all manner of discourse about the American domestic space. Jackson's depiction here cannot escape the images and tropes that so inspired domestic novels. The genre's effect on reform discourse, on national policy discussions, is well-documented. Unlike sentimental literature, which often contains abusive domestic situations, but which still upholds the ideals of domesticity, Jackson here is critical of the very foundation of the domestic space. She points out the children's subjection to the whim of "overworked mothers," whose role as enforcer is situationally pragmatic but in practice contradictory to notions of ideal domesticity. This is because the conditions that create "tired, overworked mothers," the demands of housekeeping, will not soon abate. The leading question then becomes: when is a mother not "overworked?" When will she not express that exhaustion through beatings? And the children's appeal, the iteration of "oh mamma!" does not melt mothers' hearts as it would in novels, it does

not stop the beatings; instead that plea and its aggressive response reinforce the relationship between violence and pathos. In this drama, coercion finds its impetus and justification in passion and affect. For, who else should hit a child but the mother who loves him?

This weariness toward sentiment dictates her response. With such horror stories in account, hers is not an appeal to sympathy, as was so often the case with critics of corporal punishment of a previous generation and education advocates of the time. This is because coercive domesticity is enabled by the same appeal to affect that informs sympathetic entreaties, as we've seen with the children's pleas in the beatings anecdote. In other words, to appeal to sympathy would be to use the language that enables the passions that drive corporal punishment. That has already been done, says Jackson, noting that "opponents of corporal punishment usually approach the subject either from the sentimental or the moral standpoint, . . . but the question of the direct and lasting physical effect of blows has yet to be properly considered." (10-11) Instead of prioritizing the sentimental, Jackson seeks to offer the rational scientific argument against corporal punishment. She argues that instead we should concentrate on "a statistical summing-up of pain," a "scientific demonstration of the extent to which such pain, by weakening the nervous system and exhausting its capacity to resist disease" could then be quantified in social and economic consequences. (10) Shifting attention away from the sentimental argument against corporal punishment, and away from the locus of sentiment (the home) and addressing the public social sphere (society), expands the consequences of corporal punishment beyond the private domestic sphere to include the civic domestic realm – the nation state. Moreover, Jackson reconfigures the sentimental domestic space, throwing out the affective terminology that defines punishment in affective relationships, and replacing it with a cold rationalism. By doing so, she is defamiliarizing the home space and defamiliarizing the beatings, but also is projecting another, albeit lurid and sinister, option for dealing with the passionate frustrations that lead to the beatings:

Suppose that the idea had yesterday been suggested for the first time that by inflicting physical pain on a child's body you might make him recollect certain truths; and suppose that instead of whipping, a very moderate and harmless degree of pricking with pins or cutting with knives or burning with fire had been suggested . . . I think it would not be easy to show in what wise (sic) small pricks or cuts are more inhuman than blows; or why lying may not be as legitimately cured by blisters made with a hot coal as by black and blue spots made with a ruler . . . It seems as if this one suggestion, candidly considered might be enough to open all parents' eyes to the enormity of whipping. (14)

Overworked mothers do not set about to deliberately and carefully prick their children as punishment without seeming cruel and calculating, but Jackson suggests this in order to "open parents' eyes" to the affective violence within their homes. Her argument here for an indifferent form of punishment, while rhetorical, is also an argument for a different form of discourse about families. Passion, even sentiment, is too involved in child rearing; the affective context of punishment overwhelms acts of violence, rendering them harmless, even loving. The notion that whipping is culturally figured as an act "without any thought of cruelty," rests on its affective context: the agent and the victim of punishment are figured as emotionally entangled and impassioned:

how many a loving mother will, without any thought of cruelty, inflict half-a-dozen quick blows on the little hand of her child, when she could no more take a pin and make the same number of thrusts into the tender flesh, than she could bind the baby on a rack.” (14)

Jackson’s rhetorical suggestion that a less impassioned form of punishment replace whipping conjures an image of calculated mutilation. It is through this notion of deliberately inflicted pain that we see a possible reconfiguring of the domestic space from its sentimentally charged and bounded terms. Configuring the space as more expansive, as inclusive of the public sphere through the attention to consequences for private actions, even as encompassing the ability for calculated mutilation, creates a liminal space that can then question the discourse of corporal punishment – sentimental domesticity. “(T)he pin-thrusts would hurt far less,” says Jackson in her attempt to offer an alternative to passionate beatings, “and would probably make a deeper impression on the child’s mind.” (14) Thus she concludes, in effect promoting the unspeakable as preferable to affective sentimental domesticity.

It may seem strange that I am asserting that Jackson, often identified by critics as a sentimental writer, would be weary of the genre and by extension the sentimental popular culture that informed so many of the cultural expressions of her time. Our own distance from the culture that created sentimentalism has turned the entire era into a morass of syrupy sweetness. It is from this distanced view that our distortion of the distinctions in authors often leads scholars to make wholesale assumptions of the genre, its writers, and the cultural expression that has come to be known as sentimentalism or the Cult of Domesticity. Even those scholars who have been in the position to champion Jackson’s work have dismissed it as “melodrama.”<sup>82</sup> Jackson herself was not immune to such generalizations, but as an insider and dabbler, her denunciation of melodrama is an assertion of difference. Rather than cast aspersions at that genre called sentimental, she chose to differentiate her work from a number of melodramatic genres that were just as likely to be penned by men, saying:

there are to be found circles which thrill and weep in sympathetic unison with the ridiculous joys and sorrows, grotesque sentiments, and preposterous adventures of the heroes and heroines of the “Dime Novels” and novelettes, and the “Flags” and “Blades” and “Gazettes” among the lowest newspapers. But in well-regulated and intelligent households, this sort of writing is not tolerated, any more than the correlative sort of physical phenomenon would be – the gasping, shrieking, sobbing, giggling kind of behavior in a man or woman.”<sup>83</sup> (194)

---

<sup>82</sup>See introduction by Michael Dorris in Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona: A Story* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).

<sup>83</sup>Siobhan Senier cites this passage to make the same argument I make here. See Siobhan Senier, *Voices of American Indian Assimilation and Resistance: Helen Hunt Jackson, Sarah Winnemucca, and Victoria Howard* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 68.

This distinction proves pivotal for understanding the nature of Jackson's social criticism and her decision to use romance to voice this criticism. For while in *About Home Matters* she is weary of sentiment at the expository level, in *Ramona* we see how the author tempers the emotional elements of the novel. Ramona and Alessandro are not ruled by blind passion but by measured and careful affection. Jackson would argue that the novel is not sentimental, but instead realistic, with social and economic concerns set in a romantic setting and storyline. The novel's purpose, legislative advocacy, grounds the story in the world.

Prior to her own conversion from dilettante to advocate for Native American causes, Jackson dismissed women's social reform movements such as temperance and abolition as "trivial, dilatory, ineffective" because they were "not directed toward the 'field' of 'home and private life.'"<sup>84</sup> Given this early dismissal of women's public reform and benevolence efforts, it seems odd that Jackson would take up the activist torch herself a few years later, penning government reports and essays in efforts to enact legislative change on national policy. But it is clear that this transition from wallflower to activist comes about in an effort to champion the integrity of the domestic sphere. With the publication of *Ramona*, ten years later, we see the end product of a career increasingly concerned with the interconnection between the privately constructed home space – the "republic of the family" that must contend with its own "private tyrants" and forms of emotional and physical coercion – and the public world that intrudes upon and eventually defines that private space. It is not through eternal retreat that one can defend households within the republic – particularly Indians' rights to housekeep – but through public action. The homes described in *About Home Matters* are indicative of that concern with the state of domestic life in the country. A key concern is the maintenance of domestic transparency, the opportunity for policing families in their homes (through architecture), and the consequences of passionate parenting. Along those lines, the homes Jackson documents in her California travels demonstrate the extent to which Anglo intrusions, aided by government policy, confer an accessibility on these homes, making them vulnerable to intrusion. The homes she constructs in *Ramona* are indicative of that shift, transparent, expansive, ever vulnerable to outside encroachment, they are the product of an evolving domestic culture accustomed to the threshold, or liminal space, between public and private life. *Ramona*'s households are the fulfillment of a shift toward a transparent domesticity that in theory ensures the population's adherence to the ideals of domestic comportment, but that also leaves them vulnerable to the desiring gaze of speculating emigrants. If the Mexican ranchers had chosen to blur the threshold between public and private spheres of influence, using familial and patrilineal power to influence economic and political legislation that would affect the general population, that was a sign of their relative power and influence. But Indian homes in the region are not exposed to the U.S. government or to emigrants by choice. The nature of California domestic transparency is decidedly different in each case. For Native Californians, their legal disenfranchisement and the dissolving of their land rights makes their homes accessible to outside intrusion and market speculation. Here we see some semblance to the homes Jackson encounters in New York, where the economy of urban architecture creates a shared space open to audible intrusions. With larger economic influences at stake, governmental control of households becomes ever more dominant. From the reformers'

---

<sup>84</sup>Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson: A Literary Life*, 27., citation of a letter from Jackson to Abigail Williams May, August 17, 1873, Schlesinger library, Harvard University.

perspective, the fear is that this imposition is necessary, as evidenced from the New York tenements story. But this attention to the coercion within homes signals a shift in the public inquiry on private spaces; it is a sign that the culture has irrevocably redefined the privacy and the accessibility of the domestic space in America.

### **The *Century* articles**

The series of California articles that Jackson wrote for *The Century Magazine* in 1883 are significant because the research she conducted for them eventually served as the source material for *Ramona*. The author's introduction to the plight of Native Americans – the cause with which she is most associated today – was through the northeastern symposia that were a cornerstone of middle class public intellectual life. It was in 1879 that she first heard the Ponca Chief Standing Bear give a speech in Boston, where he discussed the Poncas' forced removal from their reservation in Nebraska and eventual victory in court in establishing Native American rights as citizens under the law. Chief Standing Bear's presentation about his lost homeland resonated with Jackson, whose own writing career had revolved around domestic concerns. His speech also cemented the relationship between citizenship and housekeeping in the author's mind, as the case rested upon the assertion of Indians' rights of U.S. citizenship in order to bring cases to court to challenge infringement on Native lands (from Lakota squatters, ironically). Her response was swift. By 1881 she went from being a dilettante to an authority, penning *A Century of Dishonor*, an emotionally charged indictment of the U.S. government's broken treaties with several Native American tribes. For someone who hadn't shown any previous interest in Native American concerns, this sudden turn seems curious, but it is not beyond reasonable when seen as a natural progression of the author's preoccupation with coercive domesticity. Her concern for the white middle class home merely developed into an interest for the homes of others who resided within the boundaries of the U.S. It was the widespread and systematic nature of intrusions into Native American domesticity that spurred her work in these later years and that led her to eventually write her bestseller, *Ramona*. And while *Ramona* has garnered a large amount of interest of late with analyses of the protagonist's ethnicity and studies of whiteness in the text, it is the author's attention to domestic spaces that I think most clarifies the novel's entrance into Anglophone discourse on imperialism and domesticity through its critique of American cultural standards that value or define a limited range of domestic options. I am drawn to Jackson's evolving interest in Native American rights because it crystalizes a set of issues that informed American identity at the time that had to do with defining parameters of discretion in a public world. Jackson had an ability to make the most private of domestic spaces resoundingly political and public. By representing the struggles of the unfortunate and dispossessed at the affective level we see a different sort of politics that questions the American myths of rugged individualism and coercive domesticity. Alessandro, the Luiseño protagonist in *Ramona*, seeks not revenge for his tribe's dispossession. Rather, he seeks a home for his family. It is that fundamental desire, which is beyond reproach, that best illustrates how Jackson articulated cultural notions about desire and race.

Jackson was well-established as a writer of travel and domestic literature when in 1881 she was commissioned by *The Century Magazine* to write an "industrial and picturesque

narrative for illustration” about California.<sup>85</sup> Though she was uncomfortable about the magazine’s request for an outline of economic prospects in the region, a subject she considered “appalling,” she viewed the writing assignment as an opportunity to pursue Mission Indian rights advocacy on their dime.<sup>86</sup> Already a force as a Native American land rights advocate – by then she had *A Century of Dishonor* and several essays under her belt – she now sought to bring her connections and influence to bear on the Mission Indian cause. During this period she visited several native Californian villages. She became an unofficial advocate, writing letters to the government on their behalf. This resulted in her appointment as “official agent commissioned to locate permanent homes for them.”<sup>87</sup> The abuses suffered by the Mission Indians at the hands of emigrants seemed especially traumatic to Jackson because she valued their assimilation of European farming technology, domestic arts and housekeeping, and Christianity, sighting these as proof of their right to self-determination. It is this value of and depiction of Europeanized Indians that most rankles most contemporary scholars when they deal with *Ramona*. By turns the novel is dismissed or vilified because Alessandro, the Indian protagonist, is too Christian, the village of Temecula not Indian enough, and Jackson’s praise for the Mission system is too ready. I believe that those criticisms too easily dismiss Jackson’s expression as racist, classist, or imperialist without considering how *Ramona* negotiates various discourses on California Indian rights and claims to land, especially since those who lived in the region did so under several governments in the course of a few decades.

Jackson’s assessment of the Luiseños and the world they inhabited, their homes and their farms, while based on her own outsider observations, was one informed by Spanish colonial and Mexican land rights. Her conversations with prominent Californio friends such as the Coronels, or the various peasant and landowning Californio and Native American villagers she encountered, exposed her to the Spanish colonial and Mexican Republican terminology used to

---

<sup>85</sup>Jackson to Thomas Bailey Aldrich, April 21, 1882, Harvard. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 241.. Jackson was a close friend of Richard Watson Gilder, the editor of *The Century*. Given Jackson’s publishing history, her tenacity, and her desire to travel without having to pay out of pocket, the California piece was probably initiated by her for the purpose of visiting the California Mission Indians, but was not an unwelcome idea to *The Century Magazine*, which would have been only too glad to highlight the emerging Southern California scene. Note also that the narrative is subordinated to the illustration in this job description. *The Century* was a generously illustrated magazine that commissioned pictorial artists equally for their own abilities, not as just an appendage to writers. As such, this magazine was not interested in exposés so much as in picturesque entertainment.

<sup>86</sup>Helen Hunt Jackson, January 29, 1882, letter to Abbot Kinney, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.

<sup>87</sup>Valerie Sherer Mathes, *Helen Hunt Jackson and Her Indian Reform Legacy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 38.

define spaces of contention in the region.<sup>88</sup> Before Mexican independence from Spain, the Laws of the Indies asserted that all colonial land belonged to Indians, and would be held in trust for them until they converted to Christianity and demonstrated European farming and craft skills. This law favored neophytes, those Native Californians who had converted to Catholicism, over others who by choice or chance lived autonomous lives independent of mission authority. While the laws of the Indies were patronizing and culturally intrusive, the decree allowed for a discourse on land management that established Native American primacy with respect to land tenure, though historians contend that these were in effect “theoretical property rights” because Indian landownership through colonial channels was often thwarted in practice.<sup>89</sup> Mission Indians who worked within these laws understood the required assimilation that in theory was a prerequisite for their emancipation and accordingly demonstrated specific indicators as evidence of said assimilation to argue for their own property rights in official legal documents.<sup>90</sup> Well before the U.S. annexation of California, neophytes touted their assimilation of European domestic practices because they could benefit from such displays.<sup>91</sup> With the shift in international politics that would transform California from a distant holding of the Spanish crown to a remote region of the Mexican Republic, the fortunes of Indians took a complicated turn. Despite the fact that the Mexican Republic accorded all indigenous peoples emancipation and full citizenship, the irony was that the new Republic chose to ignore colonial laws that gave Indians priority in land claims. Indian land tenure under Mexican rule was no longer considered absolute, and instead emigrants who arrived in the wake of mission secularization were accorded first rights to the land. So while in legal parlance Indians were now free full citizens of the Mexican Republic, they were now legally estranged from the land because relocated Mexicans of the military class were given preference. The Indian response in one legal case was to argue on two issues: the mission lands had been improved by Indian labor, which must be compensated; the other point was that the Indians themselves were ready to sustain themselves, having acquired the European

---

<sup>88</sup>Antonio Coronel and his bilingual wife Mariana “delightful old Mexicans,” charmed Jackson with their old world manners and hospitality. Antonio Coronel had served as mayor of Los Angeles from 1853-1854, where he established the Public Works department. Note that his tenure as mayor actually occurred after the U.S. annexation of California. Coronel was adept at negotiating competing interests and discourses on space and resources and was clear in expressing the subtleties of these discourses to Jackson in person and through numerous letters.

<sup>89</sup>W. W. Robinson, *Land in California* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 11.

<sup>90</sup>George Harwood Phillips, *Chiefs and Challengers: Indian Resistance and Cooperation in Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>91</sup>See Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936*, 39-40. For specific instances, census entries and mission registries. But the pull to assimilate European housekeeping was also met with a push to abandon Indian housekeeping practices. As Haas notes, “In 1839, the governor stated that if villagers “reverted” to a state of dependence on wild fruits or neglected planting crops and herding, they would be returned immediately to their respective missions under conditions similar to neophytism (40).

housekeeping skills outlined in Spanish colonial law.<sup>92</sup> In representing the Luiseño stories for an Anglophone audience, Jackson passed along these same representational strategies practiced by several Mission Indians. She consciously sought to make them appear less like the Lakota or Apache, whose historical clashes with the U.S. government conjured images of violence in newspapers, dime novels, and wild west shows, and more like pastoral regionalist Americans whose skin happened to be of another hue. In effect it was the Luiseño people who were the embodiment of the yeoman farmers so heartily celebrated in the American myth about itself, and not the Anglo emigrants who entered the region to benefit from speculation on homestead parceling.<sup>93</sup> In this context Jackson's representation of the Mission Indians' European practices and habits is not an act of Native erasure, or of willful imagining, which has occasionally been argued.<sup>94</sup> Instead this portrayal presents another aspect of Mission Indian identity, which is at this point a mestizo identity. It is actually a manifestation of a long rhetorical tradition about assimilation used by both Indians and Californios to parcel land and define rights.<sup>95</sup> *Ramona*

---

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>See Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978). for a discussion of the cultural representations and political uses of the myth of the yeoman farmer and westward migration, especially chapters 11, 15, and 17.

<sup>94</sup>Kathleen Godfrey, "Visions and Re/Visions of the Native American" (PhD, Arizona State University, 1998), 56. In her dissertation, Kathleen Godfrey notes that the Indians in *Ramona* share no cultural commonalities with the Temecula Indians of ethnographic studies of the time. She argues that Jackson would have been familiar with some of the basic ethnographic characteristics of the Indians but chose to portray them as Europeanized by the Mission system. Godfrey's critique of Jackson's rests on the notion that a faithful representation would be the proper strategy for advocacy. But Jackson's goal was to promote Indian land rights based on their acquisition of European farming and domestic practices. Anthropological writing of the time was characterized by Euro-American observations of Native cultural difference. Also, many of the Luiseños that Jackson interviewed were cultural mestizos who maintained both native and Hispano-mestizo practices. Anyone observing them could pick and choose for their descriptions, rendering the representations either indigenous or European. U.S. discourse about identity, both in the nineteenth century and now, does not accommodate the kind of melding of cultures that defines a Mexican identity.

<sup>95</sup>While I use the term "assimilation" here it is problematic because it assumes dominant cultural imposition of practices without any acknowledgment of strategies of accommodation or discretionary adaptation by Native Americans. The Latin American term "mestizaje" seems more appropriate for describing variable identity practices. Nineteenth century U.S. culture does not have a way of accounting for non-static identities. Neither does twentieth century U.S. culture, as evidenced even by many recent discussions of the novel which only account for race within a static tiered dynamic based on the one-drop quantum notion of racial identity. This leaves all characters as either white or Indian without accounting for mestizo practices and identities.



attempted to singularly counter Anglophone representations of an exotic and savage people by acknowledging the source of those misconceptions. Of her good-hearted southern emigrant Aunt Ri, she wrote:

her ideas of Indians had been drawn from newspapers, and from a book or two of narratives of massacres, and from an occasional sight of vagabond bands of families they had encountered in their journey across the plains. (286)

In effect by pointing out the sensationalist print sources that misconstrued public perceptions of Native Americans, Jackson here is dismissing those perceptions while excusing the ignorance of Aunt Ri. It can be argued that Indian identification with European housekeeping is a form of co-optation that belittles Indian housekeeping, rendering it somehow inferior or less desirable in a Spanish and Mexican ruled California. But to advance this sentiment without acknowledging the ways that Mission Indians created mestizo households and attempted to influence the discourse on their own housekeeping and landowning would be to only see one side of the story, and to strip the Mission Indians of any agency in the matter.

Jackson's extensive contacts in California provided her a unique opportunity to visit Mexican and Indian families in their homes during her stay. She was able to hear firsthand their stories of dispossession at the hands of newly arrived emigrants. The author's exceptional access to the intimate workings of the domestic lives of Indians in particular made their trauma both personal and philosophical: their outcome would represent the fate of all true honest homes in the region. Focusing on the dispossession of Native lands and homes – ones she was invited to enter – was an intimate experiential counter to the rhetoric of homesteading, which had figured emigrants as protagonists in a national drama of expansion and development. For a writer whose body of work had been devoted to the celebration and improvement of middle class U.S. domesticity, this confrontation with the underside of the California emigrant phenomenon was just another in a series of blows to that ideal.

*The Century Magazine* commission that Jackson received in 1881 resulted in four essays that were published throughout 1883, the year before *Ramona*'s publication. Like other magazines of the era such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Century Magazine* "epitomized secular high culture," offering its educated affluent and middle-class readers commentaries on art, literature, and recreational and philosophical prospects.<sup>96</sup> And much like the *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Century Magazine* concurrently featured narrative encounters with exotic locales through fiction and travel essays. This seemingly benign attention to foreign or exotic lands did not just emerge from some vague resplendent sense of adventure. Without exception their attentions followed the coattails of U.S. military incursions and economic development, meaning that these magazines were simply providing genteel access to places already conquered and now accessible to tourists by trails and railroads that served military and economic purposes.<sup>97</sup> While magazine

---

<sup>96</sup>Nancy Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 266.

<sup>97</sup>Jackson herself traveled directly to southern California by way of the new Southern Pacific line through Arizona. By joining the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, the

readers – that group of Americans that in general were most in possession of wealth and education – were certainly curious about the sites and characters residing in the hinterlands, some regional natives had certain economic incentives to encourage this literary and touristic attention. Historian Nina Silber’s examination of southern romances applies here: “Hotel owners in the southern mountains frequently invited local colorists to visit, hoping that these writers would be inspired to advertise the scenic wonders of their particular locale in a new magazine story.”<sup>98</sup> The conflation of fiction, “tourist accounts,” or “illustrative landscape literature” here often resulted in short fiction that associated exoticism with freedom (for overworked northerners) and romance. The only thing that separates regionalist literature from travel literature is that one imagines the intimate lives of culturally marginalized subjects, while the other is usually an examination of public spaces that become emblematic of a place or a region. The influence that these magazines had in shaping the geography of the American imagination cannot be overstated. These magazines were arbiters of taste and where their attentions turned, readers were sure to follow. *The Century* in particular had a large circulation, numbering about 200,000 in the 1880s.

While northeastern urbanites’ perception of California in the 1880s had matured beyond the old fantasies of gold rush and desperado days, the state’s commercial and cultural assets became a topic of some interest to *The Century*, whose middle class northeastern readers – many not interested in homesteading per se – were the ideal audience for the magazine’s more subtle promotion of the Golden State’s quaint culture and mid-range economic investment opportunities. So while true booster writers like Charles Nordhoff were encouraging speculation and emigration with booklets such as *California for Travellers and Settlers* (1872), complete with appended climate tables and chapters devoted to the value of Indian vs. Mexican hired labor, outlets like *The Century* sought to enter the fray through the class-appropriate literature of fiction, general interest essays on geography and economy, and tourism.<sup>99</sup> *The Century*’s own interest in California could be summed up as a pastoral idealism drawn from the same impetus that drove the magazine’s interest in regionalist northeastern and southern literature of the period. While for *The Century* these articles about California were the ideal topic to exploit urban northeastern readers’ interest in the region’s many commercial opportunities, for Jackson, ardent as her activism was, publishing in *The Century* provided the means to introduce an affluent audience to the underbelly of Yankee opportunism and economic desire. It also didn’t hurt that the magazines paid so well for her work. She did voice her own misgivings about the efficacy of such a venture though, and when it came time to serialize *Ramona* a few years later, she chose to avoid the magazines, though they paid more, noting that “100,000 (*Christian Union*) readers will

---

Southern Pacific line was now the second transcontinental railroad line. As with all modes of economic development, it carried goods and people who sought either economic gain or leisure.

<sup>98</sup>Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 73.

<sup>99</sup>Booster literature spanned several decades following the booms and busts of various speculative outlets in the region. Another good example is Charles Dudley Warner, *Our Italy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891).

do more for the cause, than four times that number of idle magazine readers.”<sup>100</sup> Her equation of magazine reading with a certain upper-class apathy is indicative of the culture’s perceived association of wealth with a sort of smugness that bred emotional languor – affluent readers hadn’t the religious or humanitarian passion and vigor to affect change. Despite such misgivings, the articles she provided *The Century Magazine* did try to unsettle readers and to upset the usual easygoing tone of the magazine’s travel narratives by airing grievances that Native Californians had with both emigrants and with the U.S. government. An essay titled “The Present Condition of the Mission Indians in Southern California,” in particular, was far from the usual happy jaunts through foreign territory; instead, it was a tour of misery. The editors of *The Century* were not pleased with the result, but not for the expected reason. Jackson’s response to editor Robert Underwood Johnson registers this discontent with the article’s lack of sensationalism. Sadly, we do not have Johnson’s letter, but Jackson’s own written response is clear enough to reveal that *The Century* sought to exploit its subject matter in a manner that was exploitative and spectacular. The editorial board might have thought Jackson would deliver such fodder because of her “reputation of being ‘excited’ by the Mission Indian cause.”<sup>101</sup> It could be argued that the editors desired such subject matter to be portrayed ardently in the interest of the victims, since it involved political abuses. But Jackson, who by default was passionate, argumentative, and conspicuous, found their demands, in light of the subject matter and the victims involved, distasteful. Her response to their request is an expression of disgust: “you say that you want the ‘readers’ hair to stand on end,” she writes to *Century Magazine* associate editor Robert Underwood Johnson. Of her stories she says: “they are not . . . in the least sensational – nor any way calculated to raise ‘hair on end.’”<sup>102</sup> So the irony here is that Jackson believes the magazines to not have passionate readers, or at least not ones who will be moved to political action or who would appreciate sensational stories of woe, and yet Johnson is disappointed because her writing does not incite the passions enough. The debate here over the expression of hair-raising subject-matter demonstrates the uneasiness that exists over the lack of discretion in public expressions regarding the private lives of the dispossessed. It is the sign of a culture that finds such sensationalism a proper form of expression for the plight of homeless Indians. It also speaks of Euro-American’s own psychological allowance of violent or coercive actions within Indian homes. In outlining the U.S. government’s subversion of Native American domestic tranquility, she writes:

---

<sup>100</sup>Letter from Jackson to Amelia Stone Quinton, April 2, 1884. See Jackson and Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885*, 319. *The Christian Union* was a weekly with an abolitionist and reformist history, edited by Henry Ward Beecher between 1870-1881. Its readership was solidly middle class, similar to *The National Era*, the weekly that serialized Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

<sup>101</sup>Letter from Jackson to her husband, William Sharpless Jackson, December 26, 1879. See *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>102</sup>Letter from Jackson to Robert Underwood Johnson, October 28, 1882. See *Ibid.*, 238.

How many of the American people will be able to believe this—than an Indian “may kill an Indian woman without excuse or provocation, and he thereby violates no Federal law. If he marries, instead of killing her, having a former wife living, he is subject to arraignment, trial and punishment by the Courts of the United States for bigamy.”<sup>103</sup>

The laws applying to Indian households negate fundamental aspects of humanity by denying the murder of Indians at the hands of other Indians, in effect allowing for and encouraging violence between Native Americans within households and between communities.<sup>104</sup> But the practice of polygamy, which was practiced by some Native Americans on a limited scale, is criminalized presumably because of its practice among certain whites: Mormons refused to follow mainstream standards of domesticity. “Civic leaders argued that bigamy was hostile to democracy,” “republican family ideals,” and it “threatened to introduce patriarchy, elitism, and despotism.”<sup>105</sup> These alternative domestic practices, whether carried out by Mormons, “radical utopian groups,” or Native Americans, were seen as possible contaminants that could affect the U.S. civic domestic space, injecting “immoral and heathenish” practices that were decidedly foreign, “a feature of the life of Asiatic and of African people.”<sup>106</sup>

And just because Jackson takes umbrage with *The Century*’s appetite for the lurid details that make hair “stand on end,” this is not to say that she is not culpable of taking advantage of her role as reporter, as we will see below in her descriptions of the Saboba village, where she enters Indian homes and inquires into the private lives of their inhabitants. But it is that imposition of emotional sensational expression, the desiring gaze that enters the homes of Indians, the dissolving of the parameters of discrete behavior, and as we will see below, the inability to “mind one’s business” that is symptomatic of a whole different set of rules with respect to Indian homes. It is a sign of the expressed expectation that magazine editors and readers have of California homes in general and Indian homes in particular. From sites of desire, to then spaces infused with sensationalism; they are essentially enmeshed by the discourse of affect and passion in its most lurid and tragic manifestations.

For Jackson, the standout critical article of that *Century Magazine* commission was titled “The Present Condition of the Mission Indians in Southern California.” In it she chronicled the history of Mission Indian land dispossession during the U.S. era. She was particularly incensed over the fact that emigrants often displaced Indians with homesteading grants and occupied Indian houses after forcibly removing them from the land. At its essence, this article is a study of the way that the meaning ascribed to space gets reconfigured by Anglo desire. It is this story of

---

<sup>103</sup>Annual Report of the Indian Commissioner for 1878, p. 61 as cited in *Ibid.*, 33. Letter to the Editor of the *Tribune*, December 11, 1879.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.* Intertribal theft was not punishable in any court.

<sup>105</sup>Mark M. Carroll, *Homesteads Ungovernable: Families, Sex, Race, and the Law in Frontier Texas, 1823-1860* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 123.

<sup>106</sup>The first two citations *Ibid.* The third, *Reynolds Vs. United States*, 98 U.S. 146 (1878).

displacement and occupation – not necessarily of governments and of those in seats of power, but of residents from their homes – that strikes a chord with Jackson, whose notion of national integrity lies in the assurance of homes for everyone, regardless of ethnicity or class. The convergence between home and nation had already expressed itself in Jackson's ruminations on Native American advocacy early on, when she said of the travails suffered by the dislocated Ponca Nation, that no American should "feel happy in his own home again so long as these helpless creatures remain in our borders without home, freedom, or the protection of the law."<sup>107</sup> This comment indicating that all houses in the republic (those occupied by Anglos as well as Indians) should be guaranteed within U.S. borders, within the national domestic space, speaks of a parallel and even metonymic relationship between home and nation for all of the nation's populations. The irony in California, that Anglos need not fret about "feel(ing) happy" in their own homes, because they have chosen to feel happy in Indian homes, complicates Jackson's ideal harmony of protective and autonomous domestic parameters within the national domestic space. So while the discrete boundaries of "happy" domesticity are dissolved by Anglo cupidity and desire, Jackson seeks to quell all talk of desire by instead appealing to sympathy (just as the domestic novels seek to quell desire and foster sympathy).<sup>108</sup> The topic of land dispossession and homelessness became Jackson's most significant call to reader sympathy with the Mission Indians. Imagine, here was a story about emigrants who were forcibly removing Indians, then living in their houses. Oddly, despite Jackson's appeal to sympathy through equal and designated discreet domestic spaces, the Anglo "happy" in his own home, and ideally the Indian happy in his own home, it is instead the case in California that the appeal of the Indian houses, their desirability, creates a spatial dis-temporal sort of co-habitation, one where the boundaries of domestic occupation have been eradicated by government-sanctioned invasion. Rather than sympathy through equality, where the happiness of Anglo homes should be dependent upon the happiness of Indian homes, in California there is an instance of equality through displacement, causing domestic commonalities across race and culture, through the Anglo desirability of Indian homes. This in turn re-figures the occupation of space and the meaning of space, imbuing the Indian homes with integrity only through their desirability and through their inhabitants' displacement. As Nordhoff notes, the Indian abodes, houses of reeds and straw, might have been humble, but they were clean. On viewing one, he says: "Now here was an outfit, in fact, superior to that which I noted in several Pike shanties on the way."<sup>109</sup> It is the home as affective symbol, one where families are forged and hearths are tended, that makes the emigrant invasion of Indian

---

<sup>107</sup>Jackson, "Ploughed Under by William Justin Harsha, Review," 47.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Nordhoff, *California for Health, Pleasure, and Residence: A Book for Travellers and Settlers*, 157. Nordhoff's offhand pejorative "pike" finds its counterparts in the following passage from a mid-nineteenth century novel *Roxy*: "that curious poor-whitey race which is called 'tarheel' in the northern Carolina, 'sand-hiller' in the southern, 'corn-cracker' in Kentucky, 'yahoo' in Mississippi and in California 'pike.'" As quoted in Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, 233-34. For another contemporary description see Clarence King, "Wayside Pikes," *The Atlantic Monthly* 28, no. 169 (1871).

homes that much more trenchant. For a generation of northeastern readers raised on domestic fiction and domestic advice literature, this call to sympathy was a natural turn.

The American narrative of pioneer settlement – the spread of European-style domesticity into the frontier – had by its nature infringed upon the rights of natives in its wholesale imposition of U.S. definitions for land management and acquisition through such means as the Homestead Act of 1862. The Act favored individual ownership, bureaucratic paper-centric accountability, and the imposition of money-capital. California residents had an economy based primarily on the barter system before U.S. annexation. These changes were taking place across the country, but in Indian and Californio occupied territory, the imposition of American structures of governance and economy took on a language of conquest and manifest destiny in opposition to the region's pre-existing dominant discourses on land rights. In other words, it was a clash of successive impositions. Jackson would not condone that pioneer domesticity. Instead, she presented readers with a portrayal of the region that problematized northeastern domestic culture and its homesteading narrative of manifest destiny with a California-centric narrative of invasion and dislocation. Jackson's critique of domesticity is expressed in her fiction and travel narratives as criticism of the emigrants who transgressed precepts of human charity. In her non-fiction work (through the commission and reports) she directed her criticism at the legal system that worked in the emigrants favor. The significant outcome was this jarring criticism of U.S. domestic culture. The precepts that defined an orderly home could not be beyond reproach if that orderliness came at the suppression of others. This was the case in *About Home Matters* with the New York tenements described earlier, the expectations of domestic tranquility were at odds with the practice of control used to achieve that serenity. The violence and suppression of the voices of discontent, which she often portrays as pathetic and helpless rather than defiant, were symptoms of a disconnect between sympathy and salvation and instead signs of a disturbing connection between affect and coercive control. That passion and could beget violence seemed pretty much a given in a culture with dime novels and sensationalist crime stories. That sympathetic appeals and affect could beget violence and coercion, or at least be used as an excuse for the continuance of such, was another matter entirely. The way that social critics could address the matter of domestic violence, balancing as it was between the private secrets of home spaces and the public spaces of tenement courts, required an acknowledgment of the limitations of rational advocacy. As such, writers often found themselves depicting these domestic clashes as sensational because they could; the victims' and perpetrators' class or ethnicity made their stories public property in a way that was exploitative. It speaks of Jackson's self-consciousness over the role of the interlocutor or the reporter of inequities and misdeeds in an age that is more weary of the goals of reform than during the antebellum reform era. It also is reflective of a certain amount of allowance of the reporters' intrusion into the homes that are sites of violence, sites of oppression, and sites of coercion.

The following two instances from her definitive *Century Magazine* commission – one an act of literary historical interpretation, the other her recounting of an interview – illustrate Jackson's negotiation of the tensions between idealized U.S. domesticity with the American myth of wanderlust. These two vignettes reveal a web of successive and coexisting interpretations of land management and tenure: the Spanish colonial Law of the Indies; the Mexican Land Grant period which included the secularization of lands; and the U.S. government's Homestead Act. California landowners had to reconcile these often-incongruous definitions for land use. When shifts in legal and economic power reconfigured proprietorship,

they also reconfigured the web of affective relations that created a meaningful affective geography. A new emergent Californian domesticity was complicated by previous ways of identifying space and configuring affective relations within that space, and memory and orality resonated despite the new legal and material configurations of the landscape.

### **The *Century* articles: land rights and occupancy**

“Echoes in the City of the Angeles,” composed as an ode to the final vestiges of Californio and Native American culture in Southern California, opens with a nostalgic reference to the Mexican Land Grants that had determined land acquisition and usage prior to U.S. annexation of the region. The Mexican grants required occupation in perpetuity for an ownership that valued presence and industry to fulfill needs, and discouraged acquisitiveness – a practice that Jackson idealized here because she felt it was surely more beneficial to the Mission Indians. Of the grants, she wrote:

(their) continuance depended entirely on the care a man took of his house and the improvement he put on his land. If he left his house unoccupied or let it fall out of repair, if he left a field uncultivated for two years, any neighbor who saw fit might denounce him, and by so doing acquire a right to the property . . . (gaining) no better rights than those possessed by his predecessor.<sup>110</sup>

While giving a general gist of the grant, she reflects the tension over definitions of land management and citizenship rights that determined who could own land and who could not. Firstly, this description of land tenure assumed that the only proper use of land was for the cultivation of crops. Any hunter-gatherer activity did not qualify. Remember that Spanish and Mexican incursions on the land employed an authoritative discourse to describe the relation between Californios, neophytes, and non-Christian Native Californians. As summarized by historian Elizabeth Haas: “In accord with the Law of the Indies that regulated the American colonies, the mission held the territory of the converts in trust, to be returned to them once they had adopted Spanish social, cultural, linguistic, and economic behaviors.”<sup>111</sup> So in theory mission land was held in trust for Indians pending their assimilation of European domestic and agricultural practices. Indian rights, held at some future date, became a promised but unfulfilled reward within the mission system’s paternalistic suppression of the Indians. The cruelty of

---

<sup>110</sup>Helen Hunt Jackson, “Echoes in the City of Angels,” *The Century Magazine* 27, no. 2 (1883).

<sup>111</sup>Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936*, 14. Douglas Monroy also sees the Indians’ acquisition of European housekeeping practices as an act, but his analysis stems from an interpretation of the vast differences between European and Native Californian responses to technology, tools, animals, and their environment. See Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), chapters 1-2 especially.

mission life, complete with prison-dormitories and taskmaster padres, initiated a familial domestic metaphor in the region to figure Indians as wards. Mexican independence altered the discourse of rights and land management. “Because Mexican law granted equal citizenship irrespective of race, the federal government’s emancipation and secularization laws gave former neophytes the right to claim a share of mission land as citizens but, in contrast to colonial policy, refused to acknowledge their right to the pre-colonial territory that the Church had held in trust for them during the mission period.”<sup>112</sup> The irony was that the colonial model figured Indian’s future emancipation and maintained a rhetoric of land held in trust, while the Mexican national period granted all Native Americans immediate citizenship while conveniently ignoring their pre-colonial claim to the land. In practice, the freedom that Indians had after emancipation was bittersweet – without the legal protection of the paternalistic missions many were economically abused by employers and denied land by the local Californio governing population. Some found work on ranchos, some won claims to former missions lands, some moved to ancestral lands or joined Indian bands and family that had successfully averted Mission life. Often they found that they were working land that was officially granted to Californios, but their legal rights were guaranteed through Mexican land grant contracts and oral agreements with those same Californios. That those verbal agreements would eventually flutter away in the presence of the Americanos’ Homestead grants showed the precarious status of Native Americans’ rights and livelihood. But Jackson summons the pre-U.S. halcyon days of integrity and trust not in an attempt to record a past, but to present Americans with an ideal that makes American policy and claims to integrity appear lacking in comparison. Jackson chose to present the land grant laws in her essay at that very moment in an effort to criticize U.S. land grant laws, which were causing a catastrophic shift in the geographically conscribed world of seasonal migrations, agricultural work, and mobility for both the Mexicans and the Indians. Immediately after describing the Mexican land grants, Jackson inserts her own assessment of this idyllic arrangement:

This was a premium indeed on staying at home and minding one’s business – a premium which amounted to coercion.<sup>113</sup>

Jackson decides to couch her assessment of Mexican land tenure with a final expression that is so vague it’s hard to tell if it’s a sign of revulsion or a form of wry adulation for some pre-lapsarian feudalism. Despite the vagueness, it does express a critique of homesteading and U.S. expansion. Indeed, “staying at home and minding one’s business” could be read in any number of ways. In this context “minding one’s business” is good for self-preservation from prospecting neighbors. “Minding one’s business” requires a sort of myopia that curtails communal policing as well as prospecting, but it also hampers communal benevolence because it is defensive. The phrase’s defensive qualities do not only apply to the integrity of the material aspect of the home; it also refers to the less concrete but equally important defense against psychological erosion of the home’s foundation. Ever mindful of those busybodies with a “benevolent anxiety concerning neighbors,” one magazine editor advocated “minding one’s business” as a “defensive weapon to

---

<sup>112</sup>Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936*, 33.

<sup>113</sup>Jackson, "Echoes in the City of Angels," 194. Hereafter noted in parenthesis.



prevent foreign intervention” into one’s own affairs.<sup>114</sup> Minding one’s business was indeed a euphemistic call for more restraint on common public discourse regarding the private lives of neighbors. In essence to mind one’s business was to uphold the boundaries between public and private discourses: to maintain discretion with respect to private indiscretions. But as a cry to maintain domestic defenses, the call to mind one’s business was also a defensive critique of those aggressive and opportunistic persons with the impulse to wander beyond domestic (be it the nation or the home) boundaries. Westward men seemed most able or willing to defy such appeals to “mind one’s business” by venturing beyond their domestic sphere for fame and fortune. Economically and spiritually tending the home, maintaining the discreet geographic or physical boundaries that were the result of discrete behavior was, in fact, “minding one’s business.” And it was that defensive mode that Jackson sought to imply – defense is necessary only when there is the danger of attack or invasion. It is this notion of a coercive housekeeping or domesticity under duress – that is most striking, echoes of the violent atmosphere depicted in *About Home Matters*. And where the victims there are abused children, here they are those Californians who are defending their homes for fear of foreign invasion by emigrants.

That Jackson assesses the act of defensively “minding one’s business” or the tending of the home as “coercion” is understandable given her general approval of the Mexican land grant practice. On the heels of the Cult of Domesticity, the collective cultural expression that relegated women to the home, the thought of “coercive” housekeeping is particularly biting. This assessment, then, seems particularly strident coming from a writer who championed the domestic life which she herself did not live. To urban northeastern women, “coercive” was one way of describing the cultural machinations that assured that women would not wander from the hearth, distracted by the social reform “hobbies” that often drew some middle class women such as Jackson into public life.<sup>115</sup> Their less affluent counterparts fare similarly, the “overworked” mothers whose acts Jackson so assiduously describes in *About Home Matters* are not masters of the punishment they inflict; rather they join their children as casualties of the institution of the home. To consider Jackson’s assessment across gender lines, to label men’s stoking of the family hearth as “coercion” was to acknowledge the relative freedom bestowed upon male protagonists

---

<sup>114</sup>Mrs. R. C. Gardner, "'Mind Your Own Business,'" *The Ladies' Repository: A Monthly Periodical Devoted to Literature, Arts, and Religion* 20, no. 8 (1860): 453.. See the following for an example that shows that the phrase maintains its meaning "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 75, no. 446 (1887): 312. My own survey of electronic archives found that about eighty percent of the time the phrase referred to the need for more privacy from prying interests, as in the first example listed here. The rest of the time it regarded the need for more attention to one’s own business interests, particularly the maintenance of one’s own business without regard for distracting speculation, as illustrated in the second reference here. So while it usually had a defensive connotation, it also served as an admonishment for those who would venture out beyond their sphere.

<sup>115</sup>In a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson she wrote: “I have become what I have said a thousand times was the most odious thing in life, — 'a woman with a hobby.' But I cannot help it. I think I feel as you must have felt in the old abolition days.” Jackson and Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885*, 84.

in the national narrative of westward expansion. This myth was fed by a high and low literary culture of wandering eastern men who sought to escape the bonds of domesticity that confined and coerced. One need look no further than Richard Henry Dana's memoir, the countless dime novels in circulation at the time, or the authors of the American Renaissance for examples of domestic escapists. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* provides a good example drive to leave behind the "civilized life," even if just for a short time.<sup>116</sup> Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* also begins with the premise that Ishmael takes to sea when his mood is aggressive, as the adventure drives off the spleen and regulates the circulation.<sup>117</sup> For the benefit of *The Century's* would-be wanderers, Jackson's decision to wryly highlight as "coercive" the nature of land occupation in Mexican California provides a stinging criticism of the land speculation discourse of the magazines. Her comment places Homesteading in a negative light, where we see the other side of speculative land acquisition. Here the greediness of neighbors who mind others' business has created the "coercive" environment.

The Homestead Act of 1862, the U.S. equivalent to land settlement in the thirty most western states, required the building of a house and five years of continued farming on a settlement of government land, whereby the occupant could "prove" up the land, gaining a title and the freedom to then sell it. The unspoken promise of the Homestead Act was the chance to acquire wealth through slow but steady development on a parcel of land. While that deal in theory benefitted homesteaders throughout the west, in practice the story was much more complicated. What the Act did accomplish in California was a state of chaos with several parties with varying claims – some written in English, some in Spanish, some oral – on the same parcels of land. In most regions, including California, the Act's promotion of individualistic housekeeping came to dominate the region, and Indians' land rights were crippled.<sup>118</sup> At its worst, the Homestead Act validated squatters' aggressive claims on land that was not left fallow, was not empty, but instead was occupied. Jackson's report to the government stated that white men "homestead claims on lands which had been fenced, irrigated, tilled, and lived on by Indians

---

<sup>116</sup>Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1897), 7.

<sup>117</sup>Herman Melville, *Moby Dick: An Authoritative Text*. edited by Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967).

<sup>118</sup>We see a similar case in New Mexico, where the U.S. imposition on the old land laws there caused many problems. According to historian Maria Montoya: "the Mexican property system enforced in nineteenth-century New Mexico was rooted in communal, as well as individual, ownership and was often expressed in informal, customary understandings among neighbors and in oral deals between patrons and clients. For the U.S. courts to privilege individual ownership and demand written documents to define such rights was to effectively refuse to enforce Mexican property rights. Maria E. Montoya, *Translating Property: The Maxwell Land Grant and the Conflict over Land in the American West, 1840-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 4-5.

for many generations.”<sup>119</sup> The native population was now faced with the ravages of emigrants’ speculative homesteading – in essence it was U.S. civic housekeeping run amok. Emigrants’ adventuring domestic spirit could only be read in a negative light, where their interests clashed with the natives at each turn, their speculation running aground the native farmers with paper edicts. It is the emigrants’ inability to stay home and “mind (their) business,” their uncontrollable eyeing of their neighbor’s land, that causes this trauma. As an affront to the Homestead Act and the government that devised it, Jackson concludes with a vindication of the ancient Mexican grant laws by undercutting U.S. emigrant practices against what she sees as the benevolence of the California land grant tradition:

One would think that there must have been left from those days teeming records of alienated estates, shifted tenures, and angry feuds between neighbor and neighbor. But no evidence remains of such strifes. Life was too simple, and the people were too ignorant. (194)

This final revelation about California land occupation, one which in this representation is idyllic, one of necessity, not of acquisitiveness, serves as a condemnation by comparison of the Homestead Act and of U.S. emigration. Her anti-speculative critique might appear to be a direct counter to the very intention of her publishers, but as *The Century* was an enlightened magazine, its readers would most likely agree with Jackson. Most were not the sort to pick up stakes and leave their comfortable urban dwellings for Indian houses. Jackson’s declamation speaks to those who appreciate the aesthetic of the quaint, unspoiled pastoral. It is the rhetoric of enlightened tourists who find charm in Indian houses peopled with Indians, not with emigrants. Perhaps it sounds glib to state it as such, because Jackson’s appreciation of Native American sovereignty is a humanistic concern that must acknowledge the suffering of persons regardless of aesthetics or representation. It is evidenced by her tireless struggle to help a population often maligned or at best forgotten. But the aesthetics of housekeeping serves as the conduit for Jackson’s political criticism. It is not the only means at her disposal, but it is the most memorable one – her literary output.

In a letter to her friend William Hayes Ward, a former Congregational pastor-turned-editor of the *New York Independent*, Jackson decried the fate of the village of Soboba in a tone that clearly expressed her concerns with the greed of emigrants of the middling class. The village of Saboba, located in what is now San Jacinto, was a self-sustained community of Luiseño Indians. Located in an agriculturally rich region with Los Angeles to the west and the desert and Palm Springs to the east, villagers grew wheat and citrus crops. Here we see that though they may have occupied the land through generations, that romantic history is cancelled out:

those Indians have been farming that land – they & their fathers & grandfathers for a hundred years. – They have good adobe houses – fenced fields, irrigating ditches etc. – They have never had a title. In the days of Mexican proprietorship, they did not need any. – The land is now “patented” to white men: – A San

---

<sup>119</sup>As cited in Clare V. McKanna, *Race and Homicide in Nineteenth-Century California* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002), 19.

Bernardino shopkeeper owns this village.<sup>120</sup>

Perhaps she is too stridently naive in her preference for the days of Mexican land ownership, but what is most striking about this message is the delivery, which reveals an underlying criticism of the class of people who engage in imperial land speculation at the front lines, so to speak. Mexican proprietorship, a sort of feudal governance of the land, goes fairly unscrutinized here. Indians' rights are naturalized by the succession of generations and guaranteed by oral contracts and land tenure in a relationship that seems pastoral if not downright feudal. The San Bernardino shopkeeper, a man who by this account qualifies as one of the "better class of work people" similar to those who occupied the New York tenement that was the site of so many impassioned beatings, is a speculator devoid of romantic association perhaps because he is a reminder of the urban petite bourgeois who lack cultural capital. Their small-scale of acquisitions make them too comfortable to be recipients of public benevolence, but too financially strapped to be generous to their poorer neighbors. They are entirely inculcated in the world of capitalist exchange, with no claim to the bucolic transcendence that Jackson and others have bestowed upon rural folk or the poor through "fathers & grandfathers,".

Perhaps it is the hope that California will change these emigrants, rather than be changed by them, that drives this critique. At one point she does hint at the "California Fever" that Dana mentioned so ominously in his warning to emigrants. She surmises: "sooner or later there is certain to come a slacking, a toning down" of Yankee industry in the region and "money and work will not be the highest values."<sup>121</sup> It is a statement devoid of Dana's dour warning; instead in this context it verges on hopeful. Dana saw the Hispanicization of Anglo immigrants – a cultural standard that was forged by numerous important intercultural marriages – as a thing to lament. But his assessment pre-dates the U.S. – Mexican War and the gold rush and eventual emigrant rush that turned the region's population figures on their head. Jackson's assessment, informed by the Mexican and Mission Indian perspectives, counters the reality of crushing industry with the few remnants of Californio culture that remain.

### **The *Century* articles: entering an Indian home**

The second instance that deals with Indian dispossession at the hands of emigrant domesticity is an interview that Jackson includes in another *Century* essay "The Present Condition of the Mission Indians." In this essay she describes a meeting with José Jesús Castillo, a young Luiseño man whose village is in danger of forced removal by that very same San Bernardino shopkeeper described in the letter quoted above. In relating Jesús's history, she describes the home he shares with his mother, Rosaria. His mother is the type of character Jackson found most fascinating and most becoming for her fiction. Proud, haughty, and beautiful,

---

<sup>120</sup>Letter to William Hayes Ward, March 3, 1883. See Jackson and Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885*, 246.

<sup>121</sup>Helen Hunt Jackson, "Outdoor Industries in Southern California," *The Century Magazine* 26, no. 6 (1883): 820.

hers was a romantic and tragic story: she had been most dramatically betrayed by her Mexican husband who left her, one presumes, for another woman. Jackson describes this family's elevated position within the village because they speak Spanish and because of their previous class and ethnic status as landed Californios, and relates how they came to be there:

she believed herself the wife of Jesús's father, lived in his house as a wife, worked as a wife, and bore him his children. Her heart broke when she was sent adrift with her half-disowned offspring. Money and lands did not heal the wound. Her face is dark with the sting of it to-day.<sup>122</sup>

The woman's fall from favor with her wealthy husband inevitably alters her own and her son's class status and by extension shifts their ethnicity from landed Californios, presumably white, to Luiseño Indians, revealing the complicated racial stratification that existed in Mexican California and indeed throughout Latin America.<sup>123</sup> The mother, Rosaria, feels the betrayal so fundamentally that her face is now "dark" in two ways: with emotion and also with this shift in ethnicity from white Mexican to Indian. And while it seems that such a shift in ethnicity is merely symbolic, as Jackson now identifies the small family as Indian, such a shift would have great economic consequences, as Indian women did not have the rights that Mexican or Euro-American women had in courts of law when seeking divorce.<sup>124</sup> The close connection between ethnicity and wealth seen here becomes an underlying issue in *Ramona*, both through the Mexican sacrifice of Indians for their own interests, and the ethnic and social determinism that we see here with Jesús and his mother's situation.<sup>125</sup> And while this story speaks of the socio-cultural response to dwindling land and resources for non-Anglos, it has an affective and anecdotal quality that is an important

---

<sup>122</sup>Helen Hunt Jackson, "The Present Condition of the Mission Indians in Southern California," *The Century Magazine* 26, no. 5 (1883): 524.

<sup>123</sup>Jackson herself hints as much when she describes Alessandro, Ramona's love interest, as having the same skin tone as Felipe Moreno, the legally white Mexican landowner. (*Ramona*, 75)

<sup>124</sup>Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1770s to 1880s* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004), 93.

<sup>125</sup>Ramona decides to follow her true love Alessandro and accept her Indian identity, essentially changing her identity from Mexican to Indian. Her decision has real consequences that determine her class and racial identity. Here sentimental convention allows the novel to politicize love. As a sentimental heroine, Ramona is only following her heart, but that emotionally charged action and its material consequences are constructed as defiant yet selfless in a world where Indians are being exterminated. See Susan Gillman, "The Squatter, the Don, and the Grandissimes in Our America," in *Mixing Race, Mixing Culture: Inter-American Literary Dialogues*, ed. Monika Kaup and Debra J. Rosenthal (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002). and Luis-Brown, "'White Slaves' and the 'Arrogant Mestiza': Reconfiguring Whiteness in the Squatter and the Don and Ramona."

element of Jackson's reform writing. This story hints at the drama that romanticized Jackson's view of California: the capricious tastes of a wealthy man who could trade in an old wife, presumably for another. Wronged and cast aside, a home she thought hers taken away, Rosaria now must cobble together the remnants of her previous life to make a new home. The consolation, a bit of "money and land," sully the emotional nature of her family's changing fortunes. With Rosaria's retelling of that heart wrenching betrayal still fresh, Jackson then immediately turns her attention to the woman's bed:

When I asked her to sell me the lace-trimmed pillow-case and sheet from her bed, her cheeks flushed at first, and she looked away haughtily before replying. But, after a moment, she consented. They needed the money.<sup>126</sup>

The fact that many of the women in this village sell lace is merely incidental, for here Jackson's proposal to buy the woman's bedding right off the bed is not a transaction that is offered but one the author advantageously creates during the interview. While the woman has been telling her story of spumed love, Jackson has been eyeing the very bedding that in its own aesthetically pleasing and orderly manner symbolizes an idealized union. For of all the furnishings and items in such a poor adobe house, the lace bedding, a symbol of middle class marriage that gives the impression of comfort and trust, is the one item that this abandoned woman must now forsake for a few dollars.

This instance demonstrates the affective economics of dismantled homes through successive betrayals: the Mexican government of the Mission Indians, the Mexican landowners of Indian tenants through land sales to emigrants, and here at the personal and anecdotal level where an Indian woman is abandoned by her Mexican husband. Jackson's role, to record their wrongs, becomes in this moment one of opportunity and betrayal through exposure and desire. Her own artistic desire converges with the homey aesthetics that inspired the woman to fashion the bed sheets in the first place. Through this economic and informational exchange, Rosaria forgoes two symbols of middle class domesticity – the lace and her privacy. Jackson's satisfaction, both literary and domestic, must come at the expense of the woman's privacy and dignity. Through this act of compensation, Jackson as a local colorist and traveler commodifies the woman's suffering in the purchase of those bedsheets – while ironically alleviating Rosaria's financial troubles temporarily. And while it is a shocking scene for its blatant display of the disparity between the circumstances of Rosaria and Mrs. Jackson, the author's decision to include it must allow that she is fully aware of this and means to highlight, in effect showing her

---

<sup>126</sup>Jackson, "The Present Condition of the Mission Indians in Southern California," 524. Hereafter noted in parentheses. In her engaging reading of this very instance, Siobhan Senier examines this moment as an exposure of Jackson's privileged status as a writer despite her compromised position as a woman in public life. She writes: "That the naked power of economic purchase can masquerade as the marginal status of the radical out to expose injustice suggests, in turn, that women like Jackson weren't just covertly insinuating their way into the public sphere." Senier, *Voices of American Indian Assimilation and Resistance: Helen Hunt Jackson, Sarah Winnemucca, and Victoria Howard*, 60. I agree with Senier's analysis and would add that this instance is a perfect example of the literary exposure and commodification of Indian suffering.

readers the state of economic desperation of these villagers. In a letter to Miss Mary Elizabeth Sheriff, the government schoolteacher at Saboba, Jackson followed up on the bedsheets:

I found on visiting Temecula last week, that the work I had ordered there from the Indian women was none of it finished; so I would be very glad to buy that sheet off the bed of Jesús's mother! (Doesn't that sound strange?) – I think it was \$5, she asked for it – and I enclose \$6 which will pay her for the sheet also – (I want it just as it is – ) & I suppose leave a quarter over to pay Jesús, or some other boy for riding down to bring it to you.<sup>127</sup>

To Jackson's credit she acknowledges the strangeness of the transaction, but her desire is what it is. Nineteenth century readers would have been familiar with the role that handicrafts played in the typical home. As signs of extravagance, laces were prized and displayed in parlors as a mark of culture and material comfort. To part with those signs of middle class standing would be tantamount to giving up the hope of ever having those comforts again.

Jackson's presence in the woman's bedroom is not unusual, as it most likely doubled as the main room, or parlor. This was usually the case in modest homes, which were often only of one or two rooms. Visitors' access to bedrooms would not have been unusual at that time even in middle class northeastern homes, as the main room of the home. This main room often served as the master bedroom in the apartments of the "better sort" of the working class.<sup>128</sup> Bedrooms had only recently become private spaces, and then, only in more affluent households. And even when they were separate rooms, in many cases bedrooms were still accessible to visitors. Usually, the most prominent bedroom in a middle class home – the master bedroom – was located off the parlor and kept open for visitors.<sup>129</sup> While the bedroom was a space normally open for viewing, Jackson's desiring gaze is nevertheless unsettling for what it reveals about the precarious stability of domestic discretion, as evidenced by Rosaria's new social and economic status.

As these two instances of home occupancy and accessibility illustrate, civic domestic expansion is invariably facilitated through coercion and economic and social intimidation. The way people live, the access that outsiders have to their houses, the intimacy granted to some and not to others, are all determined by the affective bonds that determine discretion – the "minding

---

<sup>127</sup> Jackson and Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885*, 228.

<sup>128</sup> Jackson, *Bits of Talk About Home Matters*, 15. Such double duty rooms were seen as practical and economical solutions to the various demands placed on the domestic space. A room could serve as a "genteel parlor, during the day, (and) at night, the doors of the bedpress being opened, it is changed to an airy bedroom." Catharine Esther Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845), 264.

<sup>129</sup> Elizabeth Collins Cromley, "A History of American Beds and Bedrooms, 1890-1930," in *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*, ed. Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 121.

(of) one's business" – and discreetness – the material parameters that define the domestic space and enforce its boundaries. It is in this vein that Jackson's concerns with the domestic space are a natural extension of northeastern domesticity, yet contradictorily – her own concerns butt heads with those of her subjects. So as we shift from Jesús's adobe house in the village of Saboba to the vaguely-located Moreno hacienda – from the historical and anecdotal to the world of fiction and romance – the landscape takes on a different character: the air is sweeter, passions are freer, love is expressed more intensely, and discretion is cast aside. In this musk-scented country, affective bonds enact what Jackson posits as Californio and Indian concerns about dislocation and estrangement. The novel sets aside the discourse of court appeals and legislation, as affect becomes the forum for these discussions, the home space the stage for playing out a drama of international and intercultural proportions

Jackson's representations of California homes in *Ramona* are a literary response prompted by political and aesthetic concerns. These representative homes, their inhabitants, and the actions that take place within them are representations in conversation with historical events and phenomena. These representations are never subject to the test of socio-historical truthfulness. Their presence in the discourse on housekeeping is indication enough of the need to address the coercive affective parameters that define American life in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

### **Ramona**

The households in *Ramona* are home to both agents and casualties of U.S. expansion. These homes enact public-sphere aggressions and affiliations symbolically through affective relations. By that token, the Moreno hacienda – Jackson's ode to Mexican Californian domesticity – is surely the most grandiose literary expression of this tension between the U.S. and Mexico over domestic expansion and foreign conquest. The Moreno household settles somewhere between the realms of private home, religious organization, and commercial enterprise before and during the period of economic and political transition after the U.S. annexation of California. And as the novel takes place roughly during the 1860s, the home also represents the liminal phase of population transformation in southern California from the old order of Mexican rule and domesticity to the new order of U.S. rule and domestic practices. It is this home and Ramona's idealized Luiseño home that serve as foils for the author's critique of U.S. domestic and civic housekeeping and national expansion. With the exception of one family of southern homesteaders who come to California for health reasons, American domesticity faces severe scrutiny in this novel. The novel's emphasis on Indian homelessness, while grounded in factual evidence, also creates a shorthand sympathetic connection for readers who perceived the home as an affective symbol of middle class respectability. So in a very specific sense the novel is about the plight of the California Mission Indians, demonstrated in the dismantling of native homes in the region through the economic intimidation of newcomers and the bureaucratic disruption imposed by the newly applied U.S. land laws. More profoundly, the disenfranchisement of the landed Indian population ensured that natives of the region could not participate in public life nor could they housekeep free of emigrant intrusion. As the young lovers Ramona and Alessandro move from one location to the next in search of a place to call home their precarious situation highlights the structural forces that determine Indians' fates in this new



era. In a general sense, the novel is a critique of the way that American civic housekeeping compromises the rights of non-white members of the national domestic space. While contemporary scholars have faulted the novel for taking romantic imaginative liberties with the issue, I argue that those imaginative liberties are precisely the moments to be scrutinized, for they reveal the most about the author's negotiation of expository and literary impulses. Those moments tell us much about the perceived role of literature in nineteenth century America.

A quick summary will help ground this analysis. The novel is set roughly in Ventura County around 1860. The novel opens with the Sra. Moreno is discussing the sheep shearing with the foreman, Juan Canito. She tells him that the sheep shearing must wait until the arrival of the Temecula Indians, who are the best shearers in the region. She wants their work to coincide with the yearly visit of Father Salverdierra so that they may celebrate a proper mass and make confessions. The story then turns to Ramona, the young protagonist, who is the foster-daughter of Sra. Moreno and foster-sister to Felipe. Ramona is the daughter of a Scottish merchant, Angus Phail, and an Indian woman. Phail was the suitor of a Californiana, Ramona Moreno (sister to Sra. Moreno), several years before. But fearing him lost at sea, she married into the wealthy Gonzaga family. Twenty years later, Phail leaves his child, Ramona, with the Sra. Ramona Gonzaga Moreno. She raises the child as her own, but dies a few years later. As a favor to her sister, the Sra. Moreno takes in Ramona as a foster-child and holds the child's inheritance, expensive jewelry, in safekeeping. But though she provides Ramona with every material comfort, she does not love the girl. In contrast, she lavishes all her affection on her own son Felipe.

The Indians arrive, and Alessandro, the group leader, falls in love with Ramona at first sight. She returns the affection, and both begin courting in secret. Meanwhile, Felipe has fallen and injured himself badly during the sheep shearing and he must remain in bed. Alessandro helps Felipe by singing to him and keeping him company. The Sra. Moreno finds out about Ramona and Alessandro's courting, and she tries to put a stop to it, sequestering Ramona in her room. But Ramona escapes and elopes with Alessandro. They live happily amongst other Luiseño Indians for a while. But then American settlers show up with claims to the land, and the two must move. This happens repeatedly. Finally, they end up in the mountains. There they suffer greatly and their daughter dies. Alessandro slowly goes mad and becomes senseless. Ramona has another daughter, but by now Alessandro is inconsolable. One day while out he accidentally takes an American's horse and leaves his own. Though it is obvious to all that Alessandro is not a horse thief, the man follows him home and shoots him at the entrance of his house. Ramona retreats to another mountain settlement. There Felipe finds her. He has been searching for her all this time. The two marry, sell the Moreno estate, and move to Mexico.

### **The Moreno estate: a material artifact of the old order**

The novel's introduction of California domesticity begins with a primer on the land and its people that reveals how the architectural characteristics of southern California homes serve as signifiers of the old order and its manner of life. If the northeastern middle class American home, the unexpressed cultural standard which readers bring with them to the novel, is characterized by its attention to order and discretion, the California hacienda is conspicuous for its difference:

The Señora Moreno's house was one of the best specimens to be found in

California of the representative house of the half-barbaric, half elegant, wholly generous and free-handed life led there by Mexican men and women of degree in the early part of this century, under the rule of the Spanish and Mexican viceroys, when the laws of the indies were still the law of the land, and its old name, "New Spain," was an ever present link and stimulus to the warmest memories and deepest patriotisms of its people.

It was a picturesque life, with more of sentiment and gaiety in it, more also that was truly dramatic, more romance, than will ever be seen again on those sunny shores. The aroma of it all lingers there still; industries and inventions have not yet slain it; it will last out its century, --in fact, it can never be quite lost, so long as there is left standing one such house as the Señora Moreno's. (11-2)

The opening describes the house as a “specimen” of a type, a “representative” home of the inhabitants, who themselves are “half-barbaric, half elegant, wholly generous and free-handed,” in effect drawing a comparison between the normative regional culture and its domestic architecture. While this description can be construed as ethocentric, it also speaks to a romanticism that bucked the Victorian industrial standards of the day.<sup>130</sup> More importantly, the house is a material enactment of a network of social relations that simultaneously reinforces those relations in the material conditions it imposes on residents. Émile Durkheim’s notion that “architecture is not only the product of representation based on social forms, but was also a model for reproducing those social forms,” resonates with the idea that the Moreno house is a site imbued with a cultural identity that reflects the values and practices of the Californios.<sup>131</sup> Here, the home embodies in its structure and design a link to a specific cultural and economic niche that is quickly being overtaken by the newcomers. But it is the emphasis on the material aspect of the house that is most striking here, as it will somehow conjure the old lifestyle and perspective on those who might chance to live there, regardless of their own cultural proclivities. In this short passage Jackson manages to reference both the imposition of Spanish colonial domesticity and its waning influence under U.S. governance, allowing readers to imagine a region of Spanish colonial houses that will someday stand without Mexican residents. The house in particular, as a space defined by its inhabitants, would seem to suffer from these historic transformations, but instead Jackson posits that such a house, maybe by virtue of its architecture, by its Catholic, Latin American, and pre-capitalist imposition of public and private spaces, will somehow impart the social priorities of the old order in part because of its accommodation of the region's geographic realities – its climate and terrain. Even Americans, “unto the third and forth generation” would succumb to the charms of the region, Jackson notes in *Century Magazine*, stating that “sooner or later, there is certain to come a slacking, a toning down, and a re-adjusting

---

<sup>130</sup>T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>131</sup>Quoted in Ross W. Jamieson, *Domestic Architecture and Power: The Historical Archaeology of Colonial Ecuador* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000).

of standards and habits by a scale in which money and work will not be the highest values.”<sup>132</sup> This romanticization of Mexican manners, the value of things other than “money and work,” serves as a fundamental critique of American public and private desires and accommodations.

In Jackson’s depiction, the Moreno estate straddles the line between culture and nature. The home posits a very different purpose for the domestic space than that of the middle class northeastern U.S. home. The public activities that take place within the Moreno home, as a working ranch, and its function as an important stopover for traveling dignitaries and friends, demonstrate the social role that the ranchos fulfilled in the region. In a novel so ultimately concerned with the regional struggle over who will call California home, the Moreno hacienda is most conspicuous for the power that it does still yield over those who still adhere to the old order within a region that is quickly Anglicizing. And it is a power that is romanticized because it is a remnant of a culture predating industrial and corporate development.

The architecture of the Moreno house is a material and cultural product of colonial economic structures that existed throughout the Spanish colonies. It was this articulation of Spanish colonial dominance in the region, coupled with the mild weather, that distinguished the Mexican homes of persons of note from those of their Anglo American counterparts in the East. The patio of the house, as exemplified in the Moreno home, serves as an open space in many ways indistinguishable from the greater landscape, blurring the lines between public and private spaces. By extension, the rancho’s layout is expansive, creating a domestic space that does not maintain boundaries, which makes “minding one’s business,” that mantra of American social relations, an impossible or even undesirable act.<sup>133</sup> The California homes depicted in *Ramona* break with northeastern notions of discretion and discreetness, which would be the characteristics that would ensure order and control the flow of and encounter between persons throughout the home. It is impossible to practice domestic order, if “nobody ever knew exactly how many women were in the kitchen, or how many men in the fields”(7). The kitchen, the site of northeastern middle class woman’s locus of control and power in her particular house is here overrun with several servant women. It is a place where “when it came to the pay-roll, Señor Felipe knew to whom he paid wages; but who were fed and lodged under his roof, that was quite another thing. It could not enter into the head of a Mexican gentleman to make either count or account of that. It would be a disgraceful niggardly thought,” (7). The description of the estate is a pointed contrast to the only other U.S. domestic space with such an overflow of population: the southern slave plantation. But Jackson’s description is a concerted effort at contrast with those domestic spaces most familiar to Anglophone readers of either slave narratives, reformist literature such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* or apologist plantation literature. The hacienda’s lack of accounting is here used as a mark of its generosity and benevolence. The verity of this representation is not the issue, the symbolic power of this implied contrast is the issue. In this imaginary geography the hacienda stands in direct contrast to northeastern perceptions of the plantation and the strict domestic economy of the northeastern middle class home. The idealized paternalism of the dons is a direct counter to Yankee thrift and to white southern cruelty. And while the Moreno hacienda overflows with generosity, its chaos represents the disorder of old

---

<sup>132</sup>Jackson, "Outdoor Industries in Southern California," 820.

<sup>133</sup>Gardner, "'Mind Your Own Business.'" and "Editor's Easy Chair."

California, better stated as a benevolent disorder that would highlight the parsimonious nature of the emigrants who come into the region. While Jackson's depiction of the Moreno home is not all complementary, she establishes it as a strategic foil for the equally expansive and encompassing southern plantation and the much smaller and discrete northeastern middle class home.

The hacienda's architecture creates spaces for interaction that would not be possible within a Victorian home. (Fig. 2.3) The hacienda does not have such distinct boundaries between the interior, or home space, and exterior, or public space. The Moreno home is instead a space of organized chaos, a heterogeneous household where everyone seems to be pouring through the house and there are no boundaries:

The house was of adobe, low, with a wide veranda on the three sides of the inner court . . . These verandas, especially those on the inner court, were supplementary rooms to the house. The greater part of the family life went on in them. Nobody stayed inside the walls, except when it was necessary. All the kitchen work, except the actual cooking, was done here, in front of the kitchen doors and windows. Babies slept, were washed, sat in the dirt, and played, on the veranda. The women said their prayers, took naps, and wove their lace there . . . The herdsmen and shepherds smoked there, lounged there, trained their dogs there; there the young made love, and the old dozed. (14)

This is an image of life taking place; the mundane as well as the more significant moments of a life co-exist in the public square of the house. There is no separation by gender or age, even to those who are not officially part of the household, the house's boundaries do not seem pronounced. When old men doze and babies play in the same space that lovers meet, there may be discretion but there is no spatial discreteness. When Felipe's illness keeps him in bed, the decision, on Alessandro's suggestion, to place him on the veranda gives a sense of the mestizo housekeeping of the region, "Felipe's bed on the veranda was a rallying point for everything and everybody . . ." (104) This conflation of discrete behavior and discreet space is an echo of Richard Henry Dana's own observations of Mexican California, where the chaperone's job, which he describes as the "the sharp eyes of the dueña," represents the communal nature of marriage bonds in a culture that values consensus, for there are repercussions to going against that consensus.<sup>134</sup> We see the same occur in *Ramona* when the young girl becomes the object of attention as she falls in love with Alessandro, scrutinized by Felipe and Margarita. (99, 108)

To American readers who, it can be deduced from home manuals and architecture magazines of the day, preferred discreet and defined domestic spaces, the Californian use of domestic spaces must have been a shock of sorts. In *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, Catharine Beecher notes that the improper placement of thresholds separating interior and exterior parts of domestic spaces, the private hearth from the public facade, can have negative consequences. "The placing of an outside door, for common use, in a sitting-room, as is frequent at the West and South, is detrimental to health . . . A long window, extending down to the floor . . . secures

---

<sup>134</sup>Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea*, Penguin American Library, edited by Thomas Philbrick (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 236.



2.3: Postcard picture of Rancho Camulos, the reputed inspiration for the Moreno home described in *Ramona*. The adobe home's wide veranda, with its seating and lounging space, stands in stark contrast to the Victorian home.

all the benefits, without the evils, of an outside door.<sup>135</sup> While in the latter part of the century there develops a faith in the healthy aspects of outdoor living, as exemplified in the outdoor treatment for Tuberculosis, Beecher's distrust of the easy passage between indoor and outdoor spaces seems to also show a concern about the blurred lines between the public and private spaces that mandate comportment and commingling within the home.<sup>136</sup> The author's acknowledgment of regional predilections reveals that such spaces were being negotiated very differently throughout the country.

### **The Moreno Ranch and Indian Labor**

It is the malleability between public and private, or outdoor and indoor space within the Moreno home that stands in distinct contrast to the idealized northeastern home depicted in Beecher's tomes. This architectural distinction is paralleled in extra-domestic relations: the rancho serves as one segment of several operative spaces where people of all strata of society meet. The rancho is part of a network of spaces that welcome the Temecula Indians who come to the ranch for the sheep shearing season as seasonal workers. Juan Canito, head shepherd at the Moreno ranch, notes that the Temecula Indians' pilgrimage for the sheep shearing is as much an economic migration as it is a religious and cultural pilgrimage. He observes: "I doubt not it warms the Señora's heart to see them all there, as if they belonged to the house, as they used to" (5). Initially this comment seems reminiscent of the old southern literature that sentimentalized the "belonging" of people to a property. The hacienda's influence in the region is profound, here marked by the Indians' "belonging" to a house that extends over the landscape, encompassing more than the eye can see, a forty mile radius, we are told. Here in rural California the Moreno home is operating on a parallel level with the emerging urban spaces that are coming to define Anglo-dominated commerce and hegemony. But to "belong" to this house is to belong to a different sort of house than the southern plantation.<sup>137</sup> Looking on the relation between many ranchos and the Indian and Californio and Mexican workers that they hired, we can see that

---

<sup>135</sup>Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School*, 260-61.

<sup>136</sup>F. E. Waxham, "The Outdoor Treatment of Tuberculosis," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 288, no. 2754 (1902).

<sup>137</sup>But it is possible that Jackson was directly referencing the language of Southern plantation fiction in this comment, seeing as how she herself was an active participant in the national debate on Indian rights and freedom, though she professed on various occasions to not care for abolitionist concerns. She compared the plight of both enslaved African Americans and Native Americans by saying that "the Indian is "much more cruelly oppressed; with the name of a certain sort of freedom, but prisoner in fact – left to starve, and forced into poisonous climates to die." Jackson to Moncure Daniel Conway, in Jackson and Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885*, 135. This sort of rhetoric allows her to differentiate between these two oppressed groups by romanticizing Native Americans.

Jackson's idealized depiction of the relation between worker and employer was indeed a bit more complicated than just “belonging” to a household. To understand Juan Canito’s phrase in the context of the relations between former Mission Indians, who did hire out their labor, and the ranchos that contracted them, we must examine the way that land occupancy laws, Indian mobility, and the concept of home, affect these relations. The difference between the U.S. practice of forced removal of Native peoples onto reservations, and limitations on Indian mobility after the annexation of California and the southwest, were in direct contrast to the novel's depiction of a rural Mexican reliance and encouragement of Indian mobility for seasonal work. In fact, the Vagrancy Act of 1850 enacted after annexation speaks to the new Californians' desire to control Indian labor and mobility through laws that facilitated Indian indentured servitude. The act allowed farmers (they tended to be small landholders) to post bail for Indians arrested for public drunkenness at an auction called the “slave market.” Payment of bail entitled the farmers to a week's worth of indentured labor, at the end of which the Indian would receive a minor payment, usually in aguardiente, a cheap grape wine that was an easy form of payment for vineyard owners. This barter payment ensured a cycle of forced labor for a small compensation that by its very nature would guarantee a steady supply of labor. Uneasiness over Indian mobility, characterized as a “drunken, roving vagabond life,” also helped usher in the Indenture Act of 1850, which allowed white families (this included Mexicans) to take legal custody of Indian minors in a form of long-term indentured servitude.<sup>138</sup> Sections of the act that outlined Indian indenture were repealed in 1863 due to systematic abuses of Indian “apprentices.” In the novel, set in the 1860s, the way that Indians could “belong to the house” are more foreboding, but by the novel's publication, after the 1863 repeal, it becomes the Senora’s nostalgic musing on the former accessibility and control over Indian labor. While both Mexicans and emigrant Californians are implicated in the abuses of Indians, it is under U.S. rule that those abuses are legitimized and amplified.

Jackson chooses to couch “belonging to the house” in benevolent terms, perhaps in response to the more systematic and contrived manner of subjugation most associated with the emigrant class and the U.S. government. In *Ramona*, the Temecula Indians’ practice of mixed seasonal migratory work and landholding and harvesting is idealized, but not entirely fictional. In fact, Jackson’s representation of the conditions under which Temecula Indians lived and earned income are based on practices described to the author during her visits to the region. But rather than dismiss her representation as too rosy and just viewing the hiring of natives on Californio land grants as just another abuse of power by whites against disenfranchised natives, it is necessary to envision a richer and more complex situation that could attribute agency to the Luiseño people by giving meaning to the spaces that they inhabited and traversed. As Sarah Deutsch describes in her examination of Southwestern migratory patterns in *No Separate Refuge*, the seasonal agricultural economic structure allowed for a “regional community” to emerge from this migratory practice. “The tradition of a multi-source income, family economy, communal village, and seasonal absence of men” served as “living links” connecting villages, in effect

---

<sup>138</sup>Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 134.

creating a migratory experience that reinforced inter-village relations.<sup>139</sup> In the world of *Ramona*, the seasonal migration of the Temecula men reasserts the economics of ranching in the region that depended on large land grants and seasonal labor instead of the small tracts that were beginning to populate the region. The very long distance that the Temecula band travels for the sheepshearing is also significant, connecting the Luiseño home site to the Moreno ranch and the Mission Buenaventura in an exchange of cultural, religious, and economic practices that cover a 160 mile span. Alessandro's own discussions about Catalina Island, San Diego, and other places indicate the vast expanse that these relations encompassed.

Juan Canito's comment about the Indians belonging to the house also illustrates the public consequences of the Señora's personal disposition. In an act not unlike the practices of benevolent societies of the northeastern U.S., one of the more significant outlets for women's public work, she uses her influence to create the confluence of missionary work and economic compensation in an exchange that demands as much as it gives. The hacienda's economic power ensures its cultural and social influence by making sure that Father Salverdierra's presence coincides with the sheep-shearing. And so the Moreno ranch, by virtue of its exchange of labor with the Temecula Indians, becomes a site on the map of interconnected communities that negotiate traditional (now relegated to the private sphere) forms of exchange and commerce even as the American emigrants come to dominate the official (public) forms of travel and exchange in the region, as exemplified in the new road and emerging towns alluded to throughout the novel. And while the Californio and Indian exchange of labor and culture may have its own distinct systems and roads and agreements, the Anglo manners are present, and they are reconfiguring the landscape with the imposition of discreet spaces through the annulment of Indian mobility.

### **The Moreno Ranch as Public Institution**

As a place of economic, religious, and cultural exchange, the Moreno home is materially central to the operations of the old order. The Moreno home was a "natural resting-place for all who journeyed through the valley" (16) because the Señora Moreno was "still a person of note" (16) to those travelers who adhered to the old customs of the region. There are practical reasons for this. In a world with few lodging options, the Señora's home is not only a private home for her family, it serves as a familiar shelter along the coastal trail, the Camino Real, for those who know the Señora and who are amenable to the Mexican way of life in the region. But the home's role becomes more symbolic with the increasing emphasis on U.S. technology and practices. The house's growing irrelevance is striking, if only because its last gasps of relevance become strangely ironic, as we shall see below in an instance of architectural personification. While travelers of the old order (Mexicans and Anglo Americans who assimilated to Mexican culture) who pass through the area are welcomed and fed, those of the new order (emigrants) are shunned by the house through active and passive means. One single decision wrought by the road commission best illustrates the house's waning influence: the road is placed behind the Moreno house, rather than in front at the home's entrance. The Moreno family reconfigures this slight as a

---

<sup>139</sup>Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 40.



gesture – on their part – of rejection. In this context, the house turns its back to alien industries and practices:

It gave her unspeakable satisfaction, when the Commissioners, laying out a road down the valley, ran it at the back of her house instead of past the front. “It is well,” she said. “Let their travel be where it belongs, behind our kitchens; and no one have sight of the front doors of our houses, except friends who have come to visit us.” Her enjoyment of this never flagged. Whenever she saw, passing the place, wagons or carriages belonging to the hated Americans, it gave her a distinct thrill of pleasure to think that the house turned its back on them. She would like always to be able to do the same herself; but whatever she, by policy or in business, might be forced to do, the old house, at any rate, would always keep the attitude of contempt, – its face turned away.” (13)

This gesture of having the house turn its back on the emigrants, on the signs of change in the region, demonstrates the parallel nature of Californio relations in Anglo-controlled California. This act of anthropomorphism, with the house expressing contempt toward the new arrivals, confirms the sort of investment that American culture placed on the home space as a signifier of a family's values and ideals. While Abbot Kinney's house, mentioned in the introduction, had the audacity to stare from its perch overlooking the valley below, boastfully overseeing the altering landscape from that Southern California hill, the Moreno home instead is left to the realm of nostalgia and romance as it is exoticized by the new population. With such anthropomorphism at play, the house is indeed a protagonist in this drama. Its back turns on the emigrants and the road, the signs of change in the region, despite whatever compromise its inhabitants might eventually have to reach with the newcomers. Public concessions would be tolerable only through the continued practice of private desires, it seems. The Señora's actions in time may compromise her true feelings. But the house, as a manifestation of the old order – one that is a product of that order that in turn reinforces the practices of the order through its architecture – will not. And yet it is the official committee on development, the commissioners, who decide to run the road where they do, as if the new order finds no need to ameliorate the native Californios.

### **The Moreno Land Grant**

The fact that the Moreno ranch can serve as an influential power economically, socially, and politically prior to the U.S. invasion is the result of a number of historical and geographic factors. First, the rural nature of California's economy grounded much of California's political interests in the industries that were best suited to the place at that time: cattle ranching for the U.S. market for hide and tallow. When the Mexican government dismantled the missions in the 1830s, it freed up mission lands for the newly arrived military officers and friends of politicians, who through their acquisition of land grants became the agents of secularization. They in turn used their own discretion in the parceling of lands to later generations of Californios – mestizo or Indian. Jackson describes this cozy arrangement early in the novel:

When the house was built, General Moreno owned all the land within a radius of

forty miles . . . the boundaries were not very strictly defined; there was no occasion, in those happy days, to reckon land by inches. It might be asked, perhaps, just how General Moreno owned all this land, and the question might not be easy to answer. It was not and could not be answered to the satisfaction of the United States Land Commission, which, after the surrender of California undertook to sift and adjust Mexican land titles; and that was the way it had come about that the Señora Moreno now called herself a poor woman. Tract after tract, her lands had been taken away from her; it looked for a time as if nothing would be left. Every one of the claims based on deeds of gift from the Governor Pio Pico, her husband's most intimate friend, was disallowed. (12)

Jackson's allusion to the cronyism that determined the apportioning of Mexican land grants problematizes the claim to Mexican land ownership in the region, seemingly calling into question the land claims that were taken for granted under colonial rule at the expense of Indian sovereignty and land rights. But that fundamental questioning of the military class's land appropriations is undercut by the practicalities of U.S. land apportioning, which has a much shorter view of history that seeks to appropriate land not for the benefit of Indians but to redistribute it to small and large land owners and railroads. While these U.S. land appropriations are clothed in a democratic cloak of the rights of Jeffersonian yeoman farmers, the most noble protagonists in the project of westward expansion, in far too many other instances in the novel Jackson depicts these beneficiaries as crude and unworthy inheritors.<sup>140</sup>

What is evident is that the Moreno home, wrought together through political influence and cronyism, and site of continuing cultural influence with the sheep shearings, is in fact not just a physical space. The rancho then uneasily negotiates the line between public and private not only in its architecture or in its housekeeping but also in its creation. The Moreno land grant is the product of a close friendship with the governor, and the uneasy balance between the political cronyism that enabled its creation and the Mexican government's secularization and seizure of mission lands – freeing them up for dispersal – is later naturalized by the family's close relationship with the church during the period of mass emigration. Of the vast Moreno holdings, there are two successive sources. One is the friendship with Pio Pico, the previous one is the Church: “they were lands which had belonged to the Bonaventura Mission.” (12) The secularization of mission lands in 1834 (theoretically held in trust for Mission Indians), and subsequent dismantling of the missions' economic holdings, enabled the land-grant wealth that here is embodied in the Moreno ranch. It was really only after the Catholic Church's decline in power under Mexican rule that there could be a period of grand influential land grant families. The Señora's decision to use the hacienda (commercial private-sphere venture that it is) to advance the interests of the Church (as evidenced by the timely sheep-shearing and other religious practices) during the secular Mexican and U.S. periods is perhaps guilty compensation. And in an ironic turn the church, initially dismantled for the benefit of families such as the Morenos, must now take refuge in their homes once Protestant Americans have become the ruling agents in the public sphere. In Jackson's California, Catholic practices have nearly disappeared from the public sphere and are now expressed furtively, in private homes, the

---

<sup>140</sup>Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*.

Moreno ranch being “one of the last sure strongholds of the Catholic faith left in the country.” (37) From the period of secularization to the initial years after annexation, the missions were all but abandoned, casualties of aggressive pilfering and neglect.

Any contempt that the new Americans might have felt toward the California missions as expressions of Mexicans’ Catholicism, or Romanism as it was derisively termed, was increasingly redirected into an architectural nostalgia by those cosmopolitan Americans acquainted with the romantic aesthetics of Italian cathedrals and the “ruined abbeys” of the English countryside.<sup>141</sup> What these new romantics conjured in the California missions was the pre-industrial: the crumbling missions that succumbed to nature were expressions of the sublime rather than mere signs of the steady march of Manifest Destiny. In *Ramona* Jackson effectively disengages the Catholicism of the missions and the Morenos from the context of Irish immigration in the east, and reconfigures it as a cousin to southern European mystic practices. Nathaniel Hawthorne had summed up a certain American Protestant aesthetic fascination with the exotic religion: “Oh, that we had cathedrals in America, were it only for the sensuous luxury.”<sup>142</sup> Americans touring abroad could not help but face the distinctions between Protestant and Catholic practices, what Jenny Franchot termed the “Protestant gaze on Rome, a gaze that acknowledged its spiritual desire, celebrated Catholicism as spectacle, and fantasied the consumption of this foreign substance rather than conversion to it.”<sup>143</sup> These forms of aesthetic consumption reveal the class distinctions that determined one’s acceptance of Catholicism, for in the greater U.S., anti-Catholic sentiment, focused mostly on Irish immigrants, was a point of such contention in the 1850s and 60s, when *Ramona* was set, that adherents of the faith were often demonized and scapegoated for the ill-effects of industrialization and urban blight. Many of those emigrants who arrived in California after the annexation were of a similar mind. Aunt Ri, the Tennessean emigrant who initially shows extreme weariness toward Ramona’s and Felipe’s religious icons and prayers, embodies that Protestant folk distaste for Catholicism. If *Ramona*

---

<sup>141</sup>Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, 186. While Lears’s analysis of the American fascination with European Catholic aesthetics is confined to New England, its transference to California seems most fitting.

<sup>142</sup>As cited in *Ibid.* A testament to this fascination is the *Overland Monthly*’s numerous odes, poems, stories, drawings, and other sundry contemplations on the California mission bells. See the following brief and incomplete list: Charles E. Brimblecom, “A Masque at an Old Mission,” *The Overland Monthly* 17, no. 101 (1891); S. H. M. Byers, “The Bells of San Diego,” *The Overland Monthly* 13, no. 78 (1889); Sylvia Lawson Covey, “Mission San Gabriel,” *The Overland Monthly* 20, no. 116 (1892); L. Worthington Green, “San Gabriel Mission,” *The Overland Monthly* 25, no. 146 (1895); Edward Hulme, “A Relic of the Missions,” *The Overland Monthly* 23, no. 137 (1894); Agnes M. Manning, “Monterey,” *The Overland Monthly* 9, no. 52 (1887); Clinton Scollard, “In the Mission Burial-Ground, San Gabriel,” *The Overland Monthly* 4, no. 19 (1884); Charles Howard Shinn, “Mission Bells,” *The Overland Monthly* 19, no. 109 (1892).

<sup>143</sup>Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 234.

was going to make readers sympathize with Catholic Indians, it was going to have to surmount anti-Catholic and anti-Indian sentiment, which were both strong at this time. In fact, the book had to create a discourse of advocacy where there had previously only been the anti-Catholic sentiment of the Know Nothings and other nativist groups at its worst, and at best the bemused curiosity expressed by more cosmopolitan Americans.<sup>144</sup> *Ramona* acknowledges this tension between Protestant emigrants and Catholic natives by showing how the Catholic church must find refuge in the private sphere in *Ramona*.

*Ramona's* most severe critic of the Americans, the Señora, responds to both the swelling ranks of Americans and their destruction of mission property by marking the landscape within the bounds of her property with large crosses. The road commissioners may have insulted the Señora by running the road behind her house, but her response, to erect a large cross on every hill within sight of that road, was a strident act inspired perhaps by both “religious devotion and race antagonism.” (13-14) The proclamation of the crosses asserts that the house is a bulwark of the old order even as the new emigrants make inroads. It is another instance of the Moreno home's public role in the debate on identity in the region. The household of course has chosen sides in the debate, and its extensive holdings – from the sheep that enable it to hire so many Temecula Indians as sheepshearers, to the vast expanse of Moreno land that must be negotiated by all travelers going between the southern cities to San Francisco by overland trails – articulate its pronouncements. The rancho and its crosses, therefore, become a subject of public discourse, even if just as topographical curiosities that can serve as “landmarks to many a guideless traveller.” (14) In doing so, they demonstrate the public consequences of private decisions. And it is through this sort of proclamation, with crosses on every hill as far as the eye can see, that the Señora's land asserts a Catholic Mexican identity, grounded in a particular history, in opposition to the current order. Ironically, the former Mission land is marked in such an extravagant manner only when it has been secularized, so that the “heretics,” according to the Señora, may know the proprietor's identity as a “good Catholic.”(14) But the crosses speak a language that can be interpreted in various ways. And while the Señora's intended message could be interpreted as either “religious devotion” or “race antagonism,” as we are told, the crosses are also interpreted by the travelers as signposts, even as a welcome of sorts: “(t)here they stood, summer and winter, rain and shine, the silent, solemn, outstretched arms, and became landmarks to many a guideless traveller” (14). So while the inner sanctum of the Moreno ranch comes to symbolize an assertion of the old order, housing refugee wooden saints rescued from the missions in bedrooms and turning its back on the new railroad, the vast rancho lands tell a different message. Under azure skies, that marked landscape serves as a way for pilgrims of the new order to find their compass. The role of the old California hacienda is here affirming private family choices that no longer have such political weight, ushering in the new population even as it seems powerless to effect change. The “outstretched arms” of the crosses are oddly welcoming, this time not in an evangelical embrace, but a geographic one, accepting the emigrants that bring with them the new order. Much like the hacienda, the crosses blur the discrete geographic and affective lines between private and public land. What the Señora doesn't understand is that the land which she uses to defiantly proclaim and to alienate must also welcome, despite her efforts at controlling the message. Because to impose distinct boundaries on affect (to attempt to shut out the

---

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 234-35.

emigrants) in order to control or lessen the emigrant incursions would require the ranch to curb its spaces of emotional expression by crossing those “outstretched arms,” which it cannot do.

One thing about the Moreno home would not seem strange to northeastern Protestant readers: the use of domestic space for religious contemplation. But as it is a Mexican household with Catholic practices, religious expression in the Moreno home is decidedly romanticized, beginning with the idyllic and exotic practice of the family’s singing morning psalms upon awakening. Alessandro’s participation in the household ritual is the opportunity that allows Ramona to notice him. (50) In fact, his musical skills allow Alessandro “his place in the household.” (73) These religious rituals reinforce cultural identity through their practice, drawing in Alessandro, or others to the household.

In their exhaustive manual of domestic instruction, *The American Woman's Home*, Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe devise a floorplan for a multipurpose house that could accommodate familial entertaining and living and religious services, saying “a small church, a school-house, and a comfortable family dwelling may be all united in one building.”<sup>145</sup> Domestic architecture did indeed draw from this imperative, “by adapting Gothic Revival architecture for house construction, (Victorians) emphasized the connection between the design of homes and the design of churches.”<sup>146</sup> Such a gesture would ensure that the American home would not only be a symbolic point of origin of religious sentiment, but of religious practice as well. And while Beecher's and Stowe's idealized frontier or wilderness home would embody religious practice through the designed manipulation of moving walls and convertible furniture, its articles of religious expression would be limited to the occasional cross, a piece of multi-use furniture that could be converted to a pulpit, a Bible, and other religious literature. In the Catholic Moreno home, those symbols of religious reverence would include a rosary and icons or statues of saints, particularly the Virgin Mary or Guadalupe, but no pulpit, for all organized worship would take place in the chapel or church. When Ramona and Alessandro design their own home as a couple, it contains a shrine to the Virgin Mary that draws all of the villagers, in effect serving as the embodiment of the humble frontier household/chapel. By turning their house into the defacto chapel for the village, they have erased the threshold between public and private, even in the bedroom: “Many a woman of the village, when she came to see Ramona, asked permission to go into the bedroom and say her prayers there.” (250)

While the simple home of the frontier Protestant would likely not display Catholic articles, those of the leisure class that traveled to Europe did buy reproductions of Catholic icons as aesthetic artifacts.<sup>147</sup> But these Protestant admirers often “detached Catholic and other religious monuments from specific historical meaning and transformed them into relics of a cult

---

<sup>145</sup>Catharine Esther Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes* (New York: J.B. Ford and Company, 1872), 455.

<sup>146</sup>McDannell, "Parlor Piety: The Home as Sacred Space in Protestant America," 162.

<sup>147</sup>Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism*, 235.

of taste.”<sup>148</sup> The class distinction implied between those who could appreciate the aesthetics of Catholic practice and those who denigrated it as popery was at times an issue. While Jackson understood as much, her own depictions reveal a travel writer's fascination with the romantic aspects of Catholic practice, her character Aunt Ri demonstrates an idealized “conversion” of an eastern Protestant woman from ignorant and smug to open-minded and earnest, to the point of joining Felipe Moreno in prayer.

### Catholic Imagery in the Moreno Home

Jackson's distinction between religious practice in the Protestant east and the Catholic west draws attention to the difference between the cool rationalism of the east and the superstitions of rural California. The Moreno home is filled with mutilated wooden statues of saints, all missing eyes, noses, or arms, that were the casualties of U.S. soldiers' target practice. The sacristans of the missions took great pains to scurry them away when they could, surreptitiously handing them to the Sra. Moreno for safekeeping<sup>149</sup>: They parallel the jewels that are entrusted to the Señora for Ramona's dowry. In this sense, the Moreno ranch has become the last refuge for both Catholic iconography and Ramona's virginity and dowry. The industry and domestic largess that was the inheritor of secularization – its own vast lands pilfered from the mission registries – has then become the sanctuary of the saints when the Americans arrived in the region. The presence of the saints in every bedroom, missing eyes and hands, the victims of American soldiers' target practice, provide a lurid image of the last vestiges of a population whose influence in the region is itself now mutilated and grotesque. But this gothic image of maimed bodies, albeit wooden ones, conjures another notion that would be familiar to Jackson's eastern readers – the saintly relics that were so loathsome to Protestant sensibilities and the attendant context for those relics. Relic veneration was part of a web of objections that Protestants had regarding Catholic institutions, among them the maintenance of convents and monasteries which were seen as a pernicious influence that drew men and women from the prescribed familial roles of husband or wife and mother.

When the Señora confronts Ramona with the truth behind her birth, she does so in a manner that openly expresses the subverted coercive relations within the Moreno household. The girl's history, as summarized in a letter, and her value, as actualized in her dowry, are hidden under lock and key behind one of the house's mutilated saints. Ramona's discovery of these facts is shrouded in gothic imagery:

an inexplicable terror had got possession of her; and when the Señora, with a sneer on her face, took hold of the Saint Catharine statue, and wheeling it half

---

<sup>148</sup>Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, 186.

<sup>149</sup>"wagonloads of sacred treasures" (17). These find their inspiration in the “relics rescued at one time or another from plunderers of the missions” which the author encountered in Los Angeles. Jackson, "Echoes in the City of Angels," 202.

around, brought into view a door in the wall, with a big iron key in the key-hole, which she proceeded to turn, Ramona shook in fright. She had read of persons who had been shut up alive in cells in the wall, and starved to death. (131)

The saints, occupying every room of the Moreno house, serve as a reminder of the violence that hastened their concealment even as they minister in the form of shrines. That echo of violence is transcendent, and those mutilated saints, agents of intercession and comfort in Catholicism, offer little succor to Ramona when it is most needed. Ramona feels the saint will smother her, and it is in this moment of fear, of absolute lack of agency, that we see the Moreno home for what it can become, a labyrinth of intimidation and fear akin to the gothic castle. Also, it is in that notion of the dismembered saints that we see Jackson's use of a pernicious stereotype that does concede to certain U.S. judgements of both Spanish and Catholic practices – *la leyenda negra*. The Moreno home may serve as a foil to critique the northeastern home in some respects, but only to a point. In its own grand and exotic materiality, one that in some ways mirrors the southern plantation, it contains the possibility for secrecy and coercion.

When the Señora finds Ramona and Alessandro in an intimate embrace, she “drag(s)” the young girl to the house to mete out a punishment. (128) Thinking only that the encounter was illicit, the Señora locks Ramona in her room as punishment and to break her from the desire to be with Alessandro. Ramona’s powerlessness becomes clear in this context. She initially fears for her safety and her only consolation is that the house, here a metonym for the extended “family” of servants, will not muffle screams, that “surely no ill could happen to her . . . within call of the whole house.” (131) Indeed, all of the Morenos are keenly aware of the transparent nature of their household; there is no privacy. The Señora herself contemplates this as she considers the drama playing out between herself and Ramona. The narrative delves into the Señora’s thoughts: “she herself would have died before she would go about with such a woe-begone face, for a whole household to see and gossip about.” (167) When the Señora locks Ramona in her room, her actions are such that the young girl understands that the Señora is being careful to not let the servants or even Felipe know: she “turn(s) the key cautiously, that Felipe might not hear,” and she “would not set servants to gossiping.” (126, 128) But everywhere in this home, and Margarita, the girl who watched with jealousy as Alessandro and Ramona fell in love, is also the one to witness as the Señora “shove(s)” the girl into her room and locks the door. (114)

Secrecy and sequestration are common tropes in gothic novels. But the shoving, and Ramona’s having “read of persons who had been shut up alive in cells in the wall” give the impression of the possibility of physical abuse. (131) Instead, the girl's sense of doom is psychological, attributed to her own reading habits, and the trap doors of the home come to represent the secret coercions that occur in households where there is no love, or rather improper love, no matter how diligently they are surveyed by servants or visitors. For while Ramona is raised like a daughter, she is not loved like one:

Shelter, food, clothes, all external needs, in so far as her means allowed, the Señora would, without fail, provide for the child her sister had left in her hands as a trust; But a personal relation with her, a mother's affection, or even interest and acquaintance, no. The Señora had not that to give. And if she had it not, was she to blame? What could she do?” (90)

It is in this house, where the Señora's son dotes on her like a "lover," that we see there is something discomfiting about the Moreno household. (270) It is a place of no privacy, of no genuine love, only of ravaging love between mother and son. Of her indifference toward Ramona, Señora says "One cannot love by act of will," (91) in response to Father Salvierderra's remonstrances that she show affection. And Ramona sees that imbalance of affection. Her response to Alessandro about the lack of equitable love in the home is matter-of-fact but it shows the effects of exclusive affective relations within the home: "she does not love any other human being. He takes it all. She hasn't any left." (118) And while Ramona does not know this, the Señora's love for her son is not returned with the same fervor, "if into this fiery soul of the Señora's could have been dropped one second's knowledge of the relative positions she and Ramona already occupied in Felipe's heart, she would, on the spot, have either died herself, or have slain Ramona." (77) The passion with which the Señora guards her affection for her son encompasses the possibility of violence. And it is in this setting, amongst such a family, that Ramona must live, under this vague conditional threat of violence.

Where and what Ramona came from is another story. Her biological father, a Scottish merchant, took her from her Indian mother and left her as a gesture of spite with the woman he truly loved who had married someone else years before. That woman was the Señora Moreno's sister, Señora Ortegna. She was trapped in a loveless marriage and happily took in the child. But this home was characterized by philandering and deceit. The description of her adopted mother's house gives a sense of the passive abuse present: "The Ortegnas lavished money always on the women whose hearts they broke; and never ceased to demand of them that they should sit superbly arrayed in their lonely wretchedness." (28-30) This atmosphere eventually kills the Señora, Ramona's only caretaker, and it is through successive relocations that the young girl finds herself in the Moreno house. It is this sad story of successive disclocation, and the girl's lonely existence, that makes Alessandro say "they have made you homeless in your home," thus highlighting both the colonial project's negation of her indigenous past and her own personal story of sequestration and loneliness, in effect equating her alienation from her culture with her affective alienation. (120) For, while she has been raised without genuine affection, a figurative homelessness, her material needs have been met. Soon that homelessness becomes very real when she and Alessandro declare their love and move from place to place, only one step ahead of Euro-American encroachment.

While the Moreno house initially appears to be merry and active, upon closer inspection the Morenos occupy a gothic realm replete with the degeneracy of character inherent in that genre. In this gothic subtext, the Moreno son is a weak and ineffectual character whose desire for liveliness draws him to Alessandro for his beautiful voice and strong body and to Ramona for her spirit. The Sra. Moreno is manipulative. She dotes on her son, making him the substitute for her dead husband. His own cowardice in her presence is effeminate, un-American, and indicative of a personal and maybe even cultural maladjustment. Jackson's critique is cutting; it speaks of a culture in decay; it is one better viewed through the lens of time. In this context the nuclear domestic spaces created by Alessandro and the runaway Ramona when they finally create their own home are marked for their wholesomeness and regenerative nature, a great contrast with the extended hacienda.



### Alessandro and Ramona Establish a Home

The novel was the first to submit for mass perusal the mestizo household as a model for emulation. As the two establish their home, they create cosy rustic retreat that presents the ideal romantic setting. Their tiny home has a dove cote and porch, signs of refinement. While they are living in the village, with no priestly counsel, Ramona decides create her own sacred space. She implores Alessandro to steal a saint from the ruined San Fernando Mission for their new home. In doing so she is re-creating the Moreno tradition of housing mutilated icons from the missions. Fashioning it with linens and laces, she integrates it into her home by applying the aesthetic principles of middle class domesticity. Their house includes a

statuette of the Madonna. For this Alessandro had built a niche in the wall, between the head of the bed and the one window. . . . Below it hung her gold rosary and the ivory Christ; and many a woman of the village, when she came to see Ramona, asked permission to go into the bedroom and say her prayers there; so that it finally came to be a sort of shrine for the whole village.” (250)

This cheery shrine draws all the Indian villagers to her house, offering a place of worship for a population that must out of necessity go without priestly counsel, not unlike the frontier home fashioned by Beecher and Stowe.<sup>150</sup> Unlike the Moreno home, where the saints are grotesque and hidden, in the Indian village the saints minister to all. Ramona and Alessandro's house is the product of an orderliness and a domesticity that Jackson attributes to Mexican taste and Indian industry. The Americans who meet Alessandro and Ramona are surprised by their cozy home, their reaction reads as such:

dimly they recognized the existence of a principle here which had never entered into their life. They did not know it by name, and it could not have been either taught, transferred, or explained to the good-hearted wife and mother who had been so many years the affectionate disorderly genius of their home. (288)

That such a domestic “principle” had not been present in their lives seems more a testament to Aunt Ri's own class- and region-specific “disorderly” form of housekeeping than an expression of general American deficiency. This mestizo home benefits from the comparison. While Beecher's own design for a multipurpose home resonates here, Jackson is being provocative here when she suggests that a decidedly non-Protestant home could serve as the model for a

---

<sup>150</sup>A real-world instance of this is described in Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936*, 109. Speaking of the village curanderas, practitioners of syncretized Catholic and indigenous practices, she mentions one woman who “maintained a small chapel, complete with saints and candles, in one room of her adobe home in San Juan, where Indians and Californios went for rituals and to pray for healing and other kinds of help.”

“Christian family.”<sup>151</sup>

Catharine Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe designed their model home as an expression of Protestant practices and ideals, but in generalities the home overreaches traditional private-family standards of domesticity. They suggest that their idealized multipurpose house would be occupied by paired unmarried women who could use such a home as a space for benevolent public work, such as the housing of orphans and other forgotten types. Their home would also be open to the community, providing classes during the week and a religious space on Sundays.

Two ladies residing in this building can make an illustration of the highest kind of ‘Christian family,’ by adopting two orphans, keeping in training one or two servants to send out for the benefit of other families, and also providing for an invalid or aged member of Christ’s neglected ones.<sup>152</sup>

As a household made up of only women and their dependents, it echoes the Catholic convents that were known to conduct such works, but without the doctrinal issues that the sisters found difficult to accept.<sup>153</sup> This idealized home conflates the private dispensation of benevolent works and the public assistance that was championed as women’s public work. (Fig. 2.4) This compact, idealized Protestant space also brings benevolent work into the home, by housing those who are homeless. It is quite similar to Alessandro’s home in the Temecula village, where his family is poor because “they share everything with each other. Old Pablo feeds and supports half his village.” (78) This sort of benevolence works to self-effacement, but it is a model of virtue that Jackson posits for emulation. It seems to not figure into Protestant household economies in the same way. Beecher expresses as much when she says: “is it not sometimes the case, that both minister and people, by example, at least, seem to teach that, the more riches increase, the less demand there is for economy, labor and self-denial for the benefit of the destitute and the sinful?”<sup>154</sup> (Beecher 450) . The elder does not observe the discreet boundaries that would keep him from helping others besides his immediate family or those within his home, rather, he allows his home to open up to the extended village, supplying all in need.

---

<sup>151</sup>Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes*, 455-56.

<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*, 457.

<sup>153</sup>For a taste of the Beecher sisters’ uncomfortable praise of Catholic nuns: “A highly educated priesthood, with no family ties to distract attention, are organizing and employing devoted, self-denying women, all over the land, to perform the distinctive work that Protestant women, if wisely trained and organized by their clergy, could carry out in thousands of scattered Christian homes and villages.” *Ibid.*, 451.

<sup>154</sup>*Ibid.*, 450.

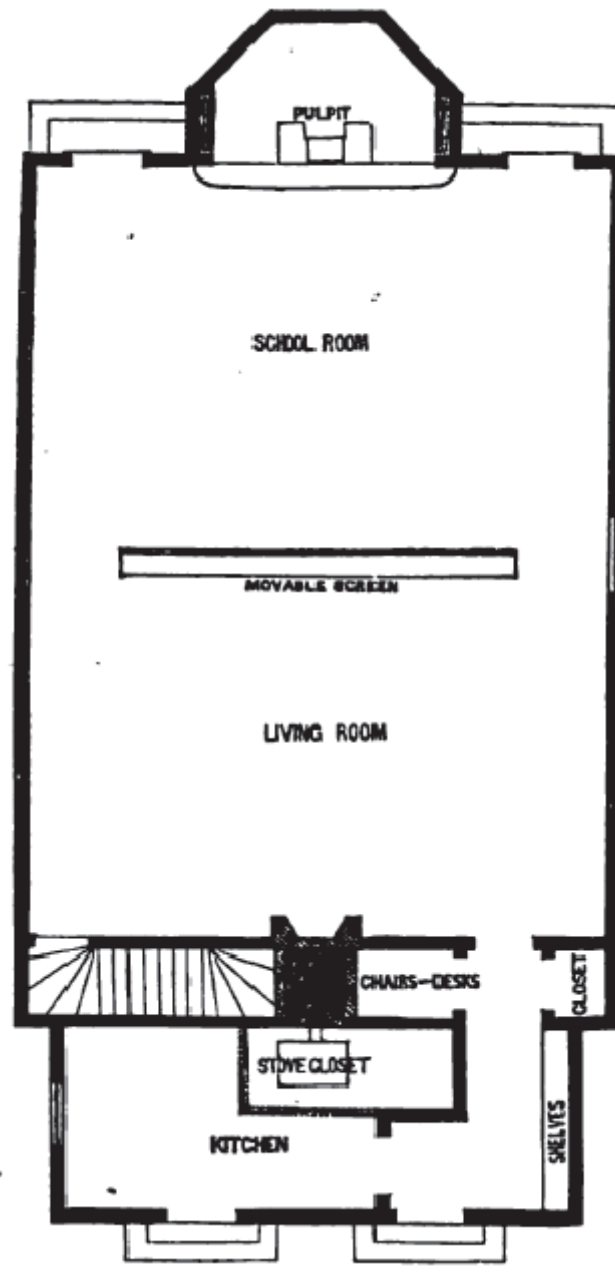


Fig. 2.4: Beecher's floor plan for the optimal home, uniting a church, school-house, and family dwelling in one space. The idea was for frontier homes, run by pairs of single women, to create the ideal "Christian Family" by taking in orphan children and the destitute. The movable screen between the living room and school room could be moved aside for Sunday religious service.

Once they have left the Moreno house and its impositions, Alessandro and Ramona are free to live as husband and wife in one of the remaining Luiseno villages. Alessandro serves as a proper husband and man, having the “sense of home, the strongest passion (he) possessed.” (289) And even after the trials of relocation and estrangement from his land, with time he talked once again of “building a house.” (289) As Ramona’s lover, he devises her a bed a ferns, (204) a sign of his manliness with an eye for comfort and beauty.<sup>155</sup> In direct opposition to the emigrants who arrive in California with dreams of wealth and speculation, having left behind the family hearth, Alessandro is conspicuous for his desire to make a home for his family in a familiar place and stay in it. That is the disadvantage of being the native in a land that is so desirable to so many intruders. When he must leave his San Pascuale house by writ of law, it is because a white settler has homesteaded a claim on the village. Alessandro devises to receive compensation by threatening to tear down the house and burn the crops if the settler will not pay. (265) This is a salient moment for a man so devoted to the project of establishing a home. Their last night in the house, having received the gold from the settler, Alessandro says: “it is like death, to be in the house which is no longer ours.” (266) It is this desirability of Indian homes, one verging on obscene in this book for its consistency and its ferocity, that serves the narrative’s purpose of empathy. Alessandro’s practicality makes him feel guilty, for unlike some residents of Temecula, his home village, he has bargained with the intruders. In Temecula, an old woman “threw her (house) down. She said nobody should ever live in those walls again.” (211) This is one of the few forms of protest available, to destroy one’s own home so that it will not be inhabited by the intruders.

When Alessandro goes back to his father’s old house in Temecula, now occupied by white settlers, the novel highlights the type of coercion that informs the project of westward expansion and homesteading. Rather than creating a series of white happy homes in California, these programs have encouraged the worst, and not the best, to emigrate. They are dysfunctional families. Alessandro’s father’s house, once a place defined by its inhabitant’s generosity of spirit, is now occupied by a husband who is a “human brute” who growls at his wife and dismisses her tentativeness about taking over someone else’s home. (215-6) And yet he has the anger to grouse about “those dogs of Indians” who have taken all their own furniture, leaving the new residents without. The wife reveals a sympathy for those her family has displaced, but is helpless to counter her husband and the U.S. government policies that work in his favor, left only to throw him “reproachful” looks. As Alessandro is left to watch them from outside the house, looking in a window, the transformation is complete. The house, made on Indian principles of design and familial relations, is now occupied by foreigners. When one of the children spies Alessandro through the crack in the shutter where he has been watching, the family then responds, and it seems an echo of all the other instances in American literature where the frontier family is in their home feeling the onslaught of the dangerous natives just outside. Only here we have the whole story and Alessandro’s plight is the one we sympathize with. This is an interesting reconfiguring of the pioneer myth of constant victimization by hostile natives, a story that was so common in the genres that Jackson herself dismissed as sensationalistic. To complete the shift to

---

<sup>155</sup>This is a sign of middle class refinement. See Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

white frontier domesticity, the man shoots out into the dark when he hears Alessandro. (216) Rather than food and assistance, those who now come to the house receive bullets.

Their last house, up in the mountains, was designed “as gay as if glad hearts had designed it” and once again, with a veranda, (310) “it was the prettiest home they had ever had.” (310) But this new home and the promise of a new life is not enough for Alessandro. Perhaps it is the estrangement from his original home, or the loneliness on that mountain plateau, but at some point “his brain gave way.” (312) Alessandro’s descent into madness is troubling, for it reveals the utter hopelessness of his and Ramona’s project to create a home as sanctuary. Alessandro is plagued by “attacks of wandering,” which is the worst sort of fate because all he has ever sought is a hearth and home. (313) In one fateful instance, Alessandro leaves the house on his black pony but returns on a fine horse, which Alessandro had mistaken for his own during a mental lapse. Ramona fears for his safety, as frontier justice deals cruelly with horse-thieves:

When she went into the house, Alessandro was asleep. Ramona glanced at the sun. It was already in the western sky. By no possibility could Alessandro go to Farrar’s and back before dark. She was on the point of waking him, when a furious barking from Capitan and the other dogs roused him instantly from his sleep, and springing to his feet, he ran out to see what it meant. In a moment more Ramona followed, – only a moment, hardly a moment; but when she reached the threshold, it was to hear a gun-shot, to see Alessandro fall to the ground, to see, in the same second, a ruffianly man leap from his horse,, and standing over Alessandro’s body fire his pistol again, once, twice, into the forehead, cheek. (316)

In the end, this most ideal of homes offers little solace to Alessandro and Ramona. He is murdered just outside, as Ramona stands at the threshold, left to witness his horrific death.

## Conclusion

In one of the most salient moments in *Ramona*, Alessandro tells Ramona about how the Indians sometimes suffered greatly while living in the missions, and that they had their reasons to try to escape or avoid mission life. It was “stupid of them to stay (away) and live like beasts,” Alessandro says, “but didn’t they have the right?” (231) Alessandro, as the son of a neophyte, is himself a skeptical Catholic who is able to question the abuses suffered by his people within the mission system, even while he denigrates their pre-Hispanic practices of hunting and gathering. Rhetorically, Alessandro’s statement is challenging: it lays bare all the conflicting expressions about the Native Californians amidst colonizing discourses. But in that final phrase, “didn’t they have the right?” we see that the ultimate issue at stake in this novel is not the “improvement” of Indian housekeeping practices, a project that the missions put forward in the old regime, and that the Bureau of Indian Affairs effected under U.S. rule, but the acceptance of Indian practices as they are, as the acceptance of human difference. Having the right to live as one would choose is the ultimate sentiment in this novel.

Some historians have noted that *Ramona* helped usher public support for the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, which divided reservation lands held in common into individually owned

plots. The Allotment Act had a harmful effect on Native American land use by imposing strict individual land ownership, and throughout the course of its enactment, 90 million acres of treaty land were lost. The Act's promotion of domestic individualism was at odds with the communal forms of land use employed by many Native Americans of the time. But it was written and passed after Jackson's death. In her own "Report on the Condition of the Mission Indians," the author was clearly opposed to government interference into what she considered Indians' viable and successful land use. Her stated denouncement of it in her much publicized debate with the secretary of the interior, Shulz, shows she would not have been in favor of the Dawes Act as it was enacted.

Most scholars agree that the novel was not a legislative or social reform success – the only reason that question is even a concern is because Jackson herself had a reformist intention and posed it as the one big purpose for the novel. Instead Ramona became a love story extracted from the brutal context that inspired it. Ramona and Alessandro's successive removals, emblematic of the Native American experience, became an expression of a more romantic and simple time. While this may be the case, the author's attempt to forge a new form of literary advocacy created an important work of literature that presented readers with sympathetic characters who were very different from themselves. It also criticized the U.S. government's abuse of its own citizens within its borders, the domestic abuse that allowed for the disenfranchisement of so many Native Californians. It serves as a reminder that there were ill effects in the promotion of settlement and of middle class domestic life, which were linked in the project of westward development and the U.S. settlement of California. Discrete homespaces in this context become an impossible objective for everyone in the republic because any form of coercion within the civic domestic sphere infects the private domestic sphere. So in a sense, this project is not looking just at the politics of literary affect, but rather the way that literary expressions portray a concern with the boundaries of affect, the way they explore the possibilities and limitations of affect, sometimes with reformist intent, sometimes for aesthetic explorations, sometimes both of course. But the intent of this chapter is not just to examine how reform-minded writers employ affect for social and political change, which has been the subject of much literary criticism, but instead how discourse – both between characters in a novel and the general ideas expressed in works that utter the concerns of a culture at a given time – reflects concern with the boundaries of affect, the way that it is used to define relations within the republic, to include and exclude, of course, but also to denote affective geographies. It is a distinctly modern notion, one that stems from political and economic developments that redefine the national civic domestic space all the while drawing connections between the way that citizens conform to the ideals of civic domesticity within the private domestic sphere.

### Chapter 3: “The evil spirit has not left our house”: Spheres of Intimacy and Conflict in *Who Would Have Thought It?*

In the midst of a thwarted effort to save her brother Isaac from a Southern prisoner-of-war camp, Lavinia Sprig, a high-strung character with a “faith in prayer of a strict Roman Catholic,” performs a nightly oration that gives a glimpse of the culturally conscribed order of affective relations in the U.S. in the nineteenth century. She begins with a general sweep of the U.S. population, but qualifies the term in her prayer:

“O Lord, be merciful unto *the American people*. Pour down thy blessings upon the House of Representatives and the Senate. Bless them because they were kind to me, and because they will not let our people starve in awful prisons. Bless them and keep them always in thy path and in thy light, that they may govern this thy people righteously. Bless the President, and enlighten him, that he may make a proper selection of men for *his Cabinet*, so that he may not be exposed to wicked influences.

Forgive *the Cabinet*, O Lord, and show them the ways of thy mercy, that their hearts may not be so pitiless to the sorrowful and afflicted. Have mercy on *all the American people*, and most particularly do I beseech Thee for —.” Here Lavvy mentioned the names of the members of her family, and ended her prayer.<sup>156</sup>

Though the prayer initially seems to be inclusive in scope, it maintains a confined range. Beginning with the American people, the largest of affiliations in the nation, Lavvy’s prayer then addresses the governing structure that rules the American people. She then turns her attention to a request for the blessing of the House of Representatives, the Senate, and then the President, and his cabinet. This prayer is surely informed by Lavvy’s recent experience in the halls of congress, so it is particularly attentive to the various branches of government. But this attention gives more than just a quick lesson on the most important players in domestic and international politics; it outlines relations of national affiliation. Interestingly, the one plea for forgiveness, for the Cabinet, is for the governmental figures not subject to the democratic voting process but with the decisive power to affect the war. But the prayer remains silent on the issue of Southern rebellion, and in doing so, it allocates prayers only for those who continue to be called “the American people.” Lavvy seeks to spread goodwill within lines of national affiliation, and her emphasis, as demonstrated by Ruiz de Burton’s use of italics, implies that the term is exclusive. Her prayer ends with a direct relational line between the American people and the specific mention of her family, indicating that the family is institutionally referential to the nation. As a woman, reciting her nightly prayer, Lavvy is performing the role that Protestant women played as moral actors with limited outlets for effecting change. And in fact Lavvy’s incentive to transgress the socially

---

<sup>156</sup>María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have Thought It?*, edited by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1995), 118. Hereafter all citations to this work will be in parentheses. Author’s emphasis.

conscripted role for women of the time in order to meet with the powers-that-be on Capitol Hill derives from her desire to bring Isaac back home, in effect bringing order back to the home. But more importantly, as a single woman, Lavvy has chosen to help with the war effort, ministering to wounded soldiers. Her efforts as a volunteer put her on the front lines in countering perceptions about how women can contribute as members of society tending the civic household.

Lavvy's prayer tells us much about nineteenth century cultural and theological faith in spheres of affective affiliation. This very faith is called into question as greed, cynicism, and aggression characterize U.S. politics and familial relations in Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* These characteristics threaten the very stability of both the Norval household and the nation. To this end, the novel examines the contradiction between an idealized national rhetoric about equality and the commonplace practices and discourses that reveal a harsher reality. Focusing on the opinions and manners of a New England family before and during the Civil War, the novel presents this critique through the parallel disintegration of both family and nation. The family's adoption of Lola Medina, a young Mexican girl – a unilateral decision made by the family patriarch – changes the family's fortunes and provides the occasion for the various members to reveal their true opinions about racial equality. This is a focus of the author's critique because nineteenth century discourse on racial equality, most associated with New England abolitionists, rings hollow in the face of an actual encounter with someone believed to be a racial other.<sup>157</sup> As a work of fictional social commentary written by an outside observer – Ruiz de Burton was a Mexican woman from Baja California – the novel deals quite deftly with the regional, national, and international scales that serve as the stage for a critical examination of American ideals and practices.

On a national scale, the assimilation of former Mexican nationals into the “national family”<sup>158</sup> is a story that finds a parallel in the Norval family's adoption of Lola. The fate of Mexicans in the U.S., both real and fictional, is a principal concern in both this novel and Ruiz de Burton's other novel *The Squatter and the Don* (1885).<sup>159</sup> While *The Squatter and the Don* is

---

<sup>157</sup>See Anne E. Goldman, “Beasts in the Jungle: Foreigners and Natives in Boston,” in *Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton: Critical and Pedagogical Perspectives*, ed. Amelia María de la Luz Montes and Anne E. Goldman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). Goldman observes that abolitionism “defines social groups and regional affiliations as much as it signifies political identifications,” 86-87. This eloquent definition applies to my use of the term abolitionist throughout the chapter.

<sup>158</sup>In his State of the Union Address, President Abraham Lincoln uses the term in the following context: “That portion of the earth's surface which is owned and inhabited by the people of the United States is well adapted to be the home of one national family, and it is not well adapted for two or more.” in Abraham Lincoln, “Annual Message to Congress, December 1, 1862,” in *The Language of Liberty: The Political Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Joseph R. Fornieri (Washington, D. C.: Regnery Publishing, 2009), 643.

<sup>159</sup>A number of critics have noted that the novel follows the conventions of Reconstruction-era historical romances, where the heterosexual romantic alliances in the novel signify the alignment of warring factions through the marital union of children from the opposing



set in California and deals specifically with the conflicts that arose between squatters and Californio landowners when the U.S. government investigated Californios' land grant claims, *Who Would Have Thought It?* takes a different tack in asserting the rights and integrity of its Mexican characters by examining the politics and culture of the country that has acquired California and its people by military victory. So while *Who Would Have Thought It?* is not set in California, it is unflinchingly about the compromised role of Californios and other Mexican inhabitants of the western regions annexed by the U.S. Taking into account the scales of the term *domestic*, as discussed in chapter one of this dissertation, this novel critiques U.S. domestic policies that result from the acquisition of foreign lands as a result of the Mexican American War (1846-1848). The novel depicts the consequences of U.S. military aggression both internationally and domestically with references to the Mexican American War and the Civil War, both resulting in the subsequent advancement of Yankee militarism and commerce. Ruiz de Burton finds much fault in U.S. policy, both foreign and domestic, as stemming from character flaws that she paints as integral to U.S. culture. Her portrayal of the family life of New Englanders in this novel is equally critical and double-edged, as she maintains the mid-nineteenth century belief that the basis for a strong nation must come from a strong household. This is not to say that political or economic discourses invade the domestic sphere; rather, the domestic sphere is a social construct that reflects alliances within hegemonic discourses.

This chapter examines the way that Ruiz de Burton negotiates defining elements in the determination of citizenship in the U.S.: race and gender. First, this study considers the trope of orphanhood by noting a parallel between Californios' expressions of frustration over their compromised role under U.S. rule and Ruiz de Burton's presentation of Lola's situation in the Norval home. Next, I consider those parallel experiences as a form of captivity. These states of orphanhood or captivity are then inscribed in the connection between affective relations and legal rights. This is an important connection, as it reads into the discourse on race and rights. By relating some of the early legal disputes on Californio racialized identity, I consider the material consequences that inform Lola's own racial identity in the novel. We then look closely at Lola's arrival in New England, and in the Norval home. The family's candid response to her appearance, and the ensuing conflict over her role in the family, provides a commentary on the debate over whether Mexicans would be part of the national family, or the servant class. The novel's representation of the Norval home, as a place with servants and an adopted child, present the question of physical intimacy between classes and races, as a sign of equality or of condescension. The sphere most associated with this intimacy, the home, becomes a site of speculation, sequestration, and conflict as these debates are played out in the novel. The character most associated with the home, the mother and wife, provides a critique of northeastern, but more generally U.S. domesticity. Her role as a citizen with few rights in the public sphere, but

---

camp. The final alliance between Californios and Anglo settlers in *The Squatter and the Don* is one accommodated through heterosexual love bonds, not through governmental diplomacy. See David Luis-Brown, "'White Slaves' and the 'Arrogant Mestiza': Reconfiguring Whiteness in *the Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*," *American Literature* 69, no. 4 (1997). Nina Silber's study of North/South romantic alliances has served as a model for this comparison. Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

total domination within the home, provides another perspective on the “national family” and insight into women’s options in nineteenth century society. No discussion of nineteenth century middle class American domesticity would be complete without attention to the role of the church. As a moral arbiter, the clergy’s influence on the middle class American home highlights one of the most profound of Ruiz de Burton’s criticisms of American culture. This chapter will address the interstices between discourses on nationhood and domesticity, remaining aware that those entities are affectively circumscribed by passionate expressions.

In summary, *Who Would Have Thought It?* is the story of a young Mexican girl, Lola Medina, who is rescued by an American explorer from her Indian captors – the only home she has known up to that point – and brought to live with her rescuer’s family in a small Massachusetts town. The young girl suffers various indignities while living as the “adopted” daughter and sister in the Norval household, mostly because the abolitionist-identifying mother is repulsed by Lola’s dark skin, despite assurances by her husband, Dr. Norval, that the young girl is white. And while the assurances of Lola’s whiteness are as unsettling as the matron’s repulsion for what they imply about race in antebellum New England, they reveal the chasm at the meeting point between an Anglo-Protestant understanding of race and a Latin-Catholic one. Mrs. Norval might remain doubtful on the point of Lola’s whiteness, but she is comforted by the crates of rough jewels that accompanied her, compliments of a resourceful mother who identified them in their natural state and scurried them away during her captivity with the Mohave Indians. The doctor vows to help Lola return to a family in Mexico that she has never met, but he must await the arrival of a translated transcript of an interview with Lola’s mother with the necessary information. It never arrives. Through the years we follow along as national tensions develop into a full blown civil war that tears apart the integrity of both U.S. domestic policy and the Norval domestic sphere. Dr. Norval’s identification as a Democrat and his encouragement of conciliation make him a target of jealous Unionists. With the suspension of the writ of Habeas Corpus, his freedom is threatened. He leaves to Africa, where soon after he is presumed dead. His presumed death sparks a radical change in the Norval household. Mrs. Norval’s growing intimacy with her counselor, former Reverend Hackwell, leaves her vulnerable to his influence. She takes the occasion of her husband’s presumed death to then avail herself of as much of Lola’s money as she can get, moving the family from their humble New England village to then live in a grand fashionable house in New York City. Through it all Lola remains fairly safe from Mrs. Norval’s wrath, as she has been sent to live in a convent to receive her education. Once Lola has matured she and the Norval son Julian fall in love, much to the disappointment of his mother and Hackwell, who each have their own reasons to detest the match. Meanwhile, on the war front, Mrs. Norval’s brother Isaac has been unfairly detained as a prisoner of war, the victim of personal animosity by the Union official in charge of prisoner exchange. Upon his release he leaves the U.S., disgusted with his experience during the war and with the rampant corruption. He goes to Mexico to find the subjects of a translated manuscript he encountered while working at the dead letter office before the war; it is coincidentally the same one intended for Dr. Norval on Lola’s behalf. Isaac then connects the two and becomes the agent for Lola’s reunion with her father. Despite a few snags along the way, including a near kidnapping of Lola by Hackwell, who has fallen madly in love with her, she and Julian end up in Mexico, where they marry. Dr. Norval’s return from the dead, by way of Africa, sends Mrs. Norval into an emotional tailspin from which she never recovers. Her partner in crime, Hackwell, thrives in his new life, assured that Mrs. Norval will not reveal any information that will hurt him.

## Negotiating a New Family: Orphaned Mexicans under New Leadership

When California was annexed by the U.S. following the U.S.-Mexican War, the question of what would happen to the native population loomed over post-war negotiations. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848) ensured that should the former Mexican nationals choose to remain in the U.S., they would be naturalized American citizens accorded all rights of citizenship. All land grants and titles to lands were also guaranteed by the U.S. Just three years after the signing of the treaty, the California state legislature passed the Land Act of 1851 in an effort to sift through the complicated system of land grants and patronage that had served to map the region under Mexican and Spanish rule. At its most benign, the Land Act of 1851 could be seen as an attempt to reorganize an “informal system” of land accounting to accommodate “Yankee precision.” Read through the matrix of varying factors – land-grabbing due to the massive influx of emigrants drawn by the gold rush; land speculation from the subsidiary farming that benefitted from this population boom; a Yankee mistrust of the region’s large-scale landowning economy in favor of the yeoman farmer ideal; or a genuine desire on the part of the government to align California land ownership regulations and titles with those of the greater U.S. – the Act was biased in its intent. The government was entirely at fault for the manner in which it determined title. Arguments that the Land Act violated the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo have some merit, it “violated the spirit if not the letter” of the accord. As it was executed, the Land Act established a Board of Land Commissioners, a three-man jury that was tasked with evaluating all land holdings prior to U.S. annexation. Rather than accept the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo’s assumption of land titles, the Land Act questioned them all, placing the burden of proof on Californios. To make matters worse, squatters had just as much right to bring a case before the commission as did land owners. Squatters benefitted from a commission that was partial to their interests by culture, disposition, and politics. This proved disastrous for the native Mexicans who held titles because the burden of proof rested with them; their land was therefore tied up in a long process of verification. The commission was slow in making its assessments, and most went to appeals, drawing out the cases and in the process incurring insurmountable legal fees that could only be paid through the liquidation of the properties in question. Since many of the defendants were already cash-poor, in a cruel twist some had to sell the very land they were defending in order to pay the legal fees for their cases. These legal fees had a profound effect in alienating Californios from their titles and from their livelihoods.<sup>160</sup>

This process of alienation served to enforce the metaphor of orphanhood and homelessness that became defining rhetorical elements in the Californios’ laments. In response to the Land Law of 1851 Pablo de la Guerra, a distinguished rancher and politician, then serving as state senator, presented a response to the Act on the state senate floor:

They (Californios) have been rejected by the Mexicans; they know no other country but California, and by depriving them of their rights, they will be compelled to be beggars in the streets; and in order to prevent this terrible calamity from overtaking them, they, through me, throw themselves upon your

---

<sup>160</sup>David J. Weber, ed., *Foreigners in Their Native Land; Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), 158-59.

mercy and clemency; and they ask and expect from you protection that will justify before the eyes of the world the belief in justice of the American people. If the American settlers are deprived of what they have expended for their improvements, they can go home and meet the aid and sympathies of their friends and countrymen; but the Californian, what prospect has he before him, or where shall he go?<sup>161</sup>

Pablo de la Guerra described the Californios – notoriously proud regionalists – as having been “rejected” by their fellow countryfolk the Mexicans, giving the impression that they in discourse and thought framed Mexico’s coerced sale of California to the U.S. as a willful act of neglect. Suing for peace and signing the treaty were reconfigured here as a rejection, not as a transaction made under duress. It is a strong condemnation for a country that had lost the war and had no choice. This statement asserts Californios’ native identity through their dearth of outside resources, noting that the “American settlers” “can go home,” if the commission finds their claims invalid. True, many emigrants were very recent arrivals, having settled only within the last decade, and the grand population shift that occurred in California in the wake of the gold rush was extraordinary. It also means that Californios understood “home” to be a descriptor of regional provenance and identity, not national affiliation. When the Anglo settlers state that the Californios could just go to Mexico, they cannot fathom that Mexico is as foreign to them as it would be to themselves. In effect the Californian had no other home and no consolation when the region became a U.S. territory. The assertion is that Anglos have a home, and are imposing and settling in the home of others and alienating them through legal and economic means.

When Ruiz de Burton penned her critique of U.S. domestic and civic life, her novel became part of a conversation taking place in cultural and political outlets regarding proper behavior in private and public intercourse. A sound home, and a sound nation, were corollaries in determining the fate of the nation. In the aftermath of the Civil War this issue was particularly relevant, as many struggled to define how a house reunited would come together. Ruiz de Burton’s novel is particularly engaging because it has provided a rare example of Mexican American writing about the Civil War, revealing a cynical assessment of the victors’ narrative in the war’s aftermath. Her introduction of a Mexican character, Lola Medina, into the world of small New England village folk life serves as a foil to upend many of the cultural assumptions about the northeast and its disproportionate influence on U.S. culture in general. Lola’s presumably dark skin and foreign bearing elicit comments that reveal the common racist assumptions of the day. This is an important consideration because Lola’s skin color initially serves as a determinant of her role in the Norval family. By extension, her skin color also determines her role in the republic. Her status and her viability as a marriage match, two factors dependent upon societal assessment, are the cultural expressions of legal rights. Literarily, her possibilities for affective relations (platonic and romantic) are symbolic renderings of material and legal rights. So when Lola is treated like an unwanted intrusion into the Norval household, or as a possible love-interest by Julian or Hackwell, those rejections and desires are symbolic, sometimes fanciful, enactments of U.S. domestic policy with respect to Mexican Americans.

---

<sup>161</sup> Josh Gottheimer, *Ripples of Hope: Great American Civil Rights Speeches* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), 64.

Also, as Lola's skin color changes, her various states of skin color enact both the real world referential experiences of those states while also encompassing the metaphorical weight of those changes. It becomes a metaphorical/symbolic construct from which to then consider Mexican American identity. As a work of fiction, we can examine Ruiz de Burton's strategies for defining Mexican identity in the U.S., with respect to their Yankee hosts, African Americans, or with Indians. Always remembering that this is a work of fiction, we would be remiss if we consider Lola's changing skin color as only the fading of skin pigment.

### **Domesticity and race**

There are elements that define a domestic life: familial and friendly relations, the architecture and layout of the house, and the economy of the home. Extra-domestic relations also determine the nature of the home, as evidenced by the Norvals' religious, civic, and financial experiences in the world. If this novel is a criticism of domestic life in the U.S., at heart it is a criticism of the American character, not only as it is presented abstractly in nationalist inkings relating to Manifest Destiny, but rather as it is evinced in everyday life. The petty jealousies, aggressions, and schemes enacted by various characters, most notably the Norval family matriarch Jemima, her lover Hackwell, and the Cackle family, all reveal a fundamental lack of empathy and kindness. But in the midst of that scheming we find people of good intention, Dr. Norval is generous to a fault, Julian is honorable and decent, Isaac is principled despite his passion, Lavvy is well-intentioned, and Mattie is fair and good to Lola, despite her mother's influence.

Ruiz de Burton's satire of American culture begins simply enough as the story of a New England family who fosters a young Mexican girl brought back from California by the family patriarch after a geological expedition. But the situation – the entrance of a stranger into this American family's home – allows the veneer of northerners as upstanding abolitionist Christians to fall away in the face of challenges to that self-aggrandized narrative of moral superiority. Much of the drama centers on the story of a cruel matron overseeing a defenseless child, a metaphorical and representational stand-in for the U.S. government's annexation of Mexican land and acquiring of its Mexican residents, that addresses the author's concerns over U.S. aggression at various levels of government. As Sánchez and Pita say in their introduction, it is a "social contract that has been breached" between the subjects and those in charge that is in question in Ruiz de Burton's critique.<sup>162</sup> This discourse of governmental relations with populations in some respect compromised is characteristic of the terminology of the day that was used to consider the nation along familial and affective lines. Mariano Vallejo, the California landowner, politician, Mexican military commander, and friend of Ruiz de Burton, became increasingly disillusioned with the relationship between the U.S. government and the Mexican American people. His ideal, for Mexicans to be treated as "hijos" or sons and daughters of the republic, as integral members of the national family, fully articulates this concept.

---

<sup>162</sup>Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, introduction, in *Who Would Have Thought It?*, ed. Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1995), xxxi.

El idioma que ahora se habla en nuestro país, las leyes que nos rigen y las caras con que diariamente tropezamos, son nuevas para nosotros los dueños del suelo y por supuesto antagónicas a nuestros intereses y derechos, pero ¿qué importa eso al conquistador? ¡él quiere el bien propio y no el nuestro! Cosa que yo considero muy natural en los individuos pero que vitupero en un gobierno que había prometido respetar y hacer respetar nuestros derechos y tratarnos como a hijos, pero ¿a qué bueno quejarnos? El mal está hecho y ya no tiene remedio.<sup>163</sup>

The language now spoken in our country, the laws that govern us and the faces we meet daily, are foreign to us, the landlords and hosts here, and clearly they are opposed to our own interests and rights, but what does this matter to the conqueror? He seeks his own interests, not ours! This is something that I consider natural behavior in an individual, but detestable in a government that had promised to respect and secure our rights and to treat us as sons and daughters, but what good does it do to complain? The damage is done, and there's nothing we can do about it.

The failed metaphor of familial care and affiliation grounds this betrayal by the U.S. government in affective terms. Vallejo's, and his countrymen's, descent from the position of *dueños*, or landlords, to that of being the conquered, the one who might complain ineffectually, positions the Californios as orphans unclaimed by their natural parents and forgotten by the guardian nation charged with their well-being. The contrast between personal and governmental behavior is interesting for what it reveals about Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo's acceptance of capitalist individualism. Selfishness is understood and even abided in individuals, but governmental policy should be impervious to the whims of human desires. As it is, "sons and daughters," however integrated into the republic, are forever beholden to the parent in this familial metaphor.

### Captivity

While Ruiz de Burton employs scathing social commentary in her critique of American cultural and political practices, she also explores the way that genre relays this commentary. As such, *Who Would Have Thought It?* is a historical romance, but one grounded and very much aware of the uses and standards of the captivity narrative. To suit its purpose in telling the story of a young girl estranged by violent circumstance from the loving bosom of her family, Ruiz de Burton references the actual collaboration in the writing of Lola's mother's captivity narrative while indicating that Lola herself continues to be a captive in a very different setting – New England.

Along with the domestic novel, the captivity novel of the nineteenth century was a genre

---

<sup>163</sup> As cited in María Carla Sánchez, "Whiteness Invisible: Early Mexican American Writing and the Color of Literary History," in *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion*, ed. María Carla Sánchez and Linda Schlossberg (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 85. Translation mine.

that appealed to readers along philosophical and aesthetic lines. While the captivity narrative predates the period under analysis in this study, finding expression in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Puritan narratives, its configuration in the antebellum years, those years referenced by Ruiz de Burton in her novel, demonstrates the evolving demons or objects of fear or repugnance that served as fodder for these sensational novels. The narrative standard about the captivity of whites by Indians, a genre that came into full fruition during the Puritan settlement of New England, was still being published, as the skirmishes of the Indian Wars continued to create the conditions for kidnapping on an evolving western theater. But also, a strengthened anti-Catholicism, spurred by nativist responses to massive Irish immigration in the 1840s, helped spread the popular convent captivity novels. Co-existent with this narrative trope was the slave narrative, bearing witness to a captivity of millions of persons that was politically sanctioned in large swaths of the country. The various manifestations of captivity narratives evince the varied forms of often legally-sanctified coercion that existed in antebellum America.

As the novel charts the young girl's movement from the wilds of the west to civilized New England, Lola experiences a decline in social status. Coming under this guardianship then presents the possibility that she, and by extension Mexicans admitted to the Union, will only find her place among the servants.<sup>164</sup> Her once exalted position with the Mohave Indians gives way to the ostracism and scorn of the northeastern whites charged with her care. Lola's guardianship, as presented to the Norval household by the returning Dr. Norval, is an adoption, which implies familial ties. Narratively, Ruiz de Burton dramatizes it as a captivity; Lola's youth and helplessness make her vulnerable to the whims of her caregivers. We might consider that there are several forms of captivity referenced throughout the novel: the Indian captivity of Sra. Medina and Lola; Lola's time with the Norval family; Isaac's time in a southern war camp; Dr. Norval's sojourn in Africa; Hackwell's attempted abduction of Lola and plan to force her into marriage; and more obliquely Lola's time in the convent.

Lola's time with the Norval family is couched within a captivity that has both historical references and symbolic significance. For we must remember that Lola's stay with the Norval family occurs during the years that her father and grandfather are unaware of her existence and still mourning her mother's disappearance. The kidnapping profoundly affects the Medina family, leaving the home without any feminine influence. As a historical practice, this sort of kidnapping was a concern along the Mexican frontier, as displaced Indians found Mexican settlements easy sources of food and supplies. The Apache practice of raiding and kidnapping, for instance, was sometimes implemented with the express purpose of replenishing dwindling populations. The abduction of women was particularly important:

In the southwest Borderlands, as elsewhere in North America, the exchange of women through systems of captivity, adoption, and marriage provided European and native men with widely understood symbols of power with which to penetrate cultural barriers. Their tales must be fretted from more familiar narratives where they have long lain hidden beneath epics of exploration and conquest. Yet while

---

<sup>164</sup>Beth Fisher, "The Captive Mexican and the Desiring Bourgeois Woman: Domesticity and Expansionism in Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?*," *Legacy* 16, no. 1 (1999): 62.

in their vulnerability they knit diverse peoples in webs of painful kinship, their captures and exchanges violated the masculine cultures of honor and social integrity of the victimized group and inspired the raids and reprisals that would punctuate everyday life in the Southwest Borderlands for three centuries.<sup>165</sup>

Theresa's initial abduction by the Apache and sale to Mohave Indians, through violent abduction, secures the situation for the tribe while enacting a form of cultural exchange. Being five months pregnant, she brings her daughter into a geography compromised by the violation of national boundaries. Julie Ruiz rightly points out that Lola is "born into that space of violation," signifying a breach in Mexican nationhood.<sup>166</sup> Lola's abduction by Dr. Norval brings New England into this practice of cultural exchange. This chain of exchange comes full-circle when she is returned home to Mexico with a parting gift from New England – Julian Norval. Brooks's assertion to read into the personal stories of these "epics of exploration and conquest" pairs nicely with the Medina women's stories of capture and exchange. Captives were often used to perform tasks commensurate with the changing economies of these bands. In the plains, some bands shifted from buffalo hunting to raiding. In the dry southwest, one extreme drought would be enough to shift their livelihood from agricultural subsistence to raiding. The process of indoctrination for captives was often difficult, involving physical coercion. Eventual assimilation often guaranteed community acceptance, respect, and ascension in status and responsibilities. That Lola and her mother are taken in, as the chief's wife and daughter, has a two-fold effect: it demonstrates the easy acceptance of foreign captives into the life of the band or tribe but also affirms the superiority or novelty of the Spanish woman in that context. The white bedding in her tent and the special treatment she receives within the tribe are signs of the status she has within the band.<sup>167</sup> But as the story is told, either by Theresa Medina or Dr. Norval, it is a bond viewed by Mexicans and Anglos alike as entirely one of degradation and suffering. And this is where Lola's and her mother's captivity is also a symbolic enactment of the Indian influence on Mexican identity as Ruiz de Burton sees it. While Lola's mother becomes the wife of the Indian chief (an ethnic reversal of the Mexican foundational story of Malinche and Hernán Cortés), it is

---

<sup>165</sup>James F. Brooks, *Captives & Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 40.

<sup>166</sup>Julie Ruiz, "Captive Identities: The Gendered Conquest of Mexico in Who Would Have Thought It?," in *María Amparo Ruiz de Burton: Critical and Pedagogical Perspectives*, ed. Amelia María de la Luz Montes and Anne E. Goldman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 126.

<sup>167</sup>Ruiz de Burton's inclusion of this detail implies that the bedding was a sign that Theresa had maintained impeccable grooming and housekeeping standards despite her compromised situation as a captive. The white bedding is intriguing for its seeming impossibility in a tent out in the desert. Another instance where the white bedding of Indian women figures prominently occurs in Helen Hunt Jackson's essay descriptions of her travels through southern California mission Indian villages. In that situation the linens were perfect and Jackson offered to buy them directly from the woman's bed. See Jackson chapter for more information on this.



a bond that links them through familial ties. Theresa's and Lola's skin is darkened not just by pigments, but by the fictive kinship association they have with the tribe. When it is evident that Lola is bound for the same fate as her mother, to be a sexual companion, the tribe's capture and negotiated release of Dr. Norval provides the opportunity for her escape. It is here that the "romantic" story of her captivity takes a turn for the decidedly more humdrum setting of small town New England.

For the next several years, Lola's stay with the Norval family is painted as a form of captivity. Since she remains apart from her father it is, in effect, a continuation of her captivity amongst the Indians. For, while Dr. Norval is her constant champion, and Mattie, Lavinia, and Julian eventually come to support her, the others in the household (Mrs. Norval, Ruth, and later Hackwell and Emma) openly dislike or attempt to coerce her. In some respects, her dark skin gives her a modicum of protection because others keep their distance initially. But she becomes increasingly an object of interest as her skin lightens: Lola and Julian Norval begin their courtship in earnest just as Hackwell begins to take notice of her maturing beauty. It makes her the object of reciprocated interest and unwanted attention. One may be welcome, but both forms of attention indicate that Lola is becoming a sexual being. The American home, in effect, has become an unsafe space for Lola. As she matures sexually, she becomes more vulnerable to the attacks of those attracted to her (Hackwell) and those jealous of her (Mrs. Norval and Emma).<sup>168</sup> The only thing that can save her in the end is her mother's captivity narrative, bringing the generational captivity of the Media women to an end. For logistical reasons it contains the information for contacting her family. On a symbolic level neither the exploring doctor nor the dashing Julian can help her. It is only a fellow prisoner, Isaac, the Unionist Democrat and client of prostitutes, who can gather all of the players together to truly free Lola.

For several years Lola is sent to live in a convent, a decision that she welcomes as it gives her a respite from the unkind Jemima Norval. In Lola's case the convent is a refuge, where the nuns have Lola's best interests at heart and she is able to practice her religion as she matures amongst other women, free of the grasping hands of Hackwell. While for Lola the convent is a source of comfort, for Protestant antebellum America, the convent has a more sinister connotation. The convent serves as a symbol of another form of captivity, expressed in a number of novels that depicted the Catholic religious orders as perverse and controlling. *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* (1836) was a bestseller that tapped into the emerging vitriol that was directed toward Roman Catholics in general and the orders in particular through the sensationalist and false stories of gothic sequestration and infanticide in the convents. The burning of an Ursuline convent near Boston in 1834 was a notorious case of the same order. Protestant crowds set fire to the convent after thwarted attempts at rescuing a nun that was rumored to be held against her will. The rumor was unsubstantiated. The convent was a boarding school housing mostly Protestant daughters of well-to-do Bostonians. Jenny Franchot summarily concluded that

The attack on convents in Jacksonian and antebellum American intricately voiced

---

<sup>168</sup>See Anne E. Goldman, *Continental Divides: Revisioning American Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 70-71. Goldman notes the parallel between Lola's near-abduction and her mother's abduction as a commentary on Hackwell's "savagery."

Protestant perplexities over the ongoing construction of the “cult of domesticity.” Whether because of its ardent female mystics, its veneration of Mary, its convents, or its traditional negative image as the Whore of Babylon, Roman Catholicism advertised a constellation of alternative femininities conspicuously excluded by antebellum theoreticians of the family who constructed instead, a region of sentiment that, though run by women, was overseen by husbandly authority.<sup>169</sup>

While it is a point of fact that the massive influx of Irish immigrants who flooded the job market spurred nativists into a frenzy of anti-Catholic behavior, the alternative matriarchal model of the Marian cult and the choice of women to live celibate lives free of any direct association with men were repugnant to many Protestants. The response of nativists was to cast Catholic institutions, growing in number, as gothic constellations in antebellum America. Their enlightened countrymen – artists, writers, and tourists – were at the same time making pilgrimages to Europe to delight in the ruined abbeys of England and the impressive cathedrals of Italy. We see this dynamic play out in the Norval family with the closed-minded Mrs. Norval’s hatred of all things foreign, while her more cultured brother and son, Isaac and Julian, are drawn to southern Europe and all its Catholic trappings.

So while Lola is a prisoner of Protestant domesticity, Isaac Sprig, her future relation and the younger brother of Jemima Norval, is held captive by the South as a prisoner of war. Isaac becomes a prisoner of the mechanisms and negotiations of war due to his own romantic interests. His affection for a “lady of the demimonde,” Lucinda, daughter of the landlady of the rooming house where Isaac lives, leads him to engage in a fight with another of her suitors who happens to be an influential cog in the war machine (58). This man, Le Grand Gunn, has the good fortune to find himself in the position to enact his revenge on Isaac in his capacity as overseer of the trading of prisoners of war. He uses this role to then deny the transfer of Isaac for several years, subjecting him to the harsh conditions of the Southern prison camps. Ruiz de Burton gives brief account of Isaac’s travails, but gives enough indication that the prisoners were starving to death and dying of illnesses. The prisoners’ suffering is brutal, and in one instance their theft of a Confederate officer’s dog and swift devouring of the beast serve to show the break down of middle class domestic taboos. When it is revealed to Lavinia Sprig, who having searched for information on Isaac all these years, that the decision to not trade prisoners is a strategic one because it is taxing Southern resources, she loses all decorum in a display dismissed as feminine, but which serves as a pointed criticism of the calculation involved in foreign policy. In effect, the North is not recovering its men because it wants the South to use up its resources feeding and housing prisoners-of-war. Such a decision is thought to bring a swift end to the war, but in the process it is harming and killing countless soldiers. Her informant, Mr. Blower, tells her that this strategy is not only practical it is “patriotic:” “why should killing people with cannons be considered more expedient and less cruel than killing them with starvation and sickness?” he asks condescendingly. (114) The gothic emerges here in the thought that a government could so cruelly use its soldiers as pawns to “economic policy.” (114) Their slow deaths require no exotic settings or torture chambers, they just require government sanction.

---

<sup>169</sup>Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 120.

### Lola and the spoils of exploration

Also problematic is the equation of Lola's person with the crates of stones and gems that accompany her. Lola's discovery and conveyance to the Norval household by the geologist Dr. Norval is paralleled by the boxes of jewels that he brings back. Ironically, Dr. Norval is a sympathetic but ineffectual character whose introduction of Lola into his world exposes her to harm and in the processes sheds light on the hypocrisy of the delicately balanced proprieties of New Englanders. That hypocrisy becomes evident when the Norval household regards the dark skinned Lola with racist proclamations. And here is where the novel transcends the typical domestic literary devices of obscured identity and presents a dark skinned girl who the returning doctor insists is white. The narrative does not reveal to either the other characters or the reader how this can be so. It is only in the fullness of time, when the girl's skin color starts to lighten, that we are then led to understand that Lola's skin color is not the simple and clear cut determinant assumed by others. Initially appearing as an Indian girl (due to the pigment applied to her skin by her Indian captors), Lola's skin slowly fades over the course of a few years, revealing that she is a light-skinned Mexican girl of the landed class. This plot device is an important one to keep in mind, as Lola's dark skin color is observed by the characters in the novel, and by the readers, to be her true skin color. The fact that it is not, a statement repeated by Dr. Norval, seems impossible, as the method of her skin-darkening is not initially revealed. This mystery provides the novel with an odd plot device that serves both superficial and complex motives. The small dark-skinned Lola receives the brunt of the family's scorn and curiosity upon her arrival, revealing that New England abolitionism is driven by hypocritical rationalizations about race and intimacy. More generally, her apparent dark skin, ostensibly a signifier of race, eventually fades, showing the instability of such indicators.

One issue that has served as a lightning rod for current criticism of the novel is the author's insistence on Lola's whiteness. Ruiz de Burton's insistence on whiteness is distinct from the Anglo-American definition of the term. As Ruiz de Burton sees it, Lola comes to embody whiteness figured as Southern European, therefore distinct or better.<sup>170</sup> Certainly, Ruiz de Burton's construction of Mexican whiteness has a class corollary.<sup>171</sup> While the world at large that serves as the setting for the novel is embroiled in a war intent on addressing the severe injustice of imposed slavery on black Americans, the scope of the novel is conspicuously distanced from the issue. Lola's own relatively minor compromised situation as a dark-skinned person in the U.S. who is yet free and even wealthy then can appear as a myopic quest of justice on the order

---

<sup>170</sup>Jesse Alemán, "'Thank God, Lolita Is Away from Those Horrid Savages': The Politics of Whiteness in *Who Would Have Thought It?*," in *María Amparo Ruiz de Burton: Critical and Pedagogical Perspectives*, ed. Amelia María de la Luz Montes and Anne E. Goldman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 102; José F. Aranda, Jr., "Contradictory Impulses: María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Resistance Theory, and the Politics of Chicano/a Studies," *American Literature* 70, no. 30 (1998): 552; Sánchez, "Whiteness Invisible: Early Mexican American Writing and the Color of Literary History," 74.

<sup>171</sup>Fisher, "The Captive Mexican and the Desiring Bourgeois Woman: Domesticity and Expansionism in Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?*," 62.

of social elevation. But it isn't that simple, of course, and Lola's dark skin serves to call attention to the stifling for darker skinned peoples in all parts of the republic, particularly California and the southwest where many of the former Mexican nationals were fully integrated members of the public sphere before and after annexation. U.S. expansion and its inclusion of Mexican Americans complicated the racial dynamic that had come to define U.S. political, social, and economic relations with the waning of the Indian wars. And while Lola's wardship puts her at the risk of losing the few rights she has under U.S. law – she can own property but she cannot vote and does not control her estate – the fates of living and breathing Mexicans under U.S. rule are equally unsecured. Court records in California show that on a number of occasions the pivotal issue at stake in the threat of revocation of Mexicans' rights after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was the color of their skin, meaning that the most politically expedient way to discredit Californios was by contesting their rights based on skin color.

### **Philosophical questions with political consequences: Mexican rights in California**

To better understand the social and political significance of Lola's skin color, we will take a detour through some of the major debates on race in California that determined the extent of Mexican rights under U.S. rule. The establishment of California as a state of the union provided the occasion for a clarification of Californios' status and rights as new members of the national family. Between September 1 and October 15, 1849, elected representatives gathered in Monterey to draft the state constitution in a bid for U.S. statehood. The constitutional convention generated a number of debates over the rights accorded citizens and who precisely those citizens would be. Those conversations, reported by J. Ross Browne and referenced below, served as a gauge of the language and sentiments developing in a region steeped in the Mexican discourse on race and now made to accommodate the recent influx of Anglos who brought their own understanding about race and rights. Apart from serving as a measure of the discourse on what it would mean to be a Mexican American in the nineteenth century, the eventual ratification of the state constitution showed that these debates had serious consequences as they restricted the rights and privileges of citizenship for Mexicans.<sup>172</sup>

When the delegation met to draft the constitution for the state of California – something they did in preparation for acceptance into the union and the granting of statehood – they had to contend with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. As an accord between two nation states, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, signed after the U.S.-Mexican War, was a federal contract and as such the U.S. federal government was entrusted to guarantee the native Californian and southwestern population's U.S. citizenship and the rights granted by that status. The treaty specified that: Mexicans “shall be incorporated into the union of the United States, and be admitted, at the proper time—to the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States

---

<sup>172</sup>The following discussion, which took place at the convention, came to my attention through Robert F. Heizer and Alan F. Almquist, *The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination under Spain, Mexico, and the United States to 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

according to the principles of the Constitution.”<sup>173</sup> The treaty made no express directive on race for qualification to U.S. citizenship because the Mexican constitution had not made such a distinction, instead offering universal citizenship and suffrage for men. But soon after the signing of the Treaty, an act of Congress ceded the granting of U.S. citizenship to the states, leaving the official legal status of Mexicans in the U.S. territories, essentially the southwest and California, in a state of limbo. Of particular import were the rights of suffrage and the right to hold office, as a number of Californios had the social position and resources to benefit from what was at that time a significant native population with the presumed right to vote. However, many of the new ruling Anglo class in California sought to replicate their two-tiered racial schema of a white and black hierarchy, and wanted to ensure that only white men be given the vote. Some of these men voiced concern that by signing the treaty with Mexico, the U.S. had in effect guaranteed the vote to all men regardless of race. The discussions at the convention show that the mostly-Anglo delegation set out to simplify and quantify race where previously under Mexican rule the parameters of race were more fluid and ambiguous.<sup>174</sup> The one drop rule that determined one’s status as black in the eastern U.S., a pernicious tool to keep blacks enslaved, was starting to have an influence on race definitions in California as the new Anglo ruling class resented any concessions made to the native Californio population.

When the California Constitution was drafted in 1849, one member of the delegation, Edward Gilbert, moved to include the specific mention of Mexican men into the articles outlining the rights of citizenship in order to clarify their rights. Where the constitution stated that “every white male citizen of the United States shall be entitled to the elective franchise” the addition of “Mexican” would then clarify and secure the rights of Californios as was intended by the spirit of the treaty.<sup>175</sup> The acknowledgment of Mexican rights in the constitution was seen as a way to help breach the limbo created by shifting jurisdiction on citizenship conferral. Another

---

<sup>173</sup>From article IX of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo

<sup>174</sup>After the Spanish were defeated and Mexican independence was achieved, the Plan de Iguala set out to establish social equality for all ethnic groups in the new republic. As a consequence, the racialized terms used under Spanish rule were exchanged for the cultural terms “gente de razon” or “gente sin razon” to denote the Indian acquisition of European domestic practices and education. Europeans, mestizos, and those Indians deemed acculturated or assimilated into Mexican culture were “gente de razon.” In theory and by law they were of the same status as Mexicans of Spanish ancestry with the same rights. But in practice this was rarely the case.

<sup>175</sup>John Ross Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849* (Washington, D.C.: John T. Towers, 1850), 62. In this instance, the constitution would have read as follows: “Every white male citizen of the United States, and every male citizen of Mexico.” The process of Mexican citizenship transference was dependent upon a number of factors, the treaty did not confer U.S. citizenship on Mexicans now residing in the U.S. As California was not yet a state, Californios were not officially residents of the U.S. An act of congress was required to confer citizenship, but that power was diverted to the states, of which California was not yet one.

member of the delegation, Charles T. Botts, objected to the openness of the language of the treaty, and sought to clarify and delimit the recipients of those rights by injecting the word “white” before “Mexican,” particularly with respect to suffrage and the right to testify in court.<sup>176</sup> The decision to include the word “white” before “Mexican” passed overwhelmingly, but without a single Mexican vote. The inclusion of this descriptor created a legal document that would have legislative and juridical consequences parsing through the degrees of color within the Californio population, leading to the official documentation of what historian Martha Menchaca calls the racialization of the Mexican American population.<sup>177</sup> Despite being offended by the racist inclusion of “white Mexican” in the constitution, the Californios did not extend such indignance on behalf of other populations singled out for exclusion from citizenship rights. An objection raised by one of the Mexican delegates, Pablo de la Guerra, demonstrates the manner in which Mexicans sought to counter the definitive Anglo discourse on Mexican identity and race with a more ambiguous one, all the while condoning the suppression of blacks. De la Guerra’s response to the inclusion of the descriptor “white” follows, in Browne’s words:

(Pablo de la Guerra) desired that it should be perfectly understood in the first place what is the true significance of the word “white.” Many citizens of California have received from nature a very dark skin; nevertheless there are among them men who have heretofore been allowed to vote, and not only that, but to fill the highest public offices. It would be very unjust to deprive them of the privilege of citizens merely because nature had not made them white. But if by the word “white” it was intended to exclude the African race, then it was correct and satisfactory.<sup>178</sup>

In response to de la Guerra’s concern over an emerging Anglo-American construction of race and rights in the region, Bott’s clarified with a bit of sophistry that he had “no objection to color, except so far as it indicated the inferior races of mankind.” Here the conversation has created a space where a dark-skinned person could be legally considered white. To further clarify, Botts was quoted as saying that it was “in this sense the word white had been understood and used—not objectionable for their color but for what that color indicates.” By this twisted logic, dark skin in-and-of itself was not objectionable, but if the color was an indicator of African or

---

<sup>176</sup>Heizer and Almquist, *The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination under Spain, Mexico, and the United States to 1920*, 97-98.

<sup>177</sup>Racialization refers to the systematic political and legal perpetuation of racial inequality. Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>178</sup>Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849*, 63. Heizer and Almquist, *The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination under Spain, Mexico, and the United States to 1920*, 98.

Indian ancestry, then that was objectionable.<sup>179</sup> It would allow for a situation where someone could have dark skin but be considered white. The U.S. and Mexico differed in their understanding of race and of its effect on individual rights. Since the requirement of the treaty bound the U.S. federal government to concede rights of citizenship to citizens of Mexico who chose to stay in the annexed territories, the conflict between U.S. legal restrictions on people of color and Mexico's more liberal assessment of rights and racial identity presented the conundrum that the official revoking of rights of dark-skinned Mexicans would amount to a violation of the treaty of peace, in effect amounting to a renewed war with Mexico.<sup>180</sup> Regardless, the delegation voted to include the word "white" to limit the amount of Mexican Americans that would be allowed to vote.<sup>181</sup>

While in Mexican society skin color often correlated to class, it was by no means a steadfast link, especially along the far reaches of the Mexican frontier. Manuel Dominguez, a prosperous Californio rancher and an elected delegate to the California State Constitutional Convention of 1849 and signer of that document, and Los Angeles County supervisor, found himself on the wrong side of the color line. (Fig. 3.1) While preparing to testify for a defendant on a court case in San Francisco in April 1857, he was denied the right to testify. The lawyer for the plaintiff objected to Dominguez's taking the stand with the rationale that he was an Indian and therefore ineligible as a witness. The judge agreed and dismissed Dominguez.<sup>182</sup> Pablo de la Guerra, the fellow member of the constitutional delegation who expressed misgivings about the specific modifier "white" in the California constitution as noted above, spoke out on the senate

---

<sup>179</sup>Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849*, 63. Heizer and Almquist, *The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination under Spain, Mexico, and the United States to 1920*, 98.

<sup>180</sup>Heizer and Almquist, *The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination under Spain, Mexico, and the United States to 1920*, 100.

<sup>181</sup>In the final draft of the constitution, the article addressing the right of suffrage read as follows: "Article II, Sec. 1. Every white male citizen of the United States, and every white male citizen of Mexico, who shall have elected to become a citizen of the United States, under the treaty of peace exchanged and ratified at Querétaro, on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1848 of the age of twenty-one years, who shall have been a resident of the State six months next preceding the election, and the county or district in which he claims his vote thirty days, shall be entitled to vote at all elections which are now or hereafter may authorized by law: Provided, nothing herein contained, shall be construed to prevent the Legislature, by a two-thirds concurrent vote, from admitting to the right of suffrage, Indians or the descendants of Indians, in such special cases as such proportion of the legislative body may deem just and proper."

<sup>182</sup>Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 57, Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 202.

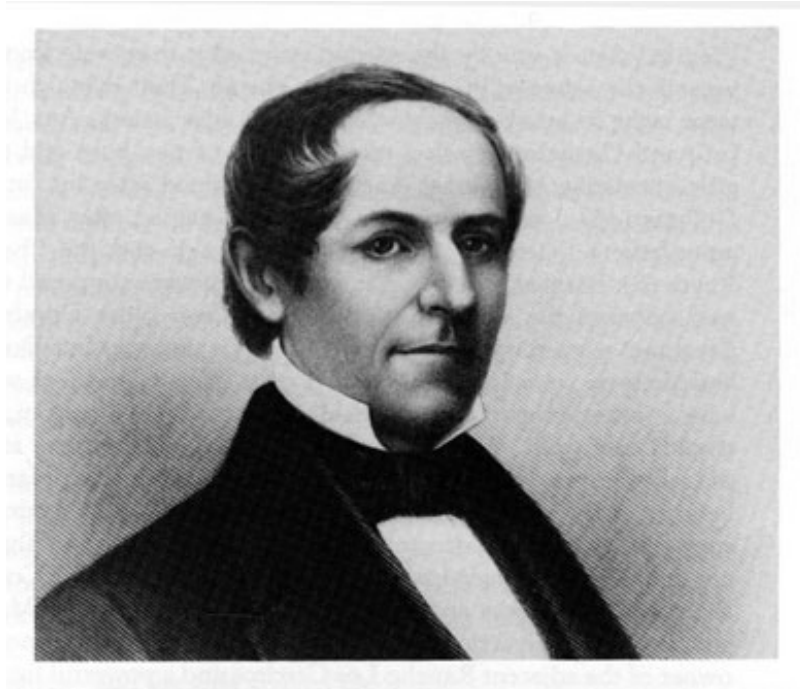


Fig. 3.1: Manuel Dominguez, (1804-1882), denied his right to testify in court.



floor in reference to this incident in order to condemn this aspect of the constitution.

Thirteen years later, in 1870, Pablo de la Guerra found himself in a similar bind when he was “prosecuted by the state for unlawfully assuming the rights of a white citizen” when he was elected as a California state court judge.<sup>183</sup> That case appeared before the supreme court of the state of California in *The People v. de la Guerra*, and while Pablo de la Guerra was eventually restored his rights of citizenship and went on to serve his post as judge, this case created the legal precedent that allowed for the disenfranchisement of those of Mexican descent who would not be able to pass the blood quantum test. Pablo de la Guerra was the son of a prominent Santa Barbara resident, Don Juan de la Guerra y Noriega, one of the few Spaniards who arrived as a settler in Alta California. His mother was from another prominent Californio family, the Carillo family from Baja California. Following this logic it is safe to assume that Pablo de la Guerra was of mostly Spanish descent and his pictures demonstrate a European likeness. (Fig. 3.2) This case, brought by M. M. Kimberly on behalf of the people of the state of California, hinged on the question of Californios’ status as U.S. citizens since by 1870 congress had yet to confer U.S. citizenship on the Mexicans who chose to stay and accept U.S. citizenship under Article VIII and XIII of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Kimberly’s argument was that the Treaty’s description for citizens’s rights was different from the U.S. constitution’s insofar that the U.S. constitution discriminated by race while the Treaty and Mexican constitution did not. Thus the crux of this case hinged on the uncomfortable racial ambiguity created by this discrepancy in standards. To make matters more complicated, de la Guerra was certainly one of the most vocal critics of squatters and of the corrupt court system that worked in their favor. As a member of the state senate he employed a rhetoric that painted the Anglo emigrants as unprincipled interlopers, stating that a majority of them knew they were squatting on deeded land. He used his position as a member of the state assembly to delay land seizure bills and was a “silent ‘partner-resident’” with the law firm of Halleck, Peachy, and Billings, where Henry W. Halleck was the most successful Californio land claim attorney in the state.<sup>184</sup> Such outspoken and conspicuous activity surely piqued the ire of many Anglo politicians who would have considered his actions an act of insolence. The fact that he was tried in court for assuming the rights of an American citizen, in effect impersonating a white man, reveals a certain calculation in an attempt to silence him just as he was assuming a position of some power.

These two instances of attempts at negating rights for Californios demonstrate the extent to which all of the questioning discourse about their status as white could then be used against them, regardless of the color of their skin. While Manuel Dominguez’s mestizo countenance and Indian ancestry was no impediment to his status as a well-respected man of politics, a founding father of the state of California, and as an influential and wealthy landowner, his right to take the witness stand was quickly questioned when the opportunity arose. This showed the precarious

---

<sup>183</sup>Gregory Rodríguez, *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans, and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 125. See Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans*, 222.

<sup>184</sup>Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890*, 91.



Fig. 3.2: Pablo de la Guerra, (1819-1874), whose right to hold office was brought before the California Supreme Court.

nature of Mexicans' rights under U.S. rule. Pablo de la Guerra's case was even more confounding in that his European ancestry was documented, but the very acknowledgment of the conflict between an Anglo-American connection between race and rights and the Mexican/Californio understanding of race and rights created the opportunity to threaten those very rights if it proved politically expedient.

When Ruiz de Burton addresses the Anglo tendency to define the Mexicans racially, she shows how these definitions are value-laden in order to justify U.S. aggression toward Mexico. In contemplating the California natives, Mrs. Cackle and the pastors gossip about the returning doctor, who:

impelled by that liking (of foreigners), betook himself to California, which is yet full of 'natives.' And as a just retribution for such perverse liking, the doctor was well-nigh 'roasted by the natives.' (11)

Such a broad sweep definition of the population impels the Rev. Hackwell to respond with a shifted definition:

not by the natives, madam. The people called the natives are mostly of Spanish descent, and are not cannibals. The Indians of the Colorado river were doubtless the ones who captured the doctor and tried to make a meal of him. (11)

Mrs. Cackle dismisses Hackwell's clarifying amendment mere sophistry, and expresses displeasure at what she sees as his conciliatory assessment of the Californians. She then states the real purpose of her disinterest in parsing through the various populations of the region:

To me they are all alike – Indians, Mexicans, or Californians – they are all horrid. But my son Beau says that our just law and smart lawyers will soon "*freeze them out.*" That as soon as we take their lands from them they will never be heard of anymore, and then the Americans, with God's help, will have all the land that was so righteously acquired through a just war and a most liberal payment in money. (11)

By labeling Mexicans as a racial other and associating them with violent action, the discourse of imperial expansion justifies their dislocation under the banner of religious righteousness.

### **Race as a determinant in affective relations, in the family and the republic**

To understand why Ruiz de Burton is so invested in the issue of Lola's whiteness, and by extension, the white status of Mexicans in general, it is necessary to consider motives beyond any perceived or acquired racism on the author's part. As contact between Californios and "Americanos," developed in California through the decades from a relationship of guarded but mutual respect to one of dominance and coercion, the question of diplomacy was muted. Mexicans were now subject to an American standard of race, religion, and language, as emigrants overwhelmed the native California population. The question of Mexicans' status as

white, and the literary maneuvering that Ruiz de Burton goes through in establishing Lola's whiteness, are a central concern for determining the role that Mexicans will play both in the civic domestic realm and the private domestic space in the novel. In other words, the role of Mexicans as U.S. citizens and civic participants (contingent on their whiteness) in public life correlates to their suitability as subjects in affective relations as marriage partners, as daughters, as sons, husbands, mothers, fathers, and lovers in a new country which does not consider interracial marriage an option. Assessments about Lola early in the novel demonstrate this as Lola is "too black and too young" for Julian Norval to take a fancy to her. (51) Mrs. Norval's initial response, one not only of repugnance but of bewilderment, suggests that blackness is inscrutable: "How old is she?" she asks her husband, "Her face is so black that truly, it baffles all my efforts to guess her age." (17) Mrs. Norval's insistence at ignorance in the face of that which is clear reminds us that the feminine standard of American culture, as evinced by sentimental or domestic literature, is the clear eye and the fair face that shows embarrassment with a reddened cheek. As if to openly reference those books, Dr. Norval meets his wife's dismissal of the girl's appearance with: "She is only ten years old, but her history is already more romantic than that of half of the heroines of your trashy novels." (17) It is the "trashy novels" that delighted so many women but that reinforced modes of behavior and certain standards of appearance that would exclude a young girl like Lola. To that end, Lola's dark skin becomes a medium by which Ruiz de Burton criticizes northeastern racism, through a critique of the cultural artifacts that have naturalized it. But, as Jesse Alemán asserts, Lola's "blackface also enacts a peculiar Mexican racial anxiety for being categorized as Indian or black."<sup>185</sup> Ruiz de Burton's insistence on Mexican whiteness can be seen as regrettable because it signals an acceptance of U.S. racist ideology, but this anxiety is grounded in a very real and substantial fear that Mexicans could have their rights stripped away from them if they were found to not be white. The presence of this fear would signal that those Mexicans with most to lose from such a finding, the landowning, former ruling class, are not always as phenotypically white as their proclamations on paper would assume. It is possible to make the point that the historical circumstance of the Californio ruling class's *mestizaje* is beside the point, that what is interesting is the discourse of whiteness.<sup>186</sup> But it seems that the discourse of whiteness is especially interesting in the presence of *mestizaje*. Given the perception of Lola's initial appearance as black or Indian, Ruiz de Burton's strategy, then, is to try to create a new racial space, one couched in ambiguity, that allows for a discourse about the whiteness of people who at times are phenotypically not European or whose skin is dark. The motivation for this is of course to secure for Mexicans the rights that are accorded to whites. This is an important distinction because it allows for Lola to occupy various shades on the color scheme without ever compromising her whiteness or, in other words, her legal status in the U.S. This status is contingent not on her own proclamations, but by those of outsiders. Dr. Norval sees Lola as white, even when her skin is dark, just as he saw her dark mother as white. He relied on other factors to determine her whiteness: her clean home, her cultured manner, her testimony. Notice

---

<sup>185</sup> Alemán, "'Thank God, Lolita Is Away from Those Horrid Savages': The Politics of Whiteness in *Who Would Have Thought It?*," 105.

<sup>186</sup> See Sánchez, "Whiteness Invisible: Early Mexican American Writing and the Color of Literary History," 75.

that those factors are not signs of race, but instead signs of middle class domesticity. Dr. Norval's opinion holds weight socially and in the Norval household, both because he is a man of science and the family patriarch. Lola's inclusion in the family, purportedly as white, as an adopted daughter who would have a room of her own in accordance with that status, understandably creates a cognitive dissonance for others who do not have the cultural sophistication or the worldliness of Dr. Norval to make that same assessment.<sup>187</sup>

### **Lola goes east and encounters northern hospitality and domesticity**

As the novel begins with Dr. Norval's return to New England accompanied by the young Mexican girl Lola, it provides an introductory glimpse of the people who are about to greet her. They are xenophobic, showing an equal weariness toward anything that hints of European taste or breeding on one end, and those they choose to deem "natives" on the other. Mrs. Cackle criticizes Dr. Norval for his

most unnatural liking of foreigners. That liking was the cause of the doctor's sending his only son Julian to be educated in Europe – as if the best schools on earth were not in New England – and Heaven knows what might have become of Julian if her heroic mother had not sent for him. He might have been a Roman Catholic, for all we know . . . And finally, impelled by that liking, the doctor betook himself to California, which is yet full of 'natives.' (11)

Their assumptions are that it is natural and even patriotic to be punitive with those who are foreign who by consequence of war are at the mercy of the U.S. government. They are cavalier about recent U.S. aggressions against Mexico. Mrs. Cackle's son Beau thinks that U.S. "just laws and smart lawyers" will soon "freeze out" the Mexicans. (11) Mrs. Cackle's dismissive statements, shown here to be the sentiments of both abolitionist women and congressmen, show no intellectual curiosity. This sort of thinking is boorish enough, but coupled with military might, it makes for a dangerous combination.

The first time we see Lola she is seated in the carriage with Dr. Norval, huddled in a shawl. (13-14) Her age and features are indistinguishable, as she is so wrapped and hidden. This air of mystery is all the more interesting because the good doctor has been abroad for so long, and his gentle manner toward the young girl seems to verge on inappropriate. We understand later how jarring this image is to his wife when we see how these descendants of Puritans stifled

---

<sup>187</sup>The following scholars have noted this strategy on Ruiz de Burton's part. She depicts the Norvals and their neighbors as racially ignorant insofar as they misread Lola's race and fail to understand the social cues that mark her as white. Peter A. Chvany, "'Those Indians Are Great Thieves, I Suppose?': Historicizing the White Woman in *the Squatter and the Don*," in *White Women in Racialized Spaces: Imaginative Transformation and Ethical Action in Literature*, ed. Samina Najmi and Rajini Srikanth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 108, and Sánchez, "Whiteness Invisible: Early Mexican American Writing and the Color of Literary History," 83.

all signs of affection in their home. After such talk about the geographic spoils of military aggression, the glimpse of this young girl reminds the reader of the human factor in imperial campaigns. Ruiz de Burton clearly associates Lola with the doctor's spoils of exploration when the narrative couches her introduction within the context of talking about his rock collection, and all that he has brought back with him. Their exclamation upon seeing her reveals a twofold expression of imperialism, daughter Mattie exclaims: "Goodness! what a specimen! A nigger girl!" (16) In effect, the girl has been reduced to an object of scientific inquiry, and labeled with an epithet. The matron's dry response equates the doctor's collection of things with beings, and from this distanced view the young Mexican girl becomes a study of scientific inquiry rather than sociological concern: "The doctor is not content with bringing four boxes more, full of stone, but now he, I fear, having exhausted the mineral kingdom, is about to begin with the animal, and this is our first specimen." (16)

When confronted with her discomfort over Lola's residence in the Norval home, Mrs. Norval responds: "I do not object to her dark skin, only I wish to know what position she is to occupy in my family. Which wish *I* consider quite reasonable, since I am the one to regulate my household." (19, author's emphasis) It is Mrs. Norval's desire to place Lola, to determine her "position" with respect to the family in a home that has distinct spheres determined by relation and status: there is the family, the central unit of the household; friends and acquaintances on the periphery, such as the Reverends Hackwell and Hammerhard or the Cackles; and the servants. Mrs. Norval's role, as the one who "regulates" or governs these social relations, implies that the mother, the true icon of the cult of domesticity, makes the home, and the nation by extension, the "empire of the mother."<sup>188</sup> The doctor responds by saying that she will be treated as "an adopted child." (19) The presumed intimacy of that relation, to live in the home as an adopted child, seems to the matron an extraordinary request. It also echoes the affective relationship sought by Mariano Vallejo when he expressed disappointment at the U.S. government's failure to comply with a promise to treat the Mexicans "as sons and daughters."

### **If Lola is not family, is she one of the servants?**

Lola's arrival does much to disquiet the smug abolitionist matron by placing the possibility of racial difference in intimate proximity. The test of their openness rests on what access Lola will have to the familial spaces in the house. With a bit of exasperation Mrs. Norval asks the doctor: "Where is the child to eat her supper?" implying that there are two options available: with the family or with the servants. His reply, "Here by my side, of course," asserts that she is to be considered a family member. (19) The matron's angry reply reveals both familial and societal objections to this intimacy: "In that case your daughters and myself will have to wait upon your adopted child, for I am sure we will not find in all New England a white girl willing to do it." (19) The question of Lola's role in the family, then, is not only one of private contemplation, but one with economic and sociological consequences. Lola's presence, then,

---

<sup>188</sup>See Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing About Domesticity, 1830-1860* (New York: Copublished by the Institute for Research in History and The Haworth Press, 1982), 97.

threatens to overturn the race and class structure within the home and in the greater community.

The Norval women, particularly Mrs. Norval, shrink from contact with Lola. Lola in turn shrinks from contact with the Irish maids who are to serve as her roommates that first night. Despite Dr. Norval's insistence that Lola be given her own room, Mrs. Norval, the one in charge of the house, sends her to sleep with the two Irish maids (22). It is only after they have all gone to bed that Mrs. Norval learns of Lola's fortune, and then, of the plan to swiftly return the girl to her family. We see how Jemima Norval has a change of heart about the girl:

all this brilliant fortune might leave her house too soon for her to mature any plan to participate in it. The despised black child she now would give worlds to keep. She would go on her knees to serve her, as her servant, her slave, rather than let her go." (30)

The symmetry of this change of heart is clear. When just minutes before, she dreaded the thought of including the girl in the family, Mrs. Norval now can envision herself working in service to the girl, mainly as a proxy to her "yellow god." (26) In fact it comes to this when the doctor, upon finding out that Lola was sent to sleep with the servants, threatens to take the girl and her money to live somewhere else, and Mrs. Norval herself prepares the girl's bedroom. (47) As the depth of Lola's wealth becomes apparent to Mrs. Norval, the doctor informs her that "by the time the girl is twenty, she will be very rich, and people wouldn't call her Indian or nigger even if she were, which she is not." (27) Just as astounding, Mrs. Norval then considers marrying Lola to either her son or her brother: "Have you thought that Julian or brother Isaac might take a fancy to Lola?" (27) Mrs. Norval's sudden interest in Lola as a daughter-in-law or sister-in-law shows how easily money can whiten Lola. In this sense, Jemima Norval reveals herself to be very cosmopolitan indeed, as she easily accommodates Latin American notions of race and class when faced with the promise of access to Lola's money. Mrs. Norval's fanciful contemplation of Lola's money shows how her wealth can possibly serve to eliminate all barriers to intimacy with the family that were initially imposed by race.

The effect that Lola's arrival has on the Norval household extends past the boundaries of the home and becomes a matter of public contemplation, as the town speculates on the changing dynamics in the home. The servants in the Norval home, Hannah and Polly the cook, are equally repulsed by Lola and repugnant to her, making the experiment of her tenure with them short-lived. Lola's naturally finer nature makes it impossible to sleep in the same bed or room with them. The servants' dirty bedclothes and ill manners play into all Irish stereotypes:

Cook, being a good Catholic and a lady of spirit, crossed herself earnestly but hurriedly, shook her fist threateningly at Lola, and bolted into bed, leaving behind, in the middle of her hoop skirt, a pair of shapeless shoes, like two dead crows, and carrying with her to bed a pair of stockings which had been blue, but were now black." (31)

Polly's gesture toward Lola hints that there is no kindness between these two outsiders in this household. The natural point of affinity, their shared Catholicism, does not help here because the Irish servants are described as vastly inferior to Lola, even as they consider themselves her superiors. The very routine act of performing the sign of the cross is then an unconscious act, not

a sign of religious influence or piety or charity, as it is followed by the menacing fist. Instead, Lola chooses to sleep on the floor outside the door to Mrs. Norval's bedroom curled up with Jack, the dog. This incident is powerful for its attention to the public speculation about private spaces. The readers are recounted these events twice: first, as the narrator relates the events as they occur to Lola; second, as the neighbors relate the gossip passed between servants. The passing of information between servants and subsequent speculation among the Cackles and pastors' wives indicates the lack of privacy in these middle class homes. On a humorous note the cook's gossip takes certain liberties with the narrative to maintain her pride: she and Hannah are the ones who reject Lola and send her to the hallway in this scenario. The inclusion of servants draws the Norval home into public discourse and into economic transactions, as it is a site of labor and various forms of compensation. As such, when the servants gossip, even if just for the satisfaction of being heard, they are participating in an informal exchange of information that has real value in the world of social relations. The value comes in the assessment of neighbors and in the proper exploitation of that information. They all wonder about the source of the family's recent wealth, only guessing that "the little black child is in some way connected with the money." (46) Apart from such speculation, the gossip gives the neighbors a sense of superiority as they talk about the domestic tensions arising from Mrs. Norval's mistreatment of Lola.

Jemima Norval's reaction to Lola's dark skin and exotic bearing shows a distinctly northern hypocrisy, preaching abolition and freedom, but on the contingent that blacks and other dark peoples remain at a distance. It is also a powerful reminder of the discussion that took place at the constitutional convention, where the objection to universal suffrage of Mexicans was rationalized by: "no objection to color, except so far as it indicated the inferior races of mankind."<sup>189</sup> But in the novel this sentiment, as expressed by a northerner and self-proclaimed abolitionist, becomes conspicuous for its convoluted and twisted logic. Ruiz de Burton's demonstration of this instance is a powerful critique of the difference between northern self-perceptions of goodness and morality and generosity, especially in relation to southern slavers, and their actual close-fisted and myopic manner of being in the world.

### **Southern and Northern perspectives on domesticity**

The cold manner of greeting that Lola receives expresses a view of northern abolitionists that is unflattering at best. And given some of Ruiz de Burton's other critiques of the tenuousness of northern family values and Unionist politics, it is possible to see Ruiz de Burton's work in the vein of the southern slavery apologists who often wrote criticisms along the same lines. An entire sub-genre of domestic novels written in the 1850s, penned by slavery apologists, meditated on the divergent domestic practices between northerners raised amidst industrial exploitation and southerners reared on rural plantations. They often couched their defense of southern domesticity and its peculiar institution by blaming northerners who relocated to the south as intruders and

---

<sup>189</sup>Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849*. Heizer and Almquist, *The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination under Spain, Mexico, and the United States to 1920*, 98.



inciters – in a number of novels northerners would encourage slaves to escape or incite slave rebellions or other such actions. This northern meddling was seen to corrupt and destroy southern domestic tranquility. These apologists also employed a number of stereotypes to paint depictions of northern families who lacked domestic values, instead indulging in base desires like greed and vanity. Scholar Mary P. Ryan cites *The Lofty & the Lowly* (1853), by Maria McIntosh, as an example where the father is ambitious and the mother has “fashionable aspirations” that override any domestic moral imperatives and J. Thornton Randolph’s *The Cabin and the Parlor* (1852), an indictment of northern wage labor.<sup>190</sup> While Lola’s negative experience with the Norval family provides a key to understanding one of the standard remonstrances of slavery apologists, there is another possible source of this criticism that needs to be taken into account. This other criticism of the abolitionist North questions that very facile correlation between Ruiz de Burton’s criticism of northern domesticity and an explicit sympathy with southern slavery apologists. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) provides this criticism in her depiction of Miss Ophelia, a paragon of northern womanhood, the New England cousin of southern slave owner Marie St. Clare. Her squeamishness at seeing the physical intimacy between whites and blacks in the South is similar to Ruiz de Burton’s indictment of the very same proto-abolitionist stance taken by the Norval household. Upon seeing little Eva adorning Tom with a necklace of flowers, lovingly cradled in his arms, Miss Ophelia gasps: “How can you let her?” to her parents, and follows up on Augustine St. Clare’s inquiry with the notion that Eva’s and Tom’s easy intimacy “seems so dreadful.” This then leads him to pontificate on the difference between northern and southern whites’ perceptions of the possible role of blacks in the civic realm and the domestic realm:

I know the feeling among some of you northerners well enough. Not that there is a particle of virtue in our **not** having it; but custom with us does what Christianity ought to do, –obliterates the feeling of personal prejudice. I have often noticed, in my travels north, how much stronger this was with you than with us. You loathe them as you would a snake or a toad, yet you are indignant at their wrongs. You would not have them abused; but you don’t want to have anything to do with them yourselves. You would send them to Africa, out of your sight and smell, and then send a missionary or two to do up all the self-denial of elevating them compendiously. Isn’t that it?<sup>191</sup>

Stowe uses St. Clare’s response to Miss Ophelia in order to criticize northerners’ staid and sanctimonious criticism of slavery that is yet couched in a revulsion at the thought of intimacy between the races. This scene contrasts the northern discourse about fair treatment for blacks with the true sentiment behind that discourse. It also calls into question some of the cultural assumptions about the connection between advocacy and respect. However, when Ruiz de Burton

---

<sup>190</sup>Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing About Domesticity, 1830-1860*, 136.

<sup>191</sup>Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: New American Library, 1966), 195. Emphasis mine.

reveals the hypocrisy of northern abolitionists, it is not in a bid to promote abolitionist introspection. Instead, it is a literary form of satire, showing the sanctimonious arguments of northern abolitionists to be grounded in a false fellowship with enslaved blacks. But ultimately, the Norvals' racism is something to be judged in the service of what Ruiz de Burton sees to be a blaring miscarriage of justice, and that is the misidentification of Lola's ancestry as anything other than European, not the institutionalized racism against blacks or Native Americans. Interestingly, Stowe wrote her book so that all may reflect on the horrors of slavery, but this critique of northern harshness, as ventriloquized by St. Clare, is particularly noteworthy in its use of the southern critique of northern hypocrisy.

Another perspective on Stowe's representation of the St. Clare home, posited by Jenny Franchot, considers the novel's engagement with a anti-Catholic discourse promulgated by abolitionists. As the possibility of war increased, escalating sectional rhetoric, Protestant New England often saw itself in opposition to a "Romish" South. One thing to consider in Stowe's critique of the St. Clare household is the Protestant criticism of Catholicism. This criticism stems from what Jenny Franchot wrote as the

mounting regional attack on slavery by popularizing a usefully improbable and clearly regional rhetoric of purity and contamination, a discourse legitimized by appeal to a religious supremacism that left racial loyalties intact. One could attack the South for the Romanism of its slaveholding practices rather than the white supremacism of such customs."<sup>192</sup>

Rather than draw attention to racial inequality, which was not the issue at stake for many northerners, they focused on the exotic elements of the southern plantation.

### **New England, New Woman**

In its representation of New England characters and life, the novel uses the region as a metonymic geographic construct to foreground criticism of U.S. conduct at an international level. But New England also stands apart as the cradle and standard-bearer of U.S. identity. The region's historical role as the cultural and commercial center of the country is something that was often just assumed, but with the developing tensions of the Civil War, the southern states presented a military and hegemonic counterweight.<sup>193</sup> The novel provides an outsider perspective as Ruiz de Burton voices frustration over Yankee dominance through her use of humor. As a westerner, her own regionalist priorities were at odds with those of the typical New England woman. Her frustration may not provide many viable alternate answers, but it points an accusing

---

<sup>192</sup>Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism*, 103.

<sup>193</sup>Boston was the financial center of the country until the 1840s, when it was surpassed by New York City. New York City ports, in turn, were heavily dependent upon southern cotton for trade.

finger at the hypocrisy of northeastern smugness, their sense of superiority, and of their purported cultural and educational advantage. Nowhere does this seem more evident than in her critique of northern womanhood. Held up as the paragon of all that is right and good in the country, the northern woman served as the cultural and moral model for the nation. This regionalist assertion was reaffirmed through the mass cultural expressions of the day.

The novel takes great pains to distinguish characteristically Yankee sentiments and opinions, as the nation's foundational myths and cultural institutions were concentrated in the region. She very dryly mocks this regional pride in an effort to call into question the underlying coercive nature of these foundational mores:

It was the anniversary of some great day in New England when the Misses Norval were to make their farewell appearance in church before leaving for Europe – some great day in which the Pilgrim fathers had done one of their wonderful deeds. They had either embarked, or landed, or burnt a witch, or whipped a woman at the pillory, on just such a day. (62)

The celebration of “some great day in New England” commemorating the deeds of “Pilgrim fathers,” the national patriarchs, reveals itself to be either an uneventful myth (embarking or landing) or the celebration of violent acts against women. The grouping of these various actions, from the mundane milestones of imperial expansion to the aggressive suppression of wayward women, equates the two, creating a narrative of international and domestic conquest. That the possible acts of aggression against the potential “witch” or a nonconformist woman are public acts – performed in a civic space and commemorated by religious institutions and the general public – reveals the extent to which a culture of women's suppression is celebrated and integrated into national foundational myths.

Near the end of the novel, after news of Dr. Norval's safe return has prompted Mrs. Norval to fall into a fit of madness, we see the consequences of this systematic suppression of women. As Hackwell considers Jemima's compromised mental state, and his own impending legal troubles, he contemplates this state of affairs on a national level:

the sooner we give over to women the management of public business, the better it will be. If we did not have such brute arrogance and unblushing conceit, we would long ago have seen the justice and propriety of hiding our diminished heads. But no. Because we have the physical force to beat women at the polls with our fists, we maintain that they have no right there as thinking beings. (271)

Hackwell's soliloquy serves as the bookend for the earlier passage, giving an account of the ways that women are subjugated to political ends. But despite this subjugation of women, there are inklings of other options – to not be the witch at the stake, or the woman beaten at the polls, and to not go mad from the guilt of adultery.

### **Mrs. Norval: as a wife, a parishioner, and a member of the community**

No other character in this novel suffers the narrator's criticism as much as Jemima

Norval, who appears to be the standard bearer of northeastern middle class antebellum womanhood at the beginning of the novel. Perhaps it is because she has such an exalted model to live up to with the antebellum middle class cult of true womanhood. In any case, Jemima Norval suffers from the comparison, but the novel, of course, benefits immensely. Jemima Norval becomes the object of scorn not because she fails to live up to an impossible ideal, but because she lacks any true sense of goodness. One might see an occasion where the adulterous matron, truly in love with her parson, could be the heroine of a story of star-crossed lovers. But for the purpose of this novel such a character development would not do. In the service of the story Jemima Norval must be the caricature of an ideal New England mother and wife.

The story, as we are told in the novel, is that as the wife of a man of means, Jemima was able to leave behind her farm girl past to then preside over her comfortable middle class home with all the rights accorded to a grand domestic matron as “*the power of the family*” (51, author’s emphasis). Her childhood on the Sprig family farm marked her upbringing as an example of the robust cottage industries that had provided so many northeastern women with livelihoods through about the 1830s.<sup>194</sup> This was historically the norm for a woman of Jemima Norval’s class, education, and aspirations, as the middle class had not yet come into full blossom as an economic and cultural force. On their small family farm the Sprig women were full participating producers of goods who jarred pickles and made butter and applesauce for the Boston market; they also raised hens and vegetables. (56) In a sense, the production of goods for market integrated the home into a network of commercial spaces, making the home space one of several sites of emergent capitalist labor production. Historian Ann Douglass characterized this shift in middle class women’s societal and domestic role – from producer to consumer – as a definitive economic and cultural transformation of the middle class woman into the idealized passive domestic wife and mother.<sup>195</sup> And while Jemima Norval, as a source of derision and contempt in this novel, does not precisely conform to the idealized motherly role as outlined by the cult of true womanhood (she is aggressive with her husband and a tyrant with her siblings and children), the economic and cultural signifiers are there, specifically in her eventual retreat into the home to care for her husband and children.

While Jemima Norval’s specific experience represented that social and cultural transition from the farm for middle class women, poor northeastern women would come to experience that spatial shift differently. In both cases their abandonment of the farm paralleled the shift in economic development to large scale production that effectively snuffed out cottage industries and began to draw poor rural women to population centers of New England where factories were concentrated. The Lowell textile mill in Waltham, Massachusetts was a standard example of this economic shift. It was the first fully-integrated mill that required no outsourcing to independent contractors and it became an example of industrial efficiency and worker agitation as the “Lowell mill girls,” as they came to be known, developed means of self-expression to denounce their working conditions. The trajectory of Jemima Norval’s retreat from the farm would not have been the same as that of the Lowell mill girls. By chance or – to paraphrase with extreme liberty

---

<sup>194</sup> Sánchez and Pita, introduction, xxi.

<sup>195</sup> Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 48-51. Sánchez and Pita, “Introduction,” xxix.

the nineteenth century expression – by the grace of good looks, she has the fortune to wind up on the other end of the spectrum as a supervisor of the working girls who are servants in her home. The Irish maids who work in the Norval home serve as the equivalent of the Lowell girls, occupying the same economic and societal role as single female wage-earners. Their presence in the home, despite their foreignness, is a reminder to the reader – and maybe to Jemima Norval if she were more introspective – of how life could have turned out differently for her.

As it is, at the novel's opening Jemima Norval is at the apex of her life. She has the run of a home, servants, and a husband who defers to her on most matters. But hers is a life of hollow compensations because at heart she harbors uncharitable feelings toward her family and fellow Christians. Ruiz de Burton presents Jemima Norval as the vacuous representation of the most venerable incarnation of American Protestant womanhood. Her purpose in the novel then is to call into question the exalted role of the American mother and wife by engaging in salacious and objectionable behavior. In the process, she provides the reader with the most engaging character in the novel by serving as a foil to the frankly uninteresting though honorable and perfect Lola Medina. For literary purposes, Lola is a blank slate, better suited to the pages of a domestic novel, while Jemima Norval courts danger by indulging her passions. She is the consummate realist character, trouncing through life in a world that, for better or for worse, maintains a moral balance. In some respects, the resemblance between Jemima Norval and Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary is uncanny. Both are farm girls who enter the comfortable role of a doctor's wife, they each succumb to the charms of rakish rogues and suffer the indignity of a scrutinized romanticism viewed in the light of a realist narrative. Their passion is found to be wanting. In a sense they are failed romantics limited by their middle class provincialism and lack of imagination. In the end, they each suffer cruel fates that deny them any romantic closure.

In the popular culture of the day, the New England woman was idealized as the source of moral integrity, a characteristic grounded in a homespun rationalism. So, in some sense, the emergence of a passionate Jemima is an interesting change. As an American woman, she epitomizes the downside of too much individualism. She is not an individual in the usual masculine antebellum sense, staking out her way in the world as the men of the same era. Instead, it is through economic and affective indulgence that she asserts herself. Kate McCullough offers an intriguing reading of Jemima Norval's passion as Ruiz de Burton's attempt to "challenge the stereotypical depiction of 'passionate Latin women' and its inverse, the passionless Anglo matron."<sup>196</sup> This certainly rings true, and I would further this interpretation of Ruiz de Burton's depiction of a passionate Jemima by noting that the author's critique is informed by the sardonic critique of American cultural expressions of affect. She is a romantic – a misguided one – for in her "all-absorbing" affection for Hackwell, she is drawn to him by their shared hatreds, her hateful rhetoric is not the stuff of a romantic mind, but her passion is: "How insidiously that love had crept into her heart! Slowly, stealthily, through the only avenue by which it was accessible – her dark bigotry and her blind prejudices." (136) Drawn to Hackwell because he is "a good hater of all other sects," Ruiz de Burton pokes fun at Mrs. Norval, finding her sincere affection farcical, as it is founded on bitterness and bigotry. And it is an astounding love, for it transforms the matron from the mere "tyrant" (138), or the de facto "power" of the family (51) to a "Yankee

---

<sup>196</sup>Kate McCullough, *Regions of Identity: The Construction of America in Women's Fiction, 1885-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 154.

Popocatepetl.” (177) The analogy, as stated by Hammerhard, is a dig at her age, with snows to cover the lusty and volatile emotions underneath. But it is also interesting in that it renders Jemima Norval in the role of a masculine mythic figure. Popocatepetl, the volcano Hammerhard derisively references in describing Jemima Norval, is one of a pair of volcanos located south of Mexico City. The other volcano, Iztaccihuatl, long dormant, represents his dead lover. Jemima Norval’s smoldering fire then is transformed from the watchful lover of Aztec mythology to the keeper of a misguided and unrequited affection for her unscrupulous confidante and lover.

And the object of that misguided affection does much to scrutinize it. The levels of scheming that go on in the novel, between Hackwell and Hammerhard, then between Hackwell and Jemima, sully any proclamations of love, for there are no innocent parties. Of their affair, Hackwell says:

She loved me—she says—for my virtues, eloquence, and edifying example as a minister of the gospel, and my patriotism in leaving my sacred calling to offer my services and my life to my bleeding country. She says all this to justify herself in her own eyes – the hypocrite – for being so ready to fall in love within two weeks after she heard of the death of her husband.” (149)

Here Hackwell mocks Jemima Norval not only for her ready affection for him but also for the manner of her feelings. As someone who must “justify” her attraction, she reveals herself to be calculating in her affections. A kinder assessment would be to view this as strategic affection, since it is an affection aided by the evaluation of the mate’s compatibility. It is a behavior lauded in the aesthetics and politics of sentimental literature, but it is loathsome to Hackwell. Instead, he proffers his model of the ideal love by contrast: “I think it contemptible to find *reasons* to love . . . truest love is generally the one that has no foundation.” (149, author’s emphasis) This act of ventriloquy, as Hackwell’s critique of Jemima Norval is most surely Ruiz de Burton’s, posits the staid and safe strategy of American women’s approach to courtship in a negative light. In doing so, he criticizes the antebellum notions of love and marriage that were so fundamental to American identity. But does this mean that the roguish Hackwell is here offering the urbane alternative with his neo-romantic assertion? He is much too calculating for that, as is evident in his scheme to become Mrs. Norval’s “confessor” and his willingness to use emotional and physical intimacy to further his cause. (44) Instead, he posits a romantic notion of love. Oddly, while he is a detestable and manipulative character, his insight into Mrs. Norval is incisive and thoughtful. It shows that even scoundrels can yearn for that most genuine love when a staunch New England matron cannot. Hackwell’s assessment is notable for its insistence on an authentic affective connection that requires no justification, that is unsullied by hatred or manipulation. This critique of middle class American standards, down to their capacity for affective expression, is part of Ruiz de Burton’s greater criticism of the manipulative and calculating aspects of public life in the U.S.

### **Lavvy: from the parlor to the hospital ward to the halls of congress**

But the American woman is not doomed, as Jemima Norval represents not all women and most certainly not all middle class women. Her sister Lavinia offers another alternative for a life

that can supercede the myopic domesticity of Jemima Norval. Lavinia's participation in the war effort and as an advocate for her brother Isaac lead her to Washington and even more impressively to the halls of Congress. She presents the most dramatic turnaround of all the characters in the novel. Initially we see that she is dismissed as a naive spinster who prizes her animals above all else, coddling them with ribbons in a gesture that infantilizes all parties. The busybody neighbor, Mrs. Cackle, surmises "(t)hat old maid Lavvy Sprig, I suppose has decked her thousand cats and her million canarybirds all with ribbons, like her odious poodle." (12) Lavvy's penchant for coddling these animals is seen as a symptom of a mania arising out of spinsterhood. But her grievances are not unfounded, as her former suitors, Hackwell and Hammerhard, broke the social custom of the time by promising marriage and then withdrawing that offer. This expression of anger and regret reveals the source of Lavinia's manic attention to her animals. For she has been forced to witness the domestic success of these two men who had wronged her, having made promises that they ultimately broke. Her monologue reveals the extent of this deception, as she considers:

I wonder if God will punish those two men for their lies and treachery to me? It is all I can do every Sunday to keep from screaming out from my pew to Hammerhard in his pulpit, 'You liar! You liar! It would do me good if I did. And if I were to go to Hackwell's church, I don't think I could be able to contain myself, for he was the greater scoundrel of the two. Hammerhard proposed to me, and went off and married Lizzie Dix, but I wasn't positively engaged to him. But Hackwell was solemnly pledged to me – the scoundrel, preaching scoundrel!<sup>197</sup>

(39)

Lavinia's painful story is the source of scorn for the wives of these men, amusement for her nieces, who hear her railing away at night, and incredulity for her own sister, Jemima Norval, who refuses to believe that Hackwell ever proposed to her. It seems that all have banded together to discredit Lavinia, turning her into a pitiful parody of a single woman. But from this vantage point, Lavinia has newfound knowledge about the value of secret promises made in the heat of the moment. Private desires do not always yield public alliances: "How very wrong girls are in permitting any liberties to men to whom they are engaged!" she says, "Who can tell what miserable liars they may not turn out to be?" (39) "Oh, the rascals, the hypocrites, preaching morality every Sunday!" she exclaims in disbelief. (39) The public morality of the pulpit proves to be on shaky ground, especially when the parson is involved in matters of courtship. Interestingly, Ruiz de Burton reveals this information not as a judgement of Lavinia, but to show how unscrupulous Hackwell and Hammerhard are.

---

<sup>197</sup>This characterization of Hackwell and Hammerhard resonates with Washington and New York gossip of the time about one of the most famous preachers and public figures of the time, Henry Ward Beecher, brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Historian Debby Applegate relates with great detail the development of the phrase pertaining to Beecher, that he "preaches to seven or eight of his mistresses every Sunday." This rumor was most certainly in circulation in January of 1871, but likely through 1870. Debby Applegate, *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 410.

But as the war looms and Lavinia contemplates its deadly consequences, she is drawn into the public world of benevolent work. In truth, Lavvy was doing what many women at the time did, she tapped into “familiar skills and networks” of women’s social and benevolent groups to offer administrative and direct assistance to soldiers she saw as “brothers.”<sup>198</sup> (116) The familial analogy that Lavvy uses to describe the soldiers, one used throughout the war effort, serves as a substitute for the brother she cannot find and whose wounds she cannot minister. But it helps her get past the difficulty of the work, and gives to her work the hint of domestic similitude. And since Lavvy has no children at home, having dramatically snuffed out her surrogate avian children, she takes that role that a number of middle class women were starting to take as genteel public caregivers.

In similar fashion to the efforts made by middle class women to help in the war effort, Lavinia and a number of the Cackle women decide to go to Washington.

For weeks and weeks, the Misses Cackle and Lavinia canned beef tea and made jellies and jams in the daytime, and lint and bandages and havelocks at night. They knitted a great number of stockings also. They made underclothes, and large, very large, night shirts, for these patriotic ladies seemed to take measure by their enthusiasm, and very possibly imagined that the heroes for whom the shirts were made must all be as large in size as in deeds” (77)

This comments on what Ruiz de Burton sees as the overcompensation in the small things that women could do. Her sardonic description of these women knitting and sewing, the small duties women could tend to on the home front, pokes fun at their zeal. It speaks to the “furor of benevolence” that characterized so many of these women’s projects.<sup>199</sup> This passionate sense of duty expressed itself in Lavinia’s dogged attention to her work: “she loved her patients. They were the impersonation of duty; she was, therefore, bound to love them. The more groans and sighs and lamentations she heard, the more cheerful she became in the sublime sense of duty.” (104)

As Lavinia immerses herself in this project, she starts to neglect the pet canaries that had given her so much joy and affection. Seeing the effect of her neglect, she comes to the conclusion that leaving for Washington would relegate the birds to a premature death either by starvation or feline attack. She conceptualizes this conundrum as a choice “between her country and her birds.” (85) Her solution is to kill the birds with chloroform to avoid whatever possible sad fate they may suffer in her absence. It is a choice Ruiz de Burton calls “Spartan, or what is the same,

---

<sup>198</sup>Beverly Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 59.

<sup>199</sup>Mary A. Livermore, Carrie Chapman Catt, and National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection, *My Story of the War: A Woman's Narrative of Four Years Personal Experience as Nurse in the Union Army, and in Relief Work at Home, in Hospitals, Camps, and at the Front During the War of the Rebellion*. (Hartford: A.D. Worthington and Company, 1888), 416.



a New England lady trained to do her duty no matter how painful.” (86) While Ruiz de Burton does mock Lavinia’s self-importance with respect to the birds and her flair for the dramatic, it is telling that the same New England home that bred such characteristics as self-control and sublimated emotion could also cultivate the heightened sensitivities and emotions to the point of inciting Lavvy to harm the objects of her affection. Lavinia succeeds in killing all but one, Jule, her nephew’s namesake, and despite her efforts the bird finds sanctuary with Lola. In her frenzied state Lavinia faints, leaving herself vulnerable to Rev. Hackwell, her former suitor and the man who abused her confidence, who happens to be in the house at this time. He is there to catch her as she falls and he takes the opportunity to kiss her. In her incoherent state, spurred by an overwhelming response to the violence of her actions, she remains mute and asleep, an image of vulnerability. This lapse into romantic imagery, the fallen maiden in the arms of a lothario, creates an uncomfortable matrix of frenzied violence and sexuality. Lola witnesses this scene, and it is telling that her main concern is for Jule and not Lavvy.

Killing the birds has a profound effect on Lavinia, and when she makes her appeal on Isaac’s behalf to the politicians in Washington, this sacrifice of hers is in her thoughts. In an effort to explain to Lavinia the very complicated machinations of war, the “wisdom” of which would come to light after “time and trial.” (116) When Mr. Blower, a lobbyist, explains to Lavvy that the exchange of prisoners has halted so that the South can consume its resources faster, her response is emotional, but no less astute in her criticism of what amounts to a sacrifice of “brothers.” Lavvy asserts: “I had the strength to kill my–my–my–dar–dar–darling can–can–canary birds, but I can’t let my own brother starve.” (116) Lavinia’s reaction recalls the dramatic scene where she killed her beloved pets. It creates a distinct parallel between the violent scene that took place in the domestic setting, and the one that is a government proposal on a grand scale. But this is too much for Lavinia to handle, as she considers the willful disregarding of women’s work and sacrifice:

Lavinia was becoming very tired, and was reflecting that no matter how much a woman, in her unostentatious sphere, may do, and help to do, and no matter how her heart may feel for her beloved, worshiped country, after all she is but an insignificant creature, whom a very young man may snub, simply because he wears very shiny brass buttons and his uncle is in Congress. ‘What a miserable, powerless thing woman is, even in this our country of glorious equality! Here I have been sitting up at night, toiling, and tending disgusting sickness, and now, the first time I come to ask a favor – a favor, do I say? No. I come to demand a right – see how I am received!’ (106)

As a category, woman is an “insignificant creature” left with no say in political matters, though her labor is of use. After her efforts in the halls of Washington, Lavvy returns to the hospital ward, only to find several men sick and one dead. She finds that the men were given rich food to eat. “She became from that day more firmly convinced than ever that *ladies* with hearts and brains were absolutely necessary to her country’s cause. Not merely *paid menials* should attend the sick and wounded, but thoughtful women, who could judiciously order as well as obey in an emergency like this” (129, author’s emphasis) Ruiz de Burton’s use of the discourse of women’s work is powerful here, as the care of soldiers, and the establishment of medical care in general,

becomes an important public outlet for privileged women at the time.<sup>200</sup>

In direct contrast to the Cackles, whose own benevolent work is mediated by their lack of true compassion, Lavvy cries and feels the soldiers' pain most profoundly. On the contrary, "Mrs. Cackle was perfectly satisfied, and told her daughters that Lavvy Sprig was a silly thing to be crying because so many poor fellows died in the hospitals, and so many returned prisoners came back mutilated and looking like skeletons." (159) There is redemption in Lavvy's work but not in the Cackles'. The parallel, where Mrs. Cackle is described, sardonically, as "a good American woman" because "she believed firmly in MANIFEST DESTINY," marks the latter as thoroughly corrupt. (159) But the wounds of the soldiers make a mockery of the "easy patriotism" of Mrs. Cackle. (164) As in all cases, the Cackles pontificate with no regard to the human suffering at hand. Lavvy's only consolation is to bear her suffering as well as that of the soldiers. She does not have the language to express her frustration, and she shrinks from the public discourse on women's rights, as she "was no advocate of 'woman's rights.' She did not understand the subject even, but she smiled sadly, thinking how little woman was appreciated, how unjustly underrated." (129) In a sense, Lavvy's experience runs the trajectory of women's experience, from the pining spinster in her sister's house to the self-assured nurse and persistent political supplicant walking the halls of congress. Her final disappointing experience in Washington eventually leads her home and though her home is brought to rights, she is not the agent of change in the final equation.

### **Free love and passionate women**

While the paths taken by the Sprig sisters offer two options for women of the time, one minor character offers another perspective on the role of women in the home and in the public sphere. In the midst of the planning and counter-planning of Lola's kidnapping, Ruiz de Burton makes a passing reference to two of the cogs in this complicated game: Lola's French maid Mina and her suitor, and Hackwell's underling Sophy. They are of interest because Mina uses her feminine charm to trick Sophy into passing on information about Hackwell's plan. Ruiz de Burton shrugs off this form of sexual manipulation, as Mina is an "advocate" of "free love," saying "she did not want matrimony; she scomed such slavery." (277) While this seems an offhand remark, it's one that clearly references the current debates on women's self-determination. While Mina contemplates the necessity or the meaning or validity of marriage, the other slavery, which Ruiz de Burton awkwardly ignores throughout the novel, is glossed over yet again. The bulk of that reference instead goes to the institution of marriage applicable to free women and upheld as an ideal, but which was at odds with the current notion of romantic love then in vogue.<sup>201</sup> The antebellum manifestations of free love were contemporary with and

---

<sup>200</sup>Kristie Ross, "Arranging a Doll's House: Refined Women as Union Nurses," in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>201</sup>Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing About Domesticity, 1830-1860*, 106-07.

expressed concerns similar to many of the other women's interest movements of the time. Marriage laws left women virtual prisoners, unable to own property as individuals and at the mercy of their husbands. Thomas Nichols, one of the more prominent figures of the movement, wrote of the typical woman's fate:

She has married a husband, perhaps she finds a tyrant; she thought to be united to a tender lover, and finds in him a monster of lust, who profanes her life with disgusting debaucheries. She is his slave, his victim, his tool. Her duty is submission. Her body is prostituted to his morbid passions, her mind must bend submissive to his will, which henceforth is her only law. By the marriage law, the husband can shut his wife up, carry her from one place to another, provide such food and clothing as he sees fit, seize upon and squander her property, and inflict corporal chastisement. The flogging of wives by their husbands, in England, is so common a thing among all classes as to have called out denunciations from the public press . . . <sup>202</sup>

The association of marriage with prostitution, or even worse physical abuse, was a common refrain for the adherents of free love, who saw in typical marriage a calculated market consciousness. While the movement was not altogether lauded by mainstream activists, it carved out a space for discourse about women's domestic and even sexual fulfillment apart from the usual discussion of female morality and duty. At its very essence it was a romantic backlash against the stilted and compromising role that women had in middle class marriages. It was meant as a gesture toward women's affective liberation but grounded in arguments about the legalized repression of women. Hackwell's own plot to entrap Lola into an unhappy marriage, by coercive or dishonest means, echoed the more quotidian forms of domestic bondage enacted in the day. The reference to Mina's beliefs serve as a hint that there could be another option for women that does not involve the convent or marriage.

### **Discrete domestic spaces**

We see at the beginning of the novel, with the family ensconced in its New England village, the propriety of space is respected. The shift in architecture, from this respect for space, to the home in New York, where Jemima Norval and Hackwell have bedrooms adjoined by a secret door, is a sign that the domestic rules of New England are no longer in use with this family. (171) The shift from Puritanical austerity to luxuriant and self-gratifying surroundings is an indication of the Yankee inability to find a simple balance between the affective elements of a home and the material aspects of a house.

When Dr. Norval first returns home, we see as Mrs. Cackle peeks into the Norval house: "Mrs. Cackle looked towards the house . . . the hall door and all of the windows were open."

---

<sup>202</sup>Thomas Low Nichols, "Marriage as It Is," in *Marriage: Its History, Character, and Results*, ed. Thomas Low Nichols and Mary Sargeant Gove Nichols (New York: T. L. Nichols, 1854), 85.

“Peer(ing)” into the windows, “over the pickets,” Mrs. Cackle’s insistence on observing, despite the boundary of the picket fence, indicates the compromised integrity of the home. While Mrs. Cackle cannot enter the property without invitation, she can surely observe activity within the home. This notion that the public and private space have a nominal threshold, one that is reinforced by the manner in which the Norvals worship, is expressed in the family’s Sunday ritual: “At the gate the doctor’s family always separated; he and his wife went to Mr. Hackwell’s church . . .” (63) In a time and place where religious affiliation was one of the more pronounced forms of sectarian tension, the Norval house is divided in its religious doctrinal loyalties. This is a house at odds with itself.

As news of Dr. Norval’s death clears the way for Hackwell to pursue Jemima Norval, he actually moves into the Norval home. Their relocation to New York City facilitates his move, and the new home becomes a repository of secret alliances and spaces, most notably evinced by the secret marriage between Jemima Norval and Hackwell. “I am your lawyer downtown, as well as your husband in this room” he tells her, indicating that sexual intimacy and legal and fiscal matters are equal forms of affective expression. (174) Here we see the pastor’s role evolving, from having an indirect influence on the home to then replacing the husband and bedding the wife. Sneaking in not through the “front” or “side-door,” (Misses Norval or Lavinia, respectively), but by “some crack” in the home – that “crack” being the matron searching for “moral support.”(44)

The Norval household is depicted as the typical New England home, where the inhabitants “curb all emotion and check all show of feeling.” (84) In Dr. Norval’s interior thoughts, the home’s lack of affection and warmth are what drive him to other lands:

Why could not his daughters be affectionate like this poor little orphan? he thought. Because their mother hated anything like a show of affection, and imperiously prohibited it. He sighed, and thought that if his home had not been made so cold and comfortless perhaps he would not have felt so deeply the injustice of the threatened persecution for his political opinions, which was the cause of his voluntarily exiling himself from his country” (84)

It is the lack of affection in the home that makes for a loveless marriage. It makes Ruth superficial and materialistic, and Lavvy turns all of her affection on her animals. Here the connection between familial and national estrangement is clear. Dr. Norval’s sense of emotional loss is depicted as a fatherly loss and a patriotic one.

### **The clerical calling: the domestication of religion**

The question of religion in a novel that includes both Catholic and Protestant characters must necessarily contend with some of the fundamental doctrinal differences that then illustrate societal and personal moral behavior. As the story of a young Mexican Catholic girl adopted by an Anglo Protestant family, the novel most emphatically contends with the issue of the girl’s vulnerability in such a setting. Living with people whose beliefs and politics are in many ways antithetical to her interests, she must, at a young age, learn to navigate this doctrinal minefield. This parallels Ruiz de Burton’s position as a writer who must maneuver through a critique of

many cultural and political truths held dear by her nineteenth century Anglo-phone readers. But Lola's religion does not figure into the narrative very much, as it is much more entertaining to catalogue the misdeeds of the novel's Christians. So rather than narrate a fish-out-of-water story, the novel provides a satirical local color examination of New England religious culture. Ruiz de Burton's representation of the Protestant preachers, their congregations, and the societal effect of their beliefs is unwavering in its condemnation. One of the reasons for this criticism is the role that American Protestantism plays in the public sphere and the domestic sphere.

Part of the novel's critique of northeastern U.S. domesticity involves a discussion of the role of religion both in the civic sphere and in the domestic sphere. One tack to consider is the critique by historian Ann Douglas, who laments the feminization of American Protestantism in the early nineteenth century, finding it emasculating for American clergy and empowering of an insipid sentimentalism associated with women's domestic culture.<sup>203</sup> Douglas sees this transformation of American religion as the culmination of shifting cultural priorities based on economic development. While Douglas's book is an impressive study of the emergence of a sentimental discourse in American religious life and writing, her view of American Protestantism's anemic devolution is fittingly complemented by Ruiz de Burton's depiction of Reverends Hackwell and Hammerhard's foibles. For, inherent in Douglas's argument is the notion that Protestant clergy and middle class women are operating in the same circles, developing a cultural and social intimacy based on shared interests, experiences, and shared feelings of disenfranchisement. In *Who Would Have Thought It?* these pastors are hyper-sexualized men of the world of commerce whose entree into the Norval home awakens women's latent sexual and pecuniary desire. In effect, their influence is the exact opposite of that heralded as the role of the clergy as moral counselor for the community. Hackwell in particular becomes progressively bold in his actions, from serving as the family's pastor and moral advisor on general topics to then gaining the confidence of Jemima Norval on delicate matters pertaining to Lola. It is an intimacy gained by careful study and deceit. Such skills had afforded him (along with his friend Hammerhard) the opportunity and inclination to trick Jemima's younger sister Lavinia Sprig into a physical intimacy accorded the rights of the betrothed. The pastors' (particularly Hackwell's) sexual conquests and drinking habits masculinize them in a debased and animalistic manner. However, they fail to live up to the standards of true Victorian manhood, which is characterized by moral integrity, the suppression of appetites, and discretion.<sup>204</sup> While these differing notions of manhood express some of the anxiety of the age over class and culture-specific expressions of manliness, they allow the characters to inhabit characteristics that seem at odds. This is why as a clergyman (a profession often feminized in this era), Hackwell can indulge his baser appetites in a show of hyper-masculinity and be a coward in the field of battle who shows no manly qualities. In the end, his is a compromised manhood but not because he is bookish or has retreated from the masculine world of commerce. Julian, the obvious counter to Hackwell, is the model of Victorian manhood for his fearlessness and his obsession with reputation, to the point of nearly committing suicide. His propensity for being wounded on the

---

<sup>203</sup>Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*.

<sup>204</sup>Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

field, as a result of that fearlessness, almost becomes a running joke in the novel, as his near-death experiences threaten to ruin his sisters' sartorial investments should they have to go into mourning. And when he is in bed recovering from his battle wounds, pale and lifeless, it is not a show of femininity, but a sign of courage and patriotism. That the narrator never shows any concern about Julian's guardianship of Lola and time spent alone with her indicates that he is entirely trustworthy for his muted sexuality.

While it is tempting to say that Hackwell the clergyman straddles the worlds of commerce and domesticity, such an assertion does an injustice to the complicated nature of his confidence game within the Norval home, and Ruiz de Burton would say within the republic. The fierce alliance created between women and clergymen, through benevolent associations and reform work, characterizes the stereotypical depiction of their aligned advocacy. Hackwell's convenient resignation from the clergy and resumption of a secular life shows the facile relation between a Protestant clerical calling and a worldly life. Given the novel's critical assessment of Reverend Hackwell, and Protestantism by extension, it is notable for its silence on the social role of the Catholic priest at this time. Industrial development in Boston and New York made those cities particularly attractive to the masses of Irish Catholic immigrants who arrived beginning in the 1840s. Their swelling numbers prompted nativist campaigns that focused on the incongruity between democracy and Catholicism due to the overriding influence of the papacy and the clergy by extension. A common literary reflection of this sentiment was the novel of sacramental seduction or the convent captivity narrative, mentioned above. The typical storyline of a Catholic priest as "lecherous father confessor" intent on seducing young Protestant women was mockingly posited as the perfect vocation for Hackwell had he chosen to join the priesthood.<sup>205</sup> The next best thing for the lustful Hackwell, to be a pastor to women in search of a "spiritual advisor," turns the anti-Catholic stereotype on its head. (44) The Protestant distrust of priestly celibacy, represented in popular culture as an untenable life choice, essentially arose out of a weariness toward any alternatives to the "domestic project" of the nuclear family.<sup>206</sup> But here, Ruiz de Burton shows the incongruity between a clerical vocation and a worldly life made up of taking the "rights of betrothed" courtship, marriage, or seduction. (159) Essentially, it is the intimacy between Protestant clergy and civilian women, beginning with their ability to marry, that opens the floodgates to lechery in this novel.

And while mainstream American culture and religion seemed to advocate for the family, Ruiz de Burton's critique of cultural and religious practices shows a concern over the way they are working against each other. American individualism fractures the family, as the narrator says: "Parents choose it for their children, although children in this country are generally an exception." (66) The Norval daughters, joined by Lavinia, attend Hammerhard's church, while Mr. and Mrs. Norval attend Hackwell's. The splitting of the family along these denominational lines is Ruiz de Burton's way of pointing out the absurdity of both the Protestant proliferation of religious sects and the American propensity for individualism to the point of familial division. Mrs. Norval's great concern over Lola's religious education rings hypocritical in this context, as

---

<sup>205</sup>Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism*, 120.

<sup>206</sup>*Ibid.*

she shows no interest regarding her daughters' choice of church. (63) The doctor decides, after four years, to send Lola to a convent because it is what her mother wished. (66) From this ensues an argument with his wife, who thinks about this in evangelical terms. Ruiz de Burton seems to be critiquing the presumption of care, or benevolence, that it asks so much of those it presumes to help, in this instance, wanting Lola to convert, or assuming that it is the best option for her.

It is fitting that Mrs. Norval is drawn to Hackwell's church since the Presbyterian church was one of the most traditional and conservative. It was one of the most accommodating to the cause of slavery. It was one of the most traditional, refusing to come out against the slavery cause when so many were calling for it. Later, when Mrs. Norval has a romantic relationship with Hackwell, she rationalizes that she loves Hackwell because he hates all the same things she hates. Hackwell is all "fire and brimstone," as he is of the "old school." (136) This would account for the difference in temperament between Mrs. Norval and the rest of the family.

With a man of the cloth in the house, it is only fitting that his lover would be no less than the incarnation of the Virgin Mary herself. When discussing Mrs. Norval's commands upon the other women in the family, Lavvy notes that "Jenny is a tyrant." But Emma Hackwell comes to her defense, noting that Mrs. Norval is a "noble woman," the "best Christian, best mother," and "perfectly unselfish." (138) Lola's sarcastic retort, that Emma makes Mrs. Norval out to be "the equal of the Virgin Mary," is lost on Emma, who believes that to be a good comparison. The Marian cult and the cult of true womanhood seem at odds here. But the Protestant mother, ever selfless, was often depicted as a saintly figure. The narrative of Jemima Norval's suffering is clothed in the same rhetoric of domestic literature, adhering to the standard saintly representation of the enduring woman.<sup>207</sup> Ruiz de Burton means to criticize the veneration of middle class womanhood in American culture. This reverence for women is an expression of subjugation, as the woman's saintliness is in proportion to her suffering. If Jemima Norval were not quite as wicked or as hateful as she is, it might ring less hollow. But her stance, as an abolitionist, as a mother, a wife, a parishioner, a sister, all bear witness to her selfishness.

## Conclusion

The republication of Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* through the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project has provided the field of nineteenth century American fiction with a fresh perspective on U.S. culture in the years leading to and including the Civil War. Ruiz de Burton's unyielding critique of U.S. culture – both domestic and civic – is impressive as it is written for U.S. readers and it makes no concessions to the national myths held most dear. Most notable among them: the sanctity of the home, the faith in government, and the belief that moral integrity pervades all aspects of American life – from the founding of the country to the social relations that occur in everyday life.

While Helen Hunt Jackson's and Richard Henry Dana's depictions of Mexicans have historically been the most dominant in American letters – both books were best-sellers – the recovery of the novels of Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton have provided new insight into the narrative strategies that Mexican Californians employed in describing their fate under U.S.

---

<sup>207</sup>Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, 47, 60.

westward expansion. One must remember that Dana's depictions are of a foreign people on a foreign land, even if he did half-heartedly entertain thoughts of U.S. annexation at such an early stage. While Jackson's depictions of Mexicans are not particularly sympathetic, the true protagonists of her novel are the California Indians, she fleshes them out and gives them complex characters and motivation, relying on the Mexican Californians to provide the local color that was so appealing to readers at that time. Ruiz de Burton's two novels counter contemporary portrayals of Mexican women and offer alternative representations to those circulating in Anglo-phone literature. As an insider writing in English for Anglo Americans, Ruiz de Burton negotiated that fine line between advocacy and regionalist nostalgia, employing a "complex system of cultural coding, aesthetic desire, and oppositional purpose"<sup>208</sup> When writing to include Mexicans into English language fiction – not as nameless plot devices or as exotic background but as normalized characters – she did just that.

---

<sup>208</sup>Genaro M. Padilla, *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 6. Genaro Padilla's description of the narrative strategies of Californio autobiographers seems to apply quite well to Ruiz de Burton's fictional projects.



#### Chapter 4: “Peering into the closets of the bedrooms”: Degenerate Domesticity in Frank Norris’s *McTeague*

When another generation shall have doubled the census  
of our city, and to that vast army of workers, held captive  
by poverty, the very name of home shall be as a bitter mockery,  
what will the harvest be?<sup>209</sup>

The home is a beautiful ideal, but have we no others?  
‘My Country’ touches a deeper chord than even ‘Home Sweet Home’<sup>210</sup>

In his review of Frank Norris’s novel *McTeague* in the March 1899 issue of *Literature*, William Dean Howells commends the young author’s literary talent and vision, but tempers this praise with vague misgivings about a novel that could so easily engage the more unseemly subject matter of the day. Norris’s failing, in the venerated author-editor’s assessment, is his omission of the redemptive and noble aspects of life. This is no small oversight, as it keeps the work from achieving “the impartial fidelity of the photograph,” in its representation, which Howells sees as the defining characteristic of realist fiction.<sup>211</sup> In the context of the entire review, this one point appears to be but a quibble, but it is one that strikes at the heart of genre debates of the day over what constituted a true representation of experience. It should be noted that Howells’s review of *McTeague* is a two-fold response: it is first and foremost a thoughtful and measured assessment of Norris’s novel; but it is also a direct challenge to Lillian Bell, a popular novelist of the day who the previous month had caused an “intellectual sensation” when she made some scurrilous remarks about the state of American fiction, particularly the brand of realist literature that Howells championed as editor.<sup>212</sup> She calls for a more strident tone, free of the “Puritanical element” and the “American girl’s” standard of taste, something apart from what she posits as the current trend of “clever details,” “witty conversations,” and “delicate touches,”

---

<sup>209</sup>Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Dover, 1971).

<sup>210</sup>Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972).

<sup>211</sup>William Dean Howells, “A Case in Point,” in *Criticism and Fiction, and Other Essays*, ed. Clara Marburg Kirk and Rudolph Kirk (New York: New York University Press, 1959), 282.

<sup>212</sup>“Last Week in Chicago: Criticisms by Lillian Bell,” *The New York Times*, February 19 1899, 13. Bell’s address before the Baptist Social Union received some measure of notoriety. She was known for having authored the humorous novel *The Love Affairs of an Old Maid* (1893) and was a contributor to *The Ladies’ Home Journal*. Bell’s criticism was part of a backlash against what was considered the high-minded, dense, and intellectual literature that was being published by the most prestigious magazines of the day.

all signs of “American overdone self-consciousness.”<sup>213</sup> Howells’s wry response to the “lady novelist of Chicago” – to counter that Norris’s lurid tale of violence and depravity should be the “inevitable consequence of expansion in fiction” that she so seeks, serves as both a challenge and dismissal of her criticism of the mores of American realism. For Howells, his embrace of Norris’s work, and the fact of *McTeague*’s presence on the literary scene, show that Bell’s complaints are unfounded. But *McTeague* does surpass the mark, and does challenge the proprieties that Howells holds dear, if only because they are “the beginning of civilization.”<sup>214</sup> Balancing himself between Bell’s call for a more passionate portrayal of real life, and Norris’s execution of that call, proves difficult. In the end, Howells decides that in subject matter and aesthetic temperament, *McTeague* disregards the rules of social convention because it requires a shift from the normative literary experience. Taking a cue from Bell’s excoriation of a reading public that insists “We will have nothing on our walls, on our book shelves, that our daughters cannot look at or read in the presence of young men,” Howells notes that *McTeague*, in fact, cannot be freely read in the home or shared between all members of a family.<sup>215</sup> His assessment of the novel concludes with the following lines:

It is a little inhuman, and it is distinctly not for the walls of living-rooms, where the ladies of the family sit and the children go in and out. This may not be a penalty, but it is the inevitable consequence of expansion in fiction.<sup>216</sup>

Howells’s assessment was, in fact, one of the more positive reviews of *McTeague*, which was otherwise received with “general thin-lipped disapproval” by most critics, who found the novel’s tone and subject matter profoundly discomfiting, perhaps because they indicated a shift in the aesthetic and moral role of literature.<sup>217</sup> Howells’s reservations about *McTeague*’s place in the American home, if not in American letters, was not one to be taken lightly. As the former editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, the preeminent cultural magazine of the day, and current editor of the highly regarded magazine *Harper’s Monthly*, Howells’s opinions were respected and had consequences in the publishing world.<sup>218</sup> He is the historical literary figure most associated with the critical success and lionization of high literary realism, a cerebral form of the genre most associated with Henry James. His editorial support of realist fiction in the 1880s, especially local color writing, had helped usher in a very profitable and favorable symbiotic relationship between

---

<sup>213</sup>Ibid.

<sup>214</sup>Howells, “A Case in Point,” 280.

<sup>215</sup>“Last Week in Chicago: Criticisms by Lillian Bell,” 13.

<sup>216</sup>Howells, “A Case in Point,” 282.

<sup>217</sup>Ernest Marchand, “1899 Reviews of *McTeague*,” in *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977), 330.

<sup>218</sup>Howells worked for *The Atlantic Monthly* as assistant editor (1866-1871) and editor (1871-1881), then for *Harper’s Monthly* as an editorial columnist (1886-1892) and (1899-1909).

the great magazines of the day and a number of realist short story writers who graced their pages.<sup>219</sup> While Howells and Norris were friendly, and Howells was a great champion of the young author's work, as an editor Howells did not extend assistance when it came to publishing Norris's fiction in his own magazine. The lurid and violent images that Norris found indispensable expressions of his romantic vision were beyond the purview of *Harper's Monthly*.

Howells's comment about the inappropriateness of *McTeague*'s placement in the typical home, one where women and children reside, brings to mind that there were some forms of literature that were in fact considered not only appropriate but requisite accessories for the home. This truism is expressed in the frontispiece of *The American Woman's Home*, by sisters Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe. (Fig. 4.1) The equation of moral integrity with the home as a physical space is emblematic of the priorities of realism – to reaffirm middle class manners, concerns, and spaces. Howells's statement implied that the subject matter of Norris's book, and by extension the work of the other naturalists, could contaminate or compromise the integrity of the middle class home space through its mere presence in the parlor. As the most public room in the home, the parlor showcased a family's values and interests to visitors. It was a space where the intimate knowledge of the home was moderated for the outside world. To quote Norris's contemporary Charlotte Perkins Gilman:

knowledge of each other's homes is obtained principally by 'calling' and the more elaborate forms of social entertainments. The caller only reaches the specially prepared parlour or reception room.<sup>220</sup>

The parlor was characterized by its conditional availability to the world and its conscious staging or performance of an idealized self.<sup>221</sup> It is in this context that the parlor emerges as a site of so much anxious contemplation by Howells. As the moderator between the more private spaces of the house and the outside world, the parlor acted as a filter and commentary on the private desires and contentions that informed public concerns. Norris's presentation of the parlor in *McTeague*, along with the more private spaces of characters' homes – the closets and bedrooms – enact a literary reconfiguration of the home and of those public spaces that serve as extensions of the home. This chapter examines how these domestic spaces are determined by economics into cultural expressions of desire: for material goods and for sexual gratification. Those spaces become emblematic of these desires, and when they are thwarted in two instances, both men kill their wives. To reconfigure the use and significance of the parlor, as Norris does, is to reconfigure the narrative of social relations in nineteenth century U.S. culture. To what purpose, one may ask, but to show that the old rules of social decorum, expressed by how the characters in

---

<sup>219</sup>Richard H. Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>220</sup>Gilman, *The Home: Its Work and Influence*, 65.

<sup>221</sup>Colleen McDannell, "Parlor Piety: The Home as Sacred Space in Protestant America," in *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*, ed. Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).



Fig. 4.1: Frontispiece of *The American Woman's Home*, by Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

the novel move and interact in these spaces, were not adequate for dealing with a world in economic, cultural, and geographic transition.

### The Cultural Process of Reading

In that same review of *McTeague*, Howells dryly notes:

Polite readers of the sort who do not like to meet in fiction people of the sort they never meet in society will not have a good time in "*McTeague*," for there is really not a society person in the book.<sup>222</sup>

To speak of "meet"ing "people" in fiction as one would in society brings the novel, and its attendant subject matter, into the parlors of middle class homes, where the majority of fiction readers spent much of their leisure time reading. It speaks of a distinctly "intimate" literary experience that employs the metaphor of the home as an expression of the act of reading and writing.<sup>223</sup> While Howells's warning seems to reveal a certain bourgeois conceit that polite society would not want to know the concerns of that other half who struggle in daily life, on another level it also reveals the role of literature as a form of companionship far exceeding the passing acquaintance that we now attribute to our most cherished writers-of and characters-in fiction.<sup>224</sup> In this light, the domestic metaphor expresses an intimacy with literature that draws on reading and writing practices modeled on social interactions. Norris expresses as much when he describes the literary tastes of his character Curtis Jadwin in *The Pit*, whose appreciation of Howells's fiction is expressed in affectionate regard for one of his protagonists: "Lapham he loved as a brother."<sup>225</sup> Such practices create a reciprocal intimacy, divulging the secret desires of fictive acquaintance, but in exchange demanding as much from readers. When an author oversteps the conventional boundaries of polite interaction, he or she in essence is betraying the public literary trust. This can be quite shocking in the context of Norris's subject matter and

---

<sup>222</sup>Howells, "A Case in Point," 281. This discourse of acquaintance was common in the period. For an example of the way that critics imagined the meeting of characters, see Nancy Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 152.

<sup>223</sup>William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 76, no. 451 (1887): 154.

<sup>224</sup>While Howells's comment is a warning to "polite readers of the sort . . ." it does not mean that he is reading his own predilections. The tone is sardonic, and Howells did champion the struggles of working people.

<sup>225</sup>Frank Norris, *The Pit: A Story of Chicago* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1903), 216. This, of course, is a reference to the eponymous character of *The Rise of Silas Lapham*.

work, as his characters engage some of the baser desires: sadomasochism, hints of necrophilia, and the usual greed and murderous impulses. While the subject matter alone is disturbing, the way the characters accommodate themselves and become accustomed to their degradation, is most telling. It speaks to a literature of a new morality and brings “polite” readers into that world by virtue of Norris’s work’s promotion and publication as a work of serious fiction. While the cultural disposition to find acquaintance with literature insinuated a reciprocal intimacy into the act of reading in the home, the layouts of the popular magazines (publishing fiction along with more domestic pursuits), promoted a “relationship between reading and domestic life,” in effect cementing that connection.<sup>226</sup>

To speak of the social and cultural role of literature as a form of companionship – one located in the parlor, hence the home – is to then assume that the broader world of social dysfunction would also be accessible within the “walls of living rooms” of polite readers. Howell’s discomfort over *McTeague*’s presence in parlors reveals the intimate association between reading and domestic life. Only months after Howell’s review is published, Norris pens a literary treatise, “A Plea for Romantic Fiction,” that revels in the use of the domestic metaphor to argue for an engaged form of literature and approach to life that did away with bourgeois conventions. In the domestic analogy Norris draws, most likely in direct response to Howells’s comments about *McTeague*’s unsuitability for “living rooms, where the ladies sit,” but also as a commentary on the role of fiction in domestic life, we get a sense of the way that naturalism inhabits the same spaces as the domestic or the realist novel, but it does so by exposing the secrets that those other genres find indelicate. It should be noted here that Norris uses the term “romance” to describe what his contemporaries and scholars and even Norris himself at times refer to as naturalism. Norris’s assertion, that romance need not be confined to the exotic medieval setting that characterized the popular sensationalistic literature of the day, but that it could populate the same spaces as serious, or realist fiction, bears out in the domestic analogy. With both genres anthropomorphized here he writes:

Realism . . . is the visit to my neighbor’s house, a formal visit, from which I will draw no conclusions. Realism bows upon the doormat and goes away and says to me, as we link arms on the sidewalk: “That is life.” And I say it is not. It is not, as you would very well see if you took Romance with you to call upon your neighbor.

Would you take her across the street to your neighbor’s front parlor . . . would you introduce her there?

So you think Romance would stop in the front parlor and discuss medicated flannels and mineral waters with the ladies? . . . She would be off upstairs with you, prying, peeping, peering into the closets of the bedrooms, into the nursery, into the sitting-room. She would find a heart-ache (maybe) between the pillows of the mistress’s bed, and a memory carefully secreted in the master’s

---

<sup>226</sup>Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910*,

It is this search for the secret world of base desires and actions that Norris claims to explore, like a nosy neighbor or a servant who cannot mind his or her business. But what is most telling is that his insatiable *Romance*, here anthropomorphized, is greedily mapping out the familiar realist architecture of the bourgeois home and exploring all of its private nooks. What is most striking about this metaphor is that the layout of the naturalist home is here imagined as no different materially or architecturally than the realist space. But the naturalist home is revealed, through a more aggressive and earnest analysis, to house an underbelly of secret desires and transgressions beneath a veil of conformity and propriety.

Whether Howells's or Norris's use of the domestic setting in their discussion of naturalism has any specific reference or source beyond the comments of Lillian Bell is unclear. But it is apt that they each chose to address the appropriateness of *McTeague* – and of the naturalist genre in general – by imagining the consumption and creation of literature in a the home. These are just three instances that reveal the pervasive cultural preoccupation with the sanctity of the private home dependent upon the presence of literature as a consumable and as a creative element in that home. This imagined discussion between Norris and Howells also registers the cultural preoccupation with the symbolic and material role of the middle class home in the discussion about the role and significance of literature in the final years of the nineteenth century. As two active participants in the publishing world, both as fiction authors and critics, they were familiar with the nuts and bolts of an industry that catered to an ideal reader/consumer who sat in his or her parlor reading articles aloud for all to share in the experience. In fact, Noah Porter had advised on such practices in his popular *Books and Reading*.<sup>228</sup> When that subject-matter turned to sado-masochism, murder, and general violence, the reading sessions would have to shift from shared family experiences to private ones. Given the images depicted in *McTeague*, it is pertinent to wonder if readers should “abandon the old-fashioned American ideal of a novel as something which may be read by all ages and sexes, for the European notion of it as something fit only for age and experience, and for men rather than women.” In essence this “expansion in fiction” would necessitate a contraction of the reading public even as it acquired a more international flavor.

*Harper's Monthly*, *The Century*, and the *Atlantic Monthly* were securely positioned in that middle class living room that Howells imagined as the consumer of a realist literature that reaffirmed middle class values and ideals. That Howells saw the inevitability of a need to quarantine *McTeague* – seeing it as a bit of writing to be exiled from the homes of polite society – is indicative of contemporary discourse about the integrity of the middle class home space and the belief that its maintenance and its expression had a moral imperative. While one of the grand acknowledgments at the core of mid-nineteenth century literature – most clearly expressed by the

---

<sup>227</sup>Frank Norris, *The Responsibilities of the Novelist, and Other Literary Essays* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1903), 215-18.

<sup>228</sup>Noah Porter, *Books and Reading; or, What Books Shall I Read and How Shall I Read Them?* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1881). Howells also posits this as the norm, see Howells, "A Case in Point," 280.

domestic novel – had been that the home was the font of civility and that a proper home had a calming influence on greater society, a later generation would have a different opinion on this matter. Here, Howells expresses the shift in perception with the home serving not as a buffer or refuge from the ills of the world at large, but instead as a vulnerable space susceptible to outside influence. Any cultural expression of anxiety about the vulnerability of the middle class home had ample sources at the time. From the economic instability of the latter decades of the nineteenth century, to other cumulative factors that led to the dismantling of middle class comforts, including the increasing urbanization of the general population, a swelling immigrant underclass, a shift to large-scale manufacturing that effectively downplayed opportunities for self-employment, there emerged a sense that the middle class home could not provide a stable counter to the vicissitudes of modern life.

### **The Home as a Site of Social Inquiry**

After decades of steady economic growth, the depression of the 1890s and increasing destitution in urban centers compounded the assault on both middle and working class households. Alan Trachtenberg sums up the contradictions of the Gilded Age as "a period of great economic growth, of steadily rising per capita wealth, and new urban markets . . ." that created massive inequalities. The "international 'great depression' from 1873 to 1896" "afflicted all industrial nations with chronic overproduction and dramatically falling prices, market uncertainties . . . extended layoffs and irregular employment, and worsening conditions, even starvation, for industrial workers."<sup>229</sup> In this social context, Norris's novel of social and economic descent voices his characters' uneasiness about the possible loss of their recently acquired middle class practices and comforts. *McTeague* offers a vision of degenerative domesticity as a married couple experience emotional and financial hardship and a drop in economic and social status. That drop in status is overwhelming, and it eventually destroys any sense of domestic contentment and economic stability, characteristics that had once defined their home. What replaces it is a convoluted exchange of violence and desire that eventually ends in Mac's murder of Trina.

I provide here a quick summary of the plot. The novel traces the downfall of a number of characters, urban dwellers, ethnic types, that people the streets and modest homes of San Francisco's Polk Street. The primary couple, Mac and Trina, receive the most narrative attention. But Maria and Zerkow, two social outcasts who live on the periphery of Mac and Trina's lives, mirror their trajectory in important ways. Mac is a former car-boy from the mines, where he lived by brute strength. The son of an alcoholic father and an "overworked drudge" mother, Mac learns his trade as a dentist from an itinerant fraud. We meet him in his parlors in San Francisco, where he runs an unlicensed practice catering to the people of Polk Street. Mac's friendship with Marcus Schouler is strained when he falls in love with Marcus's cousin and intended, Trina Sieppe, while working on her teeth. She returns Mac's attention, and just before they marry she wins the lottery. This frustrates and angers Marcus, who retaliates by reporting Mac's illegal

---

<sup>229</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 39.



practice to the authorities. Meanwhile Maria, the boarding house cleaning woman, has developed a relationship with Zerkow, the rags-bottles-sacks man, that seems fundamentally based on his obsession with a story that Maria repeats on demand about a gold plate service. Despondent over his lost practice, Mac begins to drink, revealing a cruel and sadistic alter-ego, and he begins to beat and torture Trina. She in turn has become a miser, refusing to spend the lottery winnings to maintain their lifestyle. Her friendship with Maria develops in this period, as they are now social equals. Trina insists upon moving into cheaper and cheaper lodgings until finally Zerkow's murder of Maria (she loses her mania and forgets the story, prompting him to kill her) frees up their shack, and Trina jumps at the chance of moving into the space. Soon after, Mac steals the money and eventually kills Trina. He then escapes to the mountains, but with the law on his trail he recedes further, eventually ending up in the desert. There, Marcus, now a cowpoke deputy, finds him and the two struggle to the death. The final scene leaves Mac taking in the severity of his situation as he scans the horizon, handcuffed to Marcus, who is now dead. His mule lies dead and his canary near death.

Two other couples on the periphery of their lives provide alternative stories of exchange and desire. Zerkow and Maria, a Jewish bottles and junk man and a Mexican cleaning maid, are two outcasts on the margins of society who initially stand in stark contrast to Mac and Trina. They live in a shack in the alley adjoining the boarding house where Mac and Trina live. As Mac and Trina fall upon hard times, the two couples come to resemble each other in their violent interactions. At one point in their friendship, the two women proudly exchange battle stories about how their husbands beat them, "each trying to make out that her own husband was the most cruel."<sup>230</sup> The other couple, Old Grannis and Miss Baker, are two older single residents who live in the same boarding house with Mac and Trina. It is obvious to everyone else in the building that the two are interested in each other, but their sense of decorum is ruled by an extravagant adherence to Victorian manners and they do not speak because they have not been properly introduced. Their inability to express themselves is a foil for the overly expressive exchanges between Mac and Trina and Zerkow and Maria. Their social position as renters creates a situation that opens the possibility of upward mobility, as when Mac and Trina contemplate renting a home to establish their family. But renting also puts them in a precarious economic situation, as when Mac loses his job and they move to cheaper and cheaper lodgings in a downward economic spiral. For if the realist writers encountered "the problem of inhabiting and representing rented space," for the naturalists it is compounded by the shift from banal concerns about rental contracts and neighborhoods to tragic and monumental consequences of lost jobs and domestic abuse.<sup>231</sup>

In the midst of social unrest and economic turmoil the primacy of the home becomes subordinated to a growing professional class of educators, health care workers, social workers, reformists, trained to act as municipal or civic housekeepers. As a professional class of experts become trusted sources in the discourse on national development, the home is increasingly seen

---

<sup>230</sup>Frank Norris, *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977), 174. Hereafter cited in parenthesis.

<sup>231</sup>Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 12.

as the source of societal problems stemming from domestic abuse, overcrowding, poverty, and other afflictions of economic inequality that are best exemplified in the urban tenements that house the many immigrants coming into the U.S. This transformation of the imaginative architecture of the American home was representative of a number of evolving concepts that marked the struggle to define U.S. subjectivity in this period. The home went from being portrayed as a private refuge that could alleviate the ill effects of the world to become a space of questionable value run by sometimes cruel, sometimes incompetent women; it became an object of study by experts and outsiders who sought to stem the dysfunction that spilled onto the streets of urban America. If the subject was a product of his environment, the obvious answer for reformists and other thoughtful citizens seemed to be that there must be programs for social progress to affect a change in surroundings. The naturalists met such questions with varied responses. Norris's own answer, judging from *McTeague*, seems to be that the social fabric that holds together the productive members of society is threadbare, susceptible to any misfortune that could tear it all to pieces. The inevitability of an atavistic end for characters of naturalist novels – moral, psychological, and physical degeneration – can be used to point to Norris's (and by extension the naturalists') disregard for the projects and sentiments of the reformers. Atavism and degeneration would seem impervious to the social programs that attempted to alleviate the ills of society. And as such, this outlook can be construed as a rejection of the public role that women were starting to take outside of the domestic sphere, through forms of employment or philanthropic clubs, to affect societal change in a socially approved manner.<sup>232</sup>

We must remember that one of the most shocking scenes in *McTeague* takes place in one of these spaces that embodied the social reform movement. Mac kills Trina in the cloakroom of a kindergarten established by society women, the “grand ladies” of Van Ness Avenue, for the benefit of working class children. Imported from Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, kindergartens were touted as the most innovative form of structured early education. As a pet project of the ladies of leisure, the kindergarten was both an innovative and foreign educational endeavor, and in this instance it is a genteel form of charity for the poor children of the neighborhood. It also required participants across class, as these schools were commissioned and funded with the philanthropy of wealthy women, employing educated middle class teachers and working class janitors, for the benefit of working class children.<sup>233</sup> The mention of the little

---

<sup>232</sup>Philanthropy “protected even loose associations of women against the charge of frivolity by giving distinct purpose to their gatherings and by allowing women sequestered in the home entree into the public sphere in an acceptable way.” Patricia Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 118.

<sup>233</sup>Kindergarten proponent Emily Shirreff expressed the need for a public-sector supplement to the home: “The influence of a very wide example from above would gradually and unconsciously tell through many grades below: especially would it tell upon infant schools, which for the poor must necessarily be in great measure the substitute for the mother’s care. Emily Shirreff, “What Is Women's Work in the World,” *Journal of Education* 10, no. 232 (1888): 520.

"colored" girl and the daughter of the butcher are indications of the class distinction between the recipients and the sponsors. (212) It was an early example of the extension of domestic science into the public sphere. As such, it served as part of the discourse on philanthropic work that promoted a civic domesticity, "the club expanded and reinterpreted the home circle so that neighbor and city as well as nation might be conceived of as extended family."<sup>234</sup>

And it is in just such a space that Mac leaves Trina lifeless and bloodied, only to be found by a gaggle of schoolchildren, one commenting that the schoolroom smells like her father's butcher shop. But a re-consideration of this story of degeneration and violence can reveal that but for the vicissitudes of economic instability that seem to incite this sort of behavior, people of the precarious working class can lead ordinary, even dull, lives. But that is an easy dismissal, since McTeague shows that there is a class of people who can lead ordinary lives and whose fates might shift once they suffer the vicissitudes of economic instability and social discontent: immigrants, the working class or poor, and the uneducated.

### **Institutions of Domestic Practice**

This shift in the perception of the American domestic space – from being a source of refuge to being the source of social turmoil – is apparent when comparing *The American Woman's Home*, published in 1872, by sisters Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe and *The Home: Its Work and Influence*, published in 1903, by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. While active as educators and writers, the Beecher sisters, daughters of the prominent preacher Lyman Beecher, were known for their advocacy of domestic science in an attempt to valorize domestic practices. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, great granddaughter of Lyman Beecher through Catharine and Harriet's sister, Mary Foote Beecher, would come to express an absolute distrust in the practices of domestic culture in her scathing critiques of women's roles in the home and society, and most famously in her short story "The Yellow Wallpaper." Gilman's book, *The Home*, cast opposite *The American Woman's Home* by the Beecher sisters, seems a proper bookend to the nineteenth century expressions of domestic culture. There are profound differences between the ideals espoused by the Beecher sisters and their great-niece Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The nature of housekeeping becomes a contentious issue, for in the Beecher sisters' tome, it is a means to an end. The toil of housekeeping results in a healthy and happy home. With Gilman, it becomes the compendium of mechanical acts that are stripped of any affective motivation:

The effect of the home, as it now is, upon marriage is a vitally interesting study. Two people, happily mated, sympathetic physically and mentally, having many common interests and aspirations, proceed after marrying to enter upon the business of 'keeping house,' or 'home-making.' This business is not marriage, it is not parentage, it is not child-culture. It is the running of the commissary and dormitory departments of life, with elaborate lavatory processes.<sup>235</sup>

---

<sup>234</sup>Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*, 118.

<sup>235</sup>Gilman, *The Home: Its Work and Influence*, 69.

Trina's own initiation into the world of married life, and housekeeping equally serves to blunt her passionate response to her marriage, "Trina's emotions, oscillating at first from one extreme to another, commenced to settle themselves . . . Her household duties began more and more to absorb her attention, for she was an admirable housekeeper, keeping the little suite in marvelous good order and regulating the schedule of expenditure with an economy that often bordered on positive niggardliness. It was a passion with her to save money." (106-07) Here Trina's housekeeping is a distraction from the affective relation that serves as the basis for the household. Rather than bring balance, it just serves to mask her misgivings about the marriage.

Aside from the act of cleaning house, the sisters have a staunch faith in the regenerative qualities of home life, while Gilman seems to have more faith in the public agents that are in a position to oversee domestic life. "Against the real dangers of modern life the home is no safeguard," she says, "So far as the home is protected it is through social progress – through public sanitation enforced by law and the public guardians of the peace."<sup>236</sup> In her opinion, the public sphere is the enlightened and edifying orbit that ideally will have a beneficial effect on the private sphere. And while both Gilman and the Beecher sisters disparage the dangers of the home: uncleanness, stale air, certain unhealthy practices, there is a difference. The big shift I see here between Gilman and the Beecher sisters is that Gilman has faith in institutions outside the home to provide social fulfillment. This is a big shift that we can trace to the emergent institutions of surveillance and maintenance, or "civic housekeeping" that helped create sanitation standards, an educational system etc. This serves to counter the home with the public sphere, setting the national domestic realm as the orbit of influence and regeneration.

The scales of the domestic, constituting both the national domestic space and the private-sphere familial space, find common ground in representations of domestic life throughout *McTeague*. The novel's depiction of degenerative domesticity, through economic and material downfall and violence, provides a window into concurrent discourses on domestic relations both at the national level and in the private home. One of the elements that distinguishes *McTeague* from other texts that address domestic issues in this study is the prurient subject matter and the violence. While those violent elements are significant elements of the novel, their placement within the narrative context of a marriage and a household under duress is all the more striking for the contrast that it paints, and it serves to reconfigure the representation of the domestic space in a manner that is decidedly new. Geography plays a large role in this shift, as San Francisco serves as an imaginative liminal space. But it also speaks to a reorientation of space as a cultural determinant. When writing about the possible aesthetic and philosophical shift in American letters, Howells says: "It ought not to be strange that the impulse in this direction would have come from California, where . . . a continental American fiction began."<sup>237</sup>

### Genre and the Domestic Setting

Affective relations, most clearly portrayed through coupling, serve as a symbolic and

---

<sup>236</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>237</sup>Howells, "A Case in Point," 280.

metonymic representation of the home. As such, this chapter's examination of both the symbolic and material representations of home life in the novel address the discomfort over changing cultural attitudes about domestic life and its promises. What Norris has to say about the degenerative home, as a reflection of social ills, or about marital relations, or individual atavism, is a reflection of the genre commentaries of the time. Additionally, the author's preoccupation with the portrayal of ethnic types, which some scholars have interpreted as the "symbolic embodiment of the Other," or as racial inferiors branded as "urban primitives," brings the expression of naturalist tropes into a socio-historical context.<sup>238</sup> This seems to be the crux of the connection between scales of the domestic and the genre discussions initiated by the naturalists over what constituted true representation. But before going further, it is necessary to clarify the field. As a naturalist novel, *McTeague* is often examined through a certain prism that is concerned with the yardstick of naturalism, leading to some decidedly ahistorical questions about the genre's concerns. Consider for instance, how realism always brings up issues about bourgeois identity in a historical context, but when it comes to naturalism, the conversation turns to atavism and primal human desires.

Much of this attention to genre is traceable to Norris himself, who conspicuously positioned his own writing in opposition to many of his realist contemporaries. If Norris saw his work as a reaction to what he saw as the stultifying effects of realist literature, which he characterized as too constrained, too quotidian, as lacking in romance, then he was working against his own milieu. Of realist subject matter and expression, he writes:

This is the real Realism. It is the smaller details of every-day life, things that are likely to happen between lunch and supper, small passions, restricted emotions, dramas of the reception-room, tragedies of an afternoon call, crises involving cups of tea. Every one will admit there is no romance here. The novel is interesting—which is after all the main point—but it is the commonplace tale of commonplace people made into a novel of far more than commonplace charm. Mr. Howells is not uninteresting; he is simply not romantic . . . The naturalist takes no note of common people, common in so far as their interests, their lives, and the things that occur in them are common, are ordinary. Terrible things must happen to the characters of the naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched out from the quiet, uneventful round of every-day life, and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death."<sup>239</sup>

Norris's proclamation, that the "naturalist takes no note of common people," brings us to the

---

<sup>238</sup>James Richard Giles, *The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel in America* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 32, Gina M. Rossetti, *Imagining the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 98.

<sup>239</sup>Frank Norris, "Zola as a Romantic Writer," in *McTeague: An Authoritative Text*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977), 309.

characters that live in the world of *McTeague*. They are, in some sense, quite common. Their tastes and aspirations are decidedly normal for their class. But in the context of the world of publishing, writing, and reading literature, they are rare indeed. They are linguistic, class, and cultural others, and their submission to a terrible fate suggests a cavalier enlistment of the aesthetics of violence.

Addressing Norris scholarship necessitates an engagement with the late nineteenth century genre debates that were an important part of naturalism. In turn, many Norris scholars have traditionally placed genre at the forefront of their critical analysis. In this vein, Norris's own proclamations of aesthetic expression must also be addressed. This can be problematic, for at times genre discussion has dominated Norris scholarship, stultifying any readings of his texts because they then must be compromised to fit into these neat textbook definitions of naturalism. In an attempt to not delve too deeply into a discussion of the conventions of naturalism, I will nonetheless address these discussions because they are so integral to the critical history of the novel. Norris complicates the matter by his tendency to refer to his work as "romantic" in a move to negate any associations with realism. His own literary output can probably be characterized as less rigid.<sup>240</sup> The only novels that were called romantic in this period were those historical romances about chivalrous knights and maidens that were part of the "romantic revival," which has been interpreted by historian T. J. Jackson Lears as a genteel backlash against modern technology and realist aesthetics, and by Amy Kaplan and Nancy Glazener as literary expressions of the concurrent U.S. policy of imperialist expansion.<sup>241</sup>

While the attention to genre in Norris scholarship may be overwhelming, sometimes clouding out other approaches to the text, it has been an important element of the discussion because Norris made it so initially. There is much at stake for many critics in establishing the distinguishing features of these schools of literature, if only to establish what those authorial alliances had to say about the publishing industry at the time, and about the professionalization of literary criticism that emerged at the time. But it is also important to note that such a classification implicates the author and the work into a set of values that are the hallmark of each genre. A work's adherence to some of the mandates of a genre by connection must imply an

---

<sup>240</sup>The same motive behind the tendency to cite the naturalist tendencies of Norris's novels has also prompted scholars to view Norris's works as genre parodies. A number of articles are dedicated to this task. Susan Prothro McFatter, "Parody and Dark Projections: Medieval Romance and the Gothic in *McTeague*," *Western American Literature* 26, no. 2 (1991). This article examines the author's parody of Medieval romance because "he may have sought to undermine his boyish enthusiasm for the genre by "naturalizing" it within the confines of late-nineteenth century San Francisco's Polk Street" (120). William J. Hug, "McTeague as Metafiction? Frank Norris' Parodies of Bret Harte and the Dime Novel," *Western American Literature* 26, no. 3 (1991). Cites Norris's western parody in *Perverved Tales*, a collection of pieces he wrote for *The Wave*, a San Francisco weekly.

<sup>241</sup>Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910*, Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

adherence to the moral or social dictates espoused by the genre standard-bearers, which would be the most vocal, successful, or prolific writers and critics of the genre. Note, for instance the determinism or Social Darwinism often associated with naturalism. The moniker of “naturalist,” when proclaimed by that author, becomes the starting point for examining a work. Calling a writer such as Norris a naturalist ascribes a whole set of ideas to his work that can easily be inscribed as organic to the text, but which are, in fact, genre-specific and contextually influential. The atavistic tendencies that characters reflect in *McTeague* then are generally construed as reflections of the primordial nature of humans at odds with their environment. As Donna Campbell points out, most naturalist texts have a trajectory, always atavistic, but can either end tragically or happily, depending on whether the protagonist is in an urban setting or a frontier setting.<sup>242</sup> In a frontier setting, for example, as exemplified in Jack London’s *Call of the Wild* (1903), a story about a California house pet who is stolen for the mush dog trade in the Klondike during the Alaskan gold rush, ends happily with the dog surviving in the harsh environment and finally thriving in a wild world without humans. But in an urban setting, such as with *McTeague*, the characters suffer a degenerative trajectory. In this case, Mac and his wife Trina come upon hard times when Mac is exposed as unschooled and is barred from working as a dentist. That traumatic situation sets in motion a degenerative trajectory because the two characters, stunned by their drop in social status, begin to express innate tendencies in outsize ways. No longer concerned with the rules of propriety and by material comfort, Trina loses her clean habits and Mac takes to drinking. If this is the path of most naturalist literature, then it can be said that the genre as a rule is pessimistic about the fate of a large swath of U.S. society as shown in its deterministic treatment of characters’ outcomes which are often based on ethnic stereotypes. Such an association effectively locates Norris’s work in the realm of pessimistic, anti-immigrant, anti-union, imperialistic conservatism, without ever clearly saying so. What this might say about Norris’s own opinion of the world his characters inhabited is perhaps less clear than what it has to say about his assessment of his own world, since it is the “Romance” and not “real life” that he sought to represent. “We ourselves are Mr. Howells’s characters,” Norris writes knowingly to his fellow middle class readers as he simultaneously asserts and repudiates middle class forms of literary representation, “so long as we are well behaved and ordinary and bourgeois, so long as we are not adventurous or not rich or not unconventional.”<sup>243</sup> The exclusivity of the worlds inhabited by Howells’s characters from those of the naturalists like Stephen Crane in his *Bowery Tales* or Frank Norris’s *McTeague* is an important marker of each genre’s preoccupation with class experience and representation. Good, conventional middle class characters haven’t the sort of vices or experiences that make for romantic storylines. While a few of Norris’s characters are middle class, it is often their association with sordid sorts, prostitutes, anarchists, or criminals, that allows them entrance into the naturalist world. Continuing his discussion of Howells’s fiction, he says:

if we kill a man or two, or get mixed up in a tragic affair, or do something on a

---

<sup>242</sup>Donna M. Campbell, *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885-1915* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997).

<sup>243</sup>Norris, “Zola as a Romantic Writer,” 309.

large scale . . . Mr. Howells cuts our acquaintance at once. He will none of us if we are out of the usual."<sup>244</sup>

That Norris sees himself and his readers, who are middle class, even if they are not necessarily "polite," as subject matter in Howells's novels, but does not write about himself and his own world, is indicative of a growing consciousness in American writing, where authors sought to reject the world that seemed too reflective of a comfortable and bourgeois life. Maybe not because it didn't seem real enough, but because it was too real. Stephen Crane had already made a career of his newspaper reportage of life in the Bowery slums, producing titillating fodder for office men and hopeful charity mavens. "Exploration of forbidden and menacing spaces emerged in the 1890's as a leading mode of the dailies."<sup>245</sup> This bohemian attitude, not unique to American culture, but very much a product of modern sensibilities with romantic roots, stokes the flame of a certain taste for the distasteful, a sort of anti-sublime of the romantic era. Norris scorns readers who will

associate with your Romance only so long as she wears a silken gown. You will not follow her into the slums, for you believe that Romance should only amuse and entertain you, singing you sweet songs and touching the harp . . . If haply she should call to you from the squalor of a dive, or the awful degradation of a disorderly house, crying: "Look! Listen! This, too, is life. These, too, are my children, . . ."<sup>246</sup>

Here the "disorderly house" serves as an external manifestation of psychological or social "degradation." He contrasts this vision of poor living conditions with the ethereal images of romance novels. The silken gown refers to the predilection for a certain form of historical romance popular at the turn of the century that was often set in fantastic historical settings, preferably medieval, or any other that would have manly knights, and damsels in distress. The popularity of this romantic literature, with its exploration of a certain aggressive masculinity, has been the subject of scholarship as a rejection of modernism and as an expression of imperialist fantasy on the eve of the Spanish American War, which shifted American conceptions of itself. What Norris saw was that much of this historical romance, while insipid in setting and exposition, had a certain passion that he saw as lacking in realist literature which, in reference to Howells's own work, he dismissed as "teacup tragedies."<sup>247</sup>

Instead, romance or naturalism, reworked in a contemporary setting, could explore those topics considered taboo, not in some make-believe land with jousts and rescued maidens, but in a

---

<sup>244</sup>Ibid.

<sup>245</sup>Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, 126.

<sup>246</sup>Norris, *The Responsibilities of the Novelist, and Other Literary Essays*, 218-19.

<sup>247</sup>Norris, "Zola as a Romantic Writer," 310.



modern urban setting. But in order to do so, naturalism maintains a gaze that is not genteel. It rejects all forms of propriety that would normally be observed between people in polite society. But as we see in *McTeague*, Norris does not explore the homes and lives of middle class people. Instead he chooses the world of working class urban folk. It is a world where people must work, sometimes scrounge, for a living, just a few steps ahead of destitution. They have enough disposable income to maintain pretensions to fashion and home decor, the traits of middle class living, but their financial stability is not secured. Mac and Trina in particular can pass for what Helen Hunt Jackson called “the better class of work people” who owned their own small businesses and lived in apartment buildings.<sup>248</sup> But as Mac and Trina move to cheaper and cheaper lodgings due to Mac’s unemployment and Trina’s penny-pinching, their degradation becomes apparent in all respects. This fall in station is most crystalized in their eventual move to the house once occupied by Zerkow and Maria before he slit her throat, a “wretched house with its grisly memories” that is described as “abominably dirty” filled with “evil-smelling, dirty linen” and “cockroaches,” since “all the filth of the alley invaded their quarters like a rising muddy tide.”<sup>249</sup> (188) As the former home of the junk man, who processed the detritus of the city, the shack is an embodiment of the same. It has no architectural integrity, the filth of the alley invades the space, as does the naturalist eye.

While Frank Norris’s novels have long been the subject of analysis through the rubric of naturalism: atavism, degeneration, masculinity, and human alienation stemming from industrial and scientific advancements, some more current analyses of the author’s work have focused on urban identity, economics, and psychological or psychoanalytical interpretations.<sup>250</sup> These are helpful for understanding both how Norris positioned himself within the complex world of late nineteenth century literary publishing, and how his literary legacy has reflected the evolving interests of twentieth century literary scholars. While the most basic understanding of the aims of naturalism has led many critics to focus on the characters’ atavistic or primal personas in conflict with a modern world, with few exceptions these studies have foregone all discussion of the way that Norris addresses these questions within a world representative of the social and economic complexity that characterized the U.S. at the turn of the century. By neglecting to address Norris’s own commentary on the difficulties of urban life that are determined by class, gender, and ethnic identity during a time of great social and economic turmoil, a sector of this commentary has posited the author’s claims and goals within a formalist and ahistorical context.

---

<sup>248</sup> See chapter two for Jackson’s discussion of physical abuse in the working class apartment buildings of New York City.

<sup>249</sup> I follow Norris’s lead and refrain from using the accent on Maria’s name.

<sup>250</sup> See the following: Christophe Den Tandt, *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), Jennifer Fleissner, *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004), George L. Henderson, *California and the Fictions of Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Barbara Hochman, *The Art of Frank Norris, Storyteller* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988).

## Performing Class on Polk Street

This study aims to consider Norris's naturalist concerns within the very real and material context of the progressive era's private home space, as that is the marker that most clearly reveals characters' aspirations and desires in nineteenth century literature. Most of the action in the novel takes place within people's homes, and it is Norris's direct and unflattering attention to the working class home that sets the tone for the novel. I am interested in looking back from that point, and examining how Norris's attention to domestic spaces within the novel relate the author's own concerns about genre in representing cultural and class identity at a time when American cities were undergoing grand social transformations such as mass immigration, rural migration to urban centers, a serious depression in the early 1890s, technological advancements that affected all aspects of life, and the reorganization of urban space. Meanwhile such phenomena were narrated and interpreted by a new brand of scholars and lay people, promoting and developing a pseudo-scientific approach to race theories, eugenics and Social Darwinism to explain societal ills, while on the other hand labor leaders talked about the conditional reasons for economic inequality. Others even looked inward, delving into the newest theories of psychological analysis and creating a whole new discourse for subject interiority. All of these discourses affected the public consciousness and informed popular discourse on the role of art as social commentary. That Norris's homes should be so different from the ones of the antebellum period, the ones that characterized the domestic, or sentimental, novel, is not a revolutionary idea. But Norris's novel serves to show how the expectations and the requirements of the American home have changed.

McTeague begins with the protagonist's domestic routine, and from there, draws out to the world by extension, with his parlor "bay window" as the "point of vantage" for extrapolating the domestic to the public or civic spaces that serve as the stage for human drama, we can see that Norris is interested in representing the home in a modern context. Naturalist texts rarely get discussed as domestic novels, although they tend to be very concerned with the particulars of domestic economy and its dismantling. But Norris's treatment of the home space is not along the lines of the domestic novel. This is key, since this is not an attempt to read *McTeague* along domestic genre standards. Norris's depictions of the emotional and material households of his characters reveal an anxiety about economic viability that fixates on the markers of middle class comfort. And it is the examination of those spaces, the private and semi-private rooms of a typical home, and by extension those public spaces that serve as natural extensions either through middle class use, that we see this come to pass.

In the world of *McTeague* the public spaces serve to show how the characters of Polk Street negotiate their own class identity – through the public spaces they inhabit, their manner. The public world of bars, markets, streets, and parks informs their domestic identity, not because it is an outside influence, but because the public sphere is an expression of domestic ideology. Marcus, Mac's more savvy and ambitious friend, personifies this anxiety over working class aspirations and pretensions to proper middle class behavior in public life:

Marcus was not sure of himself as regarded certain proprieties, nor, for that matter, were any of the people of the little world of Polk Street. The shop girls, the plumber's apprentices, the small tradespeople, and their like, whose position was not clearly defined, could never be sure how far they could go and yet preserve

their “respectability.” When they wished to be “proper,” they invariably overdid the thing . . . At an unguarded moment they might be taken for “toughs,” so they generally erred in the other direction, and were absurdly formal. (52)

Norris states this not as a personal angst but a class one, as the “little world of Polk Street” negotiates its position between the “great ladies of the avenue” and the degradation that lives in their midst. (109-10) The pretension to manners and dress, the markers of middle class aspirations, are obstacles to this group because they are self-conscious about performing. Their class anxiety then gets transferred down the line to Maria Macapa, the cleaning maid for the boarding house where Mac lives:

Once every two months Maria Macapa set the entire flat in commotion. She roamed the building from garret to cellar, searching each corner, ferreting through every old box and trunk and barrel, groping about on the top shelves of closets, peering into ragbags, exasperating the lodgers with her persistence and importunity. She was collecting junks, bits of iron, stone jugs, glass bottles, old sacks, and cast-off garments. It was one of her perquisites. She sold the junk to Zerkow, the rags-bottles-sacks man, who lived in a filthy den in the alley just back of the flat, and who sometimes paid her as much as three cents a pound. The stone jugs, however, were worth a nickel. The money that Zerkow paid her, Maria spent on shirt waists and dotted blue neckties, trying to dress like the girls who tended the soda-water fountain in the candy store on the corner. She was sick with envy of these young women. They were in the world, they were elegant, they were debonair, they had their “young men.” (20)

Here we see Maria’s desire for the material and social trappings of the shop girls, whose genteel work and financial independence place them in status above factory girls and cleaning women. But her manner of getting there involves bullying, searching out junk, and haggling with Zerkow, the rags-bottles-sacks man, all activities that pull her into the margins of society and deny her the status she so desperately seeks. To counter this fate, she fixates on attaining the clothing of the shop girls in an attempt to grasp their immaterial features. Their elegance and their placement in the world are both indications of a public life denied Maria, whose own work keeps her rummaging through the closets of the boardinghouse for residents’ castoffs.

While Maria’s class anxiety is expressed as a desire to dress like the shop girls, her ethnicity, a factor that is beyond her control, determines her status. She is variously described as Central American or Mexican, a narrative joke about the interchangeability of such identities in the U.S. Maria’s identity, then, is inscribed as vague and mysterious, and since she cannot be identified with specificity, neither can her past be spoken of with specificity. “There was a legend to the effect that Maria’s people had been at one time immensely wealthy in Central America,” the narrator tells us. (13) This legend of vanished wealth, of Maria’s “childhood of barbaric luxury,” and eventual dispossession at the hands of revolutionaries or insurrectionists, also speaks the narrative of Mexican loss in California and the southwest in the years after the U.S.-

Mexican War.<sup>251</sup> (27) For this reason I read her as Mexican. Maria's story of aristocratic wealth then becomes inscribed through its performance and setting: the cleaning woman has pretensions to wealth that surpasses that of the shop girls. Maria's story of former wealth, imagined or real, operates as a marker of privilege and a sign that her Mexicanness provided two possible class associations in California in these years: as a poor maligned cleaning woman or as a daughter of the wealthy land-owning Mexican families. Maria's story reveals how Mexican class identity is bifurcated between privilege and destitution. But as Maria is in fact poor, that becomes the reality of Mexican experience and the story of former wealth becomes inscribed as legend.

There are other instances of class identification, and anxiety over threats to that identification. This is evinced by the fact that there are those who work as servants to the working class. Maria, of course, fits that role. Trina also hires an old woman to cook supper each night, "a decayed French laundress, miserably poor, her trade long since ruined by Chinese competition." (110) This immigrant woman's impoverishment is tied to a newer wave of immigrants – a theme Marcus, himself a children of German immigrants, waxes on about in xenophobic diatribes about Chinese cigar makers (69). These brushes between people of various classes are constant reminders of the exclusivity of class in the private sphere, since the street affords more opportunities for cross-class exchanges. This is the case when Trina shops for groceries: "On the street she rubbed elbows with the great ladies of the avenue in their beautiful dresses," or "appearing before the butcher stalls, intent upon their day's marketing" (109-10, 103). In effect the market and the street become equalizing spaces of interaction, but "on rainy days their servants – the Chinese cooks or the second girls – took their places." (103) While Trina's idealized domestic experience as the new wife of the Dentist involves a brush with the great ladies, a tantalizing association for her, the distinction between choosing to go to market and having to go when it rains is a class marker. While her market shopping is a middle class pursuit, the conditions under which she engages it at times link her with the servants, in effect showing her economic vulnerability.

This unclear distinction between middle class pursuits and working or servant class necessities is a concern that Trina contemplates and has to reconcile when she marries Mac, who has decidedly less cultural capital than his wife. When contemplating her marriage to him, she considers:

Either it would be one long continued revulsion, or else – worse than all – she would come to be content with him, would sink too the level of steam beer and

---

<sup>251</sup>Norris's insistence on wavering in his description of Maria as Central American or Mexican is telling as a commentary on the similarity of general instability in the region. The insurrections Norris mentions are a reference to the filibuster expeditions that occurred in Cuba, Nicaragua, northern Mexico, and other parts of the region in the 1850s, and California in the 1840s with the Bear Flag revolt, which were mercenary campaigns enacted by private U.S. citizens for financial gain. The most famous of these men was William Walker, whose exploits in Sonora, Baja California, and later in Nicaragua received attention and much adulation from the American public. For many southerners these campaigns served as preparatory training for the Civil War. Walker, however, was not so lucky. He was captured and executed by a Honduran firing squad in 1860 after a turn as dictator of Nicaragua.

cheap tobacco, and all her pretty ways, her clean, trim little habits, would be forgotten, since they would be thrown away upon her stupid, brutish husband.  
(105)

And while she fears that she will sink to his level, her habits and outlook instead have a positive effect on Mac, making him conscious of his role outside the home. After some time, Trina's middle class aspirations lift Mac and through material influence she begins to inculcate bourgeois philosophical and political opinions:

Gradually the dentist improved under the influence of his little wife. He no longer went abroad with frayed cuffs about his huge red wrists – or worse, without any cuffs at all . . . She broke him of the habit of eating with his knife, she caused him to substitute bottled beer in the place of steam beer, and she induced him to take off his hat to Miss Baker, to Heise's wife, and to the other women of his acquaintance.

Besides all this, he began to observe the broader, larger interests of life, interests that affected him not as an individual, but as a member of a class, a profession, or a political party. He read the papers, he subscribed to a dental magazine; . . . He commenced to have opinions, convictions – it was not fair to deprive tax-paying women of the privilege to vote; a university education should not be a prerequisite for admission to a dental college; the Catholic priests were to be restrained in their efforts to gain control of the public schools. (108-09)

Mac's growing consciousness is a sign of the inevitable link between middle class domestic practices and civic participation. Once Mac has mastered the niceties of middle class male behavior, however crudely, his thoughts turn to the social questions and concerns addressed in the public sphere. Norris shows a perverse flair for mocking this evolution in Mac, as all his expressed opinions sound as if they are parroted from some other influence. Here, Mac considers his experience beyond his private world. It is now a public sphere one that unifies him with a particular sector of society.

Mac's temporary acquisition of this civic consciousness and eventual tossing of it parallels the fear of degeneration of the middle class that informs the work of neurasthenic experts of the time. This anxiety over the state of the middle class is paired with a fear of the massive hordes of the uneducated. Writing in *American Nervousness* (1881), George M. Beard, the neurologist who first diagnosed and wrote about neurasthenia, addressed this class anxiety as a consequence of urban life because it caused undue emotional strain. But his language reveals a fear of the working class, and by extension immigrants:

the majority of the people are muscle-workers rather than brain-workers; have little education, and are not striving for honor, or expecting eminence or wealth. All our civilization hangs by a thread; the activity and the force of a very few make us what we are as a nation; and if, through degeneracy, the descendants of these few revert to the condition of their not very remote ancestors, all our

haughty civilization would be wiped away.<sup>252</sup>

American nervousness, or neurasthenia, was limited to a certain class of people, the "brain workers" who really were in effect the bulwark against the tide of immigrants and other "muscle workers" who seemed to be overwhelming the cities at the time. While Mac has no emotional or psychological trouble meeting the demands of his profession, once he has lost his work we see an inability to reconcile his abilities to the demands of a highly specialized and professionalized urban environment. The end result, as Beard imagines it, is absolute chaos with brutishness and savagery overwhelming all traces of civility. Beard's fears pre-date the naturalist vision of atavistic degeneracy but they tap into that same anxiety over the shifting demographics of American cities to more working class and immigrant representation. The source of this anxiety is the possibility of mob rule.

Mac's friend Marcus, an opportunist at every turn, also imagines himself as an active participant in civic life. He becomes secretary of the Polk Street Improvement Club, which makes him part of the "Republican political machine." (125) If the city offered populations the opportunity to gather forces as voting blocs or as mobs, to the absolute horror of Beard and others, it also magnified the clash between dissenting forces. Massive nationwide railway strikes gave Marcus the opportunity to side with the State as a deputy-sheriff, and in that capacity he acted as any aggressive tough would: "Marcus had that quickness of temper and passionate readiness to take offence which passes among his class for bravery." (125) Marcus's participation in public life, from his strike-breaking to his work with the "political machine," show two means of crowd suppression and control through coercion. While the street offers a space for exchange, expanding any barriers that exist in the private sphere, it becomes a site of control and possible violence.

### Mapping Urban Space

The characters in *McTeague* wander the streets of San Francisco in order to understand their place in the city and to forge relationships. In the beginning, when we see Mac and Marcus walk the six miles from the Tenderloin to the Cliff House, it is set apart as an activity that bespeaks their easy and comfortable friendship. It is such an important aspect of their relationship that when the two are no longer friends, Mac's only reflection is that "it did not seem possible . . . that Marcus had ever been his 'pal,' and that they had ever taken long walks together." (125) Later, when Mac and Trina are married and settled in their routine, they wander the streets downtown, "after dark" to

promenade Market and Kearney (sic) Streets . . . All of the stores were brilliantly lighted and many of them still open. They walked about aimlessly, looking into the shop windows . . . saying how they would choose this and that if they were rich." (111)

---

<sup>252</sup>George Miller Beard, *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1881), 97.

This form of amusement, akin to the aimless wandering of the flâneur, enacts the promise of an emerging consumerism, defining the modern urban experience.<sup>253</sup> This stands in direct contrast to when Mac must cross the city in the rain because Trina denies him change for the railcar. Having lost his job, he returns home only to be turned out by Trina, “drives me out of my own home in the rain,” reflects Mac. (164). While it is one thing to choose to roam the city, it is another to be forced into it. As he had done with his friend Marcus, Mac continues to romp about the city’s parks once he is unemployed. It is his one pleasure, as this new urban space affords a comfort that is noticeably absent from his home once it loses its middle class comforts (186-87).

Mac’s strolls along the coast are not just a matter of man communing with nature. This daily exercise of Mac’s is a product of mid-nineteenth century urban planning, and the dentist’s appreciation of the land is a sensory experience, the stuff of naturalist narratives, not romantic ones. Cities at the time were becoming more “middle class” in their accommodations and layouts. The work and writing of the influential landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted illustrate this point. He saw the architect’s project as one that gave meaning to spaces. His own work on New York City’s Central Park, for instance, is seen as an example of the weariness that characterized the middle class approach to city life. The park was commissioned and presented to the public as a restorative, open space, one that could help in keeping the separation between commercial and residential spaces. This ordering of space was directly related to emerging scientific ideas about public health and morality. Immigrants and the working class, who had a propensity to sit on stoops while children played in the streets, presented the antithesis of this orderly world for Olmsted. In this landscape of stoops and children, the public and the private mingle as socializing becomes a public activity, inevitably allowing more private forms of expression to leak out into public life, and when that happens, the working classes are ordering the cityscape to their purpose by obstructing traffic in the streets in their amusement. Trachtenberg and others have rightly discerned an anxiety on Olmsted’s part about the possibility of gathering masses as a voting bloc, as an unruly riot, or as a striking mob. The park was a way of creating a space of leisure, open to all, on middle class terms that could discourage the kind of mass uprising that the streets of New York, and other cities, had already witnessed. Olmsted addressed the ideal urban inhabitant, and by extension the ideal park visitor, as those who were the bulwark of civilization, that smaller proportion of the population that was “well-educated, orderly, industrious and well-to-do” as well as those “who are struggling to maintain an honorable independence” in “decent, wholesome, tidy dwellings” because the parks served various purposes that allowed for cross-class interaction.<sup>254</sup> Here Olmsted is equating one’s propensity for domestic orderliness with their value as citizens and as active civic participants. Lolling about the city, confusing the uses of public spaces, (sitting on stoops) is a sign of degeneracy. The connection that Olmsted seemed

---

<sup>253</sup>See Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), and Erika Rappaport, “A New Era of Shopping,” in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York: Routledge, 2004). Rappaport in particular ties the consumerist project to developer driven reconfigurations of urban space that allowed for more romantic wandering.

<sup>254</sup>Frederick Law Olmsted, *Civilizing American Cities: Writings on City Landscapes*, ed. Silvia Barry Sutton (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 34, 47.

intent on making in the 1860s between the domestic spaces of citizens and the public spaces of recreation is an indication of the faith in a form of citizenship grounded in domesticity. Olmsted is one of several civil servants who imbued urban spaces with meaning, all the while providing the design for forms of population control.

There is another equivalent of the immigrants on their stoops, and this speaks to the malleability between the public and private spheres. There are spaces that serve as extensions of the home, and the stoop is the perfect example. But the public parks also serve this purpose, mostly for economic reasons. The practice of courting in city parks was acknowledged and viewed with concern at the time. Considering that so many young women worked as servants in houses, only before they would marry, they lived active lives as eligible young women while working. Far from home, and confined to a home that was not their own, they had no access to their employers' drawing room should young men call. The city's public spaces served, then, as a substitute for chaperones and as the public morality that maintained young women's virtue. Mac and Trina court in Schutzen park, in the company of her family, yet this practice was as often as not conducted without chaperones. While the park designs were meant for social control, the use of those spaces were apparently always in contention:

It is no use shutting our eyes to the fact that the Parks take the place of drawing-rooms for a large part of the community . . . Until Masters and Mistresses are willing to provide a reception-room for the 'young men' of their five or six maid-servants, the Parks must be their trysting-ground, and therefore ought to be kept free of rowdyism. Respectable young people of the class to which I allude deserve as much protection of 'gangs of men and women' as do the residents of our city.<sup>255</sup>

This letter writer's concerns with the use and safety of public spaces as possible extensions of domestic space – through their common use for courting – demonstrates a shared cross-Atlantic Anglo-phone concern over the diminishing discreteness between public and private space. That the park could serve as a “trysting ground” for the servants of a house, who haven't the access to the family drawing room, speaks of the need to accommodate the various needs of a city's residents in a way that will acknowledge that private acts will now need to take place in public. It is the blurring distinction between the street and the parlor that creates the tension we see here, particularly with respect to affective interactions.

### **Semi-private Spaces in the Home**

If in *McTeague* public sphere experiences reveal the forms of social control in the modern

---

<sup>255</sup>Letter to the Editor, London Times, June 16, 1888: 282 as cited in Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*, 32-33. An American writer expresses as much when stating that the typical domestic servant has “no recognized right to invite any one to come and see her, and therefore can have no full and satisfying sense of home.” “Our Domestic Affairs,” *Continental Monthly: Devoted to Literature and National Policy* 6, no. 3 (1864): 242.



American city, then the semi-private sections of the home, the parlor or working class kitchen, show how these public concerns resonate in the American home. The invitation, and eventual intrusion, of public life into the home's semi-public spaces, brings with it economic exchange. When Mac and Trina leave their comfortable apartment after Mac abandons his dental practice, they lose their sense of privacy, a concept deeply tied to the architecture of middle class domesticity. In losing all of the markers of middle class aspiration: discrete spaces, housekeeping, neatness, and safety, their appreciation of aesthetic and emotionally fulfilling experience falters as well. Gone are the cultural rituals of tipping hats in greeting and the decorative objects of sentimental value such as the stone pug. Their affective attachments to those objects obscure the fact that they are mass-produced products of consumption and that the home is a site of economic exchange. Their sudden income drop makes this fact startlingly clear and opens the home to economic intrusion. When Mac and Trina begin to feel anxious about their changing fortunes after Mac is barred from practicing dentistry, this feeling is personified. Norris describes this fear not as an amorphous psychological dread, but as something that invades their home and becomes part of domestic practice: "the terror of the thing was ever at their elbows, going to bed with them, sitting down with them at breakfast in the kitchen, keeping them company all through the day." (150) It is as if the existential dread of destitution has become a pet, a being apart that rather than nurturing and consoling, strips them of all sense of comfort.

Efficiency of space is a distinguishing characteristic of Mac's home at the beginning of the novel. His "Dental Parlors" act as an office and as his bedroom. This conflation of space under the descriptor "parlors" calls to mind that the action in many realist novels – the literary genre written about and for the middle class – does in fact occur in very different sorts of parlors. Our introduction to Mac's world begins with a rundown of his Sunday routine. It is fitting that this should be so, since it is the one day that the dentist does not work, and we are most able to see how he inhabits his home and work space when he is free to do as he pleases. This early view of Mac's day of rest is significant because it highlights the fact that he has a modicum of leisure in his life. The manner in which he chooses to spend that time reveals his limited cultural or material resources. This day consists of eating a greasy meal at the corner "coffee-joint" and returning home with a pitcher of cheap "steam beer" to lounge in his own operating chair and to smoke, "crop-full, stupid, and warm." (1) Most striking is that the lounging, sleeping, the playing of "six lugubrious airs" on his concertina, and drinking to satiety all take place as he sits in his patient chair in his "Dental Parlors," the place that doubles as an office and a living space. The name place descriptor that Mac uses, "Dental Parlors," is the dentist's bourgeois pretense, which seems artificial for a man known for pulling teeth with his fingers and a clientele of "butcher boys, shop girls, drug clerks, and car conductors." (2) It is revealed to be an affectation (for it's basically just a dingy corner room), that must have tickled Norris to no end, as he repeats it, quotes and all, several times in the novel. That the "Dental Parlors" also serve as Mac's living quarters is only revealed after we've gotten to know a bit more about Mac and his background. When it is, it is done in minute detail, down to the odor that pervades the room: "ether, creosote, and stale bedding." (17) That the fine doctor would live in his own "Dental Parlors," mingling the space where he earns a living (a place of economic exchange) and where he exercises what he most desires (leisure), is a prescient beginning for a novel that is so bent on revealing what goes on in the private spaces of people of the working class, revealing the sighs in the pillows, so to speak. We get to see how Mac lives before he

marries Trina. His is a life of small aspirations and simple contentment. What is most striking about the Dental Parlors, as a semi-private space that serves for intimate or private relaxation or contemplation, is that it truly looks out on the street: “McTeague saw the same panorama unroll itself. The bay window of his “Dental Parlors” was for him a point of vantage from which he watched the world go past” (4-5).

When Mac and Trina first meet, it is in his “Dental Parlors,” and when they declare their love for each other it is in the parlor of her parents’ home. At this time, the parlor was seen as an artifact of Victorian domesticity that did little to add to the everyday life of the typical home. As the “space within a private household where families could present their public faces,” the room was the site of extra-familial interactions, most notably for “rites of passage as small weddings and laying out the dead,” but also for visitors, meetings, and for courting.<sup>256</sup> And while the parlors in *McTeague* are all quite distinct – the “Dental Parlors” that Mac maintains does not qualify as a typical parlor per se – they each regard the social proprieties. Mac’s “Parlors” are in fact one room that serves as Mac’s staging or self-presentation to the world. It is his reception room for his patients, but as the place where he performs surgery, it is a site of medical practice with anesthetized patients. As Mac puts Trina under, she appears dead, calling to mind the common ritual use of the parlor in the days before funeral parlors.

The Sieppe family parlor is also a pretension, as this German immigrant family does not fall under the rubric of those who would have the means and inclination to establish and maintain such a room, which was a very class and culture-specific trait. As such, the space does not enforce the proprieties. Mac and Trina’s first kiss at the B Street station opens the way for a later exchange in the Sieppe parlor. In the street, “he took her in his enormous arms, crushing down her struggle with his immense strength. Then Trina gave up, all in an instant, turning her head to his. They kissed each other, grossly, full in the mouth.” (48) It is an act devoid of romance or sentiment, in sight of rag-pickers and amidst the smell of salt, tar, dead seaweed, and bilge. The week after Mac and Trina’s initial passionate kiss before the B Street station, it is in this same family parlor that again Mac kisses Trina against her will, crushing her down with brute force: “McTeague put aside her hands with a single gesture, and gripped her to him in a bear-like embrace that all but smothered her.” (51-52) Norris comments that it is the happiest moment of their relationship, and such an assertion assumes that the two are most happy when they are transgressing the rules of propriety. As the only room in the house where Mac and Trina can be alone, it presents the only opportunity for any sort of physical contact. The parlor, then, while the site of somber family rituals and events, is also the room relegated to lovers’ meetings. Later, when Mac and Trina marry, the rite is performed in the parlor of their new home.

Mac and Trina’s introduction is depicted as a collision of two worlds: Mac the sedate giant with the car-boy hands and the violent past in the mines; and Trina the young daughter of German immigrants whose life is ordered and tidy. Her tooth has been knocked in an accident on one of the Sieppe family picnics, (a form of recreation most associated with German immigrants

---

<sup>256</sup>Katherine C. Grier, *Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 64.

in these years) and it is now in need of surgery.<sup>257</sup> Mac's prognosis is that it is a case of "necrosis" – the tooth has discolored and is loose – and initially he decides to extract it and another tooth. (15) Later, Mac devises a way to save the second tooth with a crown, so that Trina's smile afterward contains this dead tooth. The procedure requires several visits to Mac's "Dental Parlors," in other words, his off duty bedroom, with the young girl sitting in his Sunday leisure chair. Trina's entrance into Mac's world is expressed as an invasion of sorts: as the only proper young woman of his acquaintance, she serves as his introduction into the world of bourgeois aspiration. It is while she is prostrate in his chair, mouth agape, with the dentist's fingers in her mouth, that Mac begins to fall in love with her, or what we are led to believe is his inarticulate and bumbling form of love. Her neatness and smallness are a marked contrast to the environment, with its smell of bedding, its clumsy decor, and its stale air. While Mac tinkers for several weeks with Trina's crown, she, under ether in a slumber or dead-like state, has become the object of his affection. There is a connection between the necrosis in Trina's tooth, her dead-seeming state, and the common use of the family home, specifically the parlor of the middle class home, for the showing of the dead in the nineteenth century. This is before the professionalization of the funeral industry when the role that the home played as a site for religious rites of passage was primary. The presence of death in the parlor, even "Dental Parlors," would not be out of place in Mac's world. "In the days before the 'funeral home' and the 'living room,' formal parlors functioned as the public space in which rites of passage could be legitimately conducted."<sup>258</sup>

The staging and observance of the dead were common activities in the home. In Mac's home, we see a simulacrum of the Victorian staging of death. In an anesthetized state, Trina's own child-like smallness makes her not unlike the common mourning photographs of dead children that circulated at the time. It was a practice that began with the advent of photography in the antebellum period. Such portrayals "articulate(d) anxieties over the commodification of affect in an increasingly urbanized, industrialized, and impersonal America."<sup>259</sup> This comes to bear on Mac's affection for Trina, which comes into its own while she is in her own temporary state of necrosis. He takes advantage of her condition and kisses her, finding courage or passion in her small-like stillness. This scene has on occasion been read in the context of rape, because Mac has

---

<sup>257</sup>Before the arrival of the Germans, many communities in the American colonies observed a Puritan Sabbath, with an emphasis on rest and family time spent at home. Germans, however, had a long tradition of organized Sunday recreation and were enthusiastic devotees of the Sunday outing. This had a great influence on the ordering and use of space in urban centers. It appears that Norris is poking fun with this stereotype.

<sup>258</sup>McDannell, "Parlor Piety: The Home as Sacred Space in Protestant America," 170.

<sup>259</sup>Karen Sánchez-Eppler, "Then When We Clutch Hardest: On the Death of a Child and the Replication of an Image," in *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*, ed. Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 64.

taken advantage of Trina in her unconscious state.<sup>260</sup> While Mac's violation of Trina's trust and of her body is technically a violation of her person, the dead-seeming state of the young victim draws the kiss out of the realm of coerced action (we see the eroticized forced kiss in front of the train station later) and into the realm of the gothic, or romance and fantasy. Mac violates the culturally prefigured boundary set between the living and the dead metaphorically through his engagement with the unresponsive object of his lust. But to further the notion of this violation, we see that he has taken a token (one of the clichés of nineteenth century sentimentalism) from Trina, the dead tooth, and cherishes it as one would their lover's lock of hair. Mac's putting Trina under is a prefiguring of his murder of her later. Also, it marks his first violation of Trina's body and marks that violation as a desire set in a state when she is most helpless:

He was alone with her, and she was absolutely without defense.

Suddenly the animal in the man stirred and woke; the evil instincts that in him were so close to the surface leaped to life, shouting and clamoring.

It was a crisis – a crisis that had arisen all in an instant; a crisis for which he was totally unprepared. Blindly, and without knowing why, McTeague fought against it, moved by an unreasoned instinct of resistance. Within him, a certain second self, another better McTeague rose with the brute; both were strong, with the huge crude strength of the man himself. The two were at grapples. There in that cheap and shabby "Dental Parlor" a dreaded struggle began . . .

Dimly he seemed to realize that should he yield now he would never be able to care for Trina again. She would never be the same to him, never so radiant, so sweet, so adorable; her charm for him would vanish in an instant. Across her forehead, her little pale forehead, under the shadow of her royal hair, he would surely see the smudge of a foul odure, the footprint of the monster. It would be a sacrilege, an abomination. He recoiled from it, banding all his strength to the issue.

He turned to his work, as if seeking a refuge in it. But as he drew near to her again, the charm of her innocence and helplessness came over him afresh. It was a final protest against his resolution. Suddenly he leaned over and kissed her, grossly, full on the mouth. The thing was done before he knew it. (18)

Mac's desire, stirred by opportunity and by Trina's helplessness, becomes inscribed with this bestial violation. But it is a more complicated and disturbing form of desire, as it marks this violation on an unconscious body. Unlike in the exchanges that occur later at the B Street station and in the Sieppe parlor, here is drawn to her death-like appearance. This would put Mac's desire in the realm of necrophilia. That this would occur in his "Dental Parlors," a twisted version of the family parlor, is most fitting.

As the parlor is the room of the home that is open to the world, it is the most vulnerable to speculation and intrusion from the outside world. When Mac and Trina need to sell their goods at auction after Mac's job loss: "All Polk Street seemed to have invaded the suite." (157) The

---

<sup>260</sup>Philip Acree Cavalier, "Mining and Rape in Frank Norris's *McTeague*," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 14 (2000).

appraisal and evaluation of their goods, essentially of their lives together, is dismissive. The candy store girls mock her taste as they rummage through the goods: “look here what she used for curtains” and “I really believe they used to eat in the kitchen.” (158) While certain items have a profound emotional value, such as the “table before which they were married,” others come to acquire that value through the act of housekeeping as the items take on sentimental value for having withstood their use: “Trina’s heart nearly broke when the kitchen utensils and furnishings began to go. Every pot, every stewpan, every knife and fork, was an old friend,” and “it was all her own,” she was “proud in the sense of her proprietorship.” (154) Most intriguing is the notion that each item is a reminder of the act of shopping: “and how well she remembered her raids upon the bargain counters in the house-furnishing departments of the great down-town stores!” (154) Trina’s experience, through work and toil, gives those items meaning. The parlor then becomes the site of the dismantling of the household and its memories: “it was a pillage, a devastation, the barrenness of a field after the passage of a swarm of locusts” (159). “Here where they had been married, where the wedding supper had taken place, where Trina had bade farewell to her father and mother, here where she had spent those first few hard months of her married life. . . here in what had been her home, nothing was left but echoes and the emptiness of complete desolation.” (159) As Norris gives the couple’s internal thoughts voice, we see the extent to which their association with the space is affective. The things, purchased mass-produced goods, become imbued with meaning through their role as inanimate objects in the household. It is when their loss is recalled that we see the dismantling of the home. Although the two find other places to live afterward, several in fact, this is the last home they will have.

In the end, for all his initial denigration of the domestic space, Norris is quite sentimental about the home as a space that offers a regenerative and salutary environment under the right economic and social conditions. It is the civilizing influence in this coupling. As the couple moves to ever questionable housing, with ever fewer amenities, and with ever less a resemblance to a middle class home, the violence in their relationship escalates. With each successive loss of privacy in the home – the loss of a bedroom, the dismantling of the spaces of operation in the home, the kitchen – the violence increases in the relationship. It is necessary to have private spaces in the home in order for it to be healthy. The need for privacy, for discrete spaces that maintain the integrity of defined space, is an important defining aspect of the middle class American home.

### **The Closets of the Bedrooms**

While Mac is beguiled by Trina’s physical charms as she sits in the dental chair, and uses the opportunity of her unconscious state to steal a kiss, the night he spends in her bedroom in the Sieppe house affords him a different sort of opportunity for physical intimacy. As the Sieppe family lives in the East Bay, Marcus and Mac cross the bay to visit them. They spend the entire day at a park, having a picnic. At the end of the day, the family invite the two men to stay the night and have supper. They accept the invitation. It is decided that Marcus will sleep in the front parlor, Trina will sleep with one of her small brothers, and Mac will sleep in Trina’s room. In this instance, Mac is now alone in Trina’s bedroom with all of her things. They stand in as a substitute for her, but they also serve as objects of middle class aspiration and culture. These little things serve as signifiers of a certain life with certain routines. “It was as though Trina were

close by, but invisible. McTeague felt all the delight of her presence without the embarrassment that usually accompanied it. He was near to her – nearer than he had ever been before. He saw into her daily life, her little ways and manner, her habits, her very thoughts.” (44) It is striking that when he is with her things, he is “nearer (to her) than he had ever been before,” a statement that underscores the emotional investment in things and their role in creating a more clear and true experience and connection than spending time with the living breathing people who own the things. Later, when the two marry, their standard past time is to window shop downtown. Consuming, visually if not materially (as an observer/proxy instead of actually buying) becomes a stand in for communication and real connection. Mac is more comfortable with her things than with her.

His attraction to Trina in this instance overlaps with the enchantment of domestic housekeeping. “McTeague was in his lady’s bower; it seemed to him a little nest, intimate, discreet.” (44) The feminine world is revealed to him in this place. But it is foreign to him, and his presence in the room is overwhelming, even to Mac. “He felt hideously out of place. He was an intruder; he, with his enormous feet, his colossal bones, his crude, brutal gestures. The mere weight of his limbs, he was sure, would crush the little bedstead like an egg-shell.” (44) While he is a stranger to this world, feeling as if he could physically ruin it, he is also intrigued. As he explores Trina’s bedroom, he comes to possess her in a material way, recognizing that her things are metonyms for her body: “McTeague went softly about the room from one object to another, beholding Trina in everything he touched or looked at.” (45)

The following scene, which needs to be entered in its entirety, illustrates how Mac sees Trina not for herself but through her things. In this case, it is her clothing, which, because of its intimate nature, conjures Trina in ways surpassing the flesh. This assertion of Trina’s clothes over her self is an important engagement of the culture of consumption:

Trina’s clothes were hanging there – skirts and waists, jackets, and stiff white petticoats. What a vision! For an instant McTeague caught his breath, spellbound. If he had suddenly discovered Trina herself there, smiling at him, holding out her hands, he could hardly have been more overcome. Instantly he recognized the black dress she had worn on that famous first day. There it was the little jacket she had carried over her arm the day he had terrified her with his blundering declaration, and still others, and others – a whole group of Trinas faced him there. He went farther into the closet, touching the clothes gingerly, stroking them softly with his huge leathern palms. As he stirred them a delicate perfume disengaged itself from the folds. Ah, that exquisite feminine odor! It was not only her hair now, it was Trina herself – her mouth, her hands, her neck; the indescribably sweet, fleshly aroma that was a part of her, pure and clean, and redolent of youth and freshness. All at once, seized with an unreasoned impulse, McTeague opened his huge arms and gathered the little garments close to him, plunging his face deep amongst them, savoring their delicious odor with long breaths of luxury and supreme content. (45)

For a brutish old car boy, Mac is very emotionally and consciously attuned to Trina’s wardrobe. His response to her clothes is sentimental, he associates her outfits with certain events, but the whole scene becomes subsumed in the sexual imagery of penetration. This association of

clothing with certain occasions becomes a way for him to relive his emotions of the moment. Also a way to associate her things with his life, it is a transference of sorts. The “little jacket” then is not just a clothing item that marks certain events in Trina’s life, it has become imbued with Mac’s own memories. What is most striking here though is the pure revelry that Mac feels touching and smelling the contents of the closet. When Mac enters Trina’s closet, he is both possessed and possessive. His action, couched as it is in the language of seduction, appears to be the innocent work of someone infatuated and beguiled by his surroundings. His response, to find emotional attachment, makes the act sentimental. But his action, to take the clothes in his arms, in essence to possess them and the multitude of Trinas, in their essence, is a bold and masculine act. It becomes a metaphor, or better put a substitute, for sexual penetration and physical possession before their marriage: “He went farther into the closet, touching the clothes gingerly, stroking them softly with his huge leathern palms. As he stirred them a delicate perfume disengaged itself from the folds.” This space which presents Mac’s most intimate experience with Trina shifts from a sentimental discourse to an explicit description of sexual penetration. It is not brutish or violent, rather, it is a sexualized engagement with the inanimate. It seems as if Mac has gotten at the essence of Trina, her true self, through these clothes, when in truth clothes are just a superficial cover. Appropriately enough, William Dean Howells’s review of *McTeague* mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, provides the most profound commentary on the issue of clothes: “society, as we have it, is a tissue of hypocrisies, beginning with the clothes in which we hide our nakedness.” Here Howells writes in defense of the hypocrisies, or niceties and manners of bourgeois life. But Mac’s experience, in all its physicality, overturns that assumption. However, this sexualized act does not create human connection; it is a re-affirmation of the mediation of human relations through things, not actions and exchanges.

The latent passion that links Mac and Trina, and the pattern of brutal force and submission, is magnified when Mac loses his dental practice. The neighbor Miss Baker tells Trina that the loss of work “is just like cutting off your husband’s hands.” (157) In return, Mac begins to beat and abuse Trina. As Mac drinks, and his violent alter-ego emerges, he begins to take pleasure in physically abusing Trina:

As time went on, McTeague’s idleness became habitual. He drank no more whiskey than at first, but his dislike for Trina increased with every day of their poverty, with every day of Trina’s persistent stinginess. At times – fortunately rare – he was more than ever brutal to her. He would box her ears or hit her a great blow with the back of a hairbrush, even with his closed fist.

The people about the house and the clerks at the provision stores often remarked the Trina’s finger-tips were swollen and the nails purple as though they had been shut in a door. Indeed, this was the explanation she gave. The fact of the matter was that McTeague, when he had been drinking, used to bit them, crunching and grinding them with his immense teeth, always ingenious enough to remember which were the sorest. Sometimes he extorted money from her by this means, but as often as not he did it for his own satisfaction.

And in some strange, inexplicable way this brutality made Trina all the more affectionate; aroused in her a morbid, unwholesome love of submission, a strange, unnatural pleasure in yielding, in surrendering herself to the will of an irresistible, virile power.

Trina's emotions had narrowed with the narrowing of her daily life. They reduced themselves at last to but two, her passion for her money and her perverted love for her husband when he was brutal. (173-74)

This listing of Mac's abuses is telling. As Mac becomes more abusive in his treatment of Trina, it is couched in his dependence on her money, "conjoining male violence with women's empowerment."<sup>261</sup> He gains satisfaction from biting her fingers, but it is not described as sexual. Trina's "unnatural pleasure," on the other hand, rests on these exchanges as affirmations of her relationship. To inscribe her desire in this way draws a connection between violence and desire. Her love for this submission, and her love for her husband, then become interchangeable and reaffirm that connection between affect and coercion.

It is in this stage of Mac and Trina's relationship that Trina comes to be "on very intimate terms" with Maria Macapa. They become very comfortable in each other's homes:

Maria was constantly in and out of Trina's room, and, whenever she could, Trina threw a shawl over her head and returned Maria's calls. Trina could reach Zerkow's dirty house without going into the street. The back yard of the flat had a gate that opened into a little inclosure where Zerkow kept his decrepit horse and ramshackle wagon, and from thence Trina could enter directly into Maria's kitchen. (174)

Making these visits in "dressing-gown and curl papers," Trina is essentially at-home in Maria's house, foreshadowing her move to that space after Maria's murder. The easy intimacy that develops between the two is also enforced by the idea that they have access to each others homes without the mediation of the street. This is important, as the street represents public surveillance and the introduction of outside parties that are in a position to judge, but also to help, these two women. At this point, both have become house-bound. Maria no longer works as a cleaning woman, and Trina remains at home. While she is performing the work she was doing before, carving the Noah's ark animals, her other identity, that as a shopper, has been circumscribed by her fear of spending money. The two women then are bound to their homes, have lost any connection they might have had to the outside world, and they have become ever more vulnerable to abuse. Over their cups of tea they compare notes on their abuse and on their coping strategies.

Trina and Maria come to find a sense of camaraderie in their abuse, as they compare notes, this becomes the binding element in their friendship:

They told each other of their husbands' brutalities, taking a strange sort of pride in recounting some particularly savage blow, each trying to make out that her own husband was the most cruel. They critically compared each other's bruises, each one glad when she could exhibit the worst. They exaggerated, they invented details, and, as if proud of their beatings, as if glorying in their husbands'

---

<sup>261</sup>Sabine Sielke, *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790-1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 44.



mishandling, lied to each other, magnifying their own maltreatment. They had long and excited arguments as to which were the most effective means of punishment, the rope's ends and cart whips such as Zerkow used, or the fist and backs of hair-brushes affected by McTeague. Maria contended that the lash of the whip hurt the most; Trina, that the butt did the most injury. (174)

The objects the men use to beat their wives have been re-inscribed with a whole new meaning. Zerkow's cart-whip is now used on Maria, and the "talismanic" hairbrush that had so delighted Mac when he stayed in Trina's room at the Sieppe house is now used to beat her. (44) These kitchen-table gossip sessions give the women a sense of connection and pride, mirroring Trina's "unnatural pleasure" in her husband's beatings. Norris's description of their exchanges likens them to ritualized storytelling sessions. This form of gossip, with its violent content, becomes a fundamental aspect of their domestic practice. It is in the act of making one of her visits that Trina, walking into Maria's kitchen, finds her seated at a chair with a large slash in her throat.

As the home becomes less a source of comfort and more a site of contention and coercion the street presents a sharper contrast as a site of shared surveillance and safety. The street serves as a distinct contrast to the private home when Trina finds Maria murdered in her kitchen. Trina's reaction is to go out to the street to seek help, and it is in that direct contrast, between the horror in the kitchen and the "same familiar aspect of Polk Street," that we see an absolute disjuncture between public and private experience. When she first sees the body, Trina goes out to get help, but she is in a state of shock. (178)

Trina wondered why she didn't scream, how she could keep from it – how, at such a moment as this, she could remember that it was improper to make a disturbance and create a scene in the street . . .

There was the same familiar aspect of Polk Street. She could see it at the end of the alley. The big market opposite the flat, the delivery carts rattling up and down, the great ladies from the avenue at their morning shopping, the cable cars trundling past, loaded with passengers. She saw a little boy in a flat leather cap whistling and calling for an unseen dog, slapping his small knee from time to time. Two men came out of Frenna's saloon, laughing heartily. Heise the harness-maker stood in the vestibule of his shop, a bundle of whittlings in his apron of greasy ticking. All this was going on, people were laughing and living, buying and selling, walking about out there on the sunny sidewalks, while behind her in there — in there — in there — (177-78)

In there was the unspeakable – Maria's bloodied body and mangled throat. Here we see the stark contrast between the everyday life of the street, appearing just as dynamic and cheerful as it did at the beginning of the novel, and the transformed and violent domesticity of these private spaces. For Trina, this contrast presents a profound experience. She has difficulty reconciling what she has seen and relaying that information because of this contrast. Her reliance on the old manners seems absurd at this point given the circumstances, but it is the thing that holds her together.

We do not witness this murder, only the after-effect, but the narrative does show the exchange between Zerkow and Maria, a sexualized form of narrative interplay. It is not unlike

Trina's eroticized submission to Mac's physical aggression. Zerkow's "consuming desire" may be gold, but the next best thing is the story about the gold.

"Say," said Zerkow at last, "how about those gold dishes you told me about the last time you were here?"

"What gold dishes?" inquired Maria, puzzled.

"Ah, you know," returned the other. "The plate your father owned in Central America a long time ago. Don't you know, it rang like so many bells? Red gold, you know, like oranges?"

"Ah," said Maria, putting her chin in the air as if she knew a long story about that if she had a mind to tell it. "Ah, yes, that gold service."

"Tell us about it again," said Zerkow, his bloodless lower lip moving against the upper, his claw-like fingers feeling about his mouth and chin. "Tell us about it; go on."

He was breathing short, his limbs trembled a little. It was as if some hungry beast of prey had scented a quarry. Maria still refused, putting up her head, insisting that she had to be going.

"Let's have it," insisted the Jew. "Take another drink." Maria took another swallow of the whiskey. "Now, go on," repeated Zerkow; "let's have the story." Maria squared her elbows on the deal table, looking straight in front of her with eyes that saw nothing.

"Well, it was this way," she began. "It was when I was little. My folks must have been rich, oh, rich into the millions – coffee, I guess – and there was a large house, but I can only remember the plate. Oh that service of plate! It was wonderful. There were more than a hundred pieces, and every one of them gold. . . (26-27)

Zerkow appears to be physically aroused by this narrative, and his insistence on hearing the story, and Maria's replies, become a ritual repeated several times in the novel. Of all the repetition present in the novel, this is the most striking example apart from Maria's introductory phrase: "Name is Maria – Miranda – Macapa. Had a flying squirrel an' let him go." (12, 25, 71) Its presence in the narrative, as a descriptive technique, and as a character trait with Maria and Zerkow, imposes a vastly altered understanding of consciousness from that posited in realist literature. Barbara Hochman has noted that Maria's story is one of loss, which she posits as "fixed upon a devastating moment of experience in the past."<sup>262</sup> Maria's repeated story, then, is an attempt to impose a "stabilizing structure in a dangerously fluid world."<sup>263</sup> This interpretation of repetition is helpful for engaging the question of narrative technique and meaning. But where Hochman reads this story of loss as a personal, psychological experience root in the trauma of modern experience, I read it as an expression of loss grounded in the historical experience of Mexican (or Central American) loss of material wealth and status. This notion that Maria is

---

<sup>262</sup>Hochman, *The Art of Frank Norris, Storyteller*, 24.

<sup>263</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

narrating a loss is integral to understanding the way that Norris is positioning Mexican memory and identity in the region. Maria's story of the gold plate, a story of former wealth and extravagance, is not unlike the fables of the land-wealthy dons. Maria's story, while exaggerated, would not be entirely unthinkable in this period of California history. For while the Anglo migration to California diminished the relative influence of Mexican Californians, their history was an important element of regional identity formation. So much so that Hubert Bancroft, an important early chronicler of California and western history, set out to collect many oral histories of Mexican Californians for his massive History of California project. These collections were insistent requests for narrative substance, not unlike Zerkow's of Maria, that wanted details of their lives that could serve a greater purpose.<sup>264</sup> Their former wealth, often measured in acres and cattle, was not of the same realm as the gold service. But in a land that had already experienced a major gold rush, land rushes and real estate booms, these Halcyon days served as a reminder of former comfort for a group of people that saw itself stripped of its status. Articles in *The Century*, *The Overland Monthly*, and other national magazines had also repeated this narrative of loss and it was becoming a standard tale. And though the story was Maria's, and for all intents and purposes the loss is hers, she does not express any anguish. Rather, it is "Zerkow who labored under its hallucination," caught up in the story's spell, insisting that it is real. Norris conjures the stereotype of the acquisitive Jew, and another, more regional stereotype that seems to have slipped with the passage of time: the downtrodden Latin American landowner ousted by U.S. imperial designs.

Zerkow's old place, "that dirty rat hole," as Mac calls it, is startlingly more disturbing than anything one can possibly find on the street in *McTeague*. And yet, more than any other home depicted here, it is a product of the public sphere. Like the good dentist when he still had his practice, Zerkow also conflates his living and work space. As a junk collector, his real work is out on the street, but he stores it all in his cramped alley shack. His "shop" has "all the detritus that a great city sloughs off in its daily life." (25) In effect, his domestic identity is comprised of the refuse of society. Yet, it holds an appeal that Trina – for all the trauma she suffers there – cannot discount. She insists they move into the hovel because it offers a cheaper rent. "We can have it dirt cheap," she says, a phrase that is both a justification and a description of the place. When Mac objects, it is on rational grounds because "there's where Zerkow killed Maria – the very house – an' you wake up an squeal in the night just thinking of it." Trina's response, despite her nightmares and visions of being chased by a bloodied Maria, is to accommodate, "I'll get used to it," she assures Mac. (187) Despite her claims that she has adjusted to the space, she still "associated the house with a scene of violent death." (193)

As it turns out, Zerkow and Maria's old house is the last place Mac and Trina cohabit. Soon Mac abandons Trina, taking with him the gold she has stored away in her bridal trunk and leaving her with crippling wounds on her fingers which require amputation. While this does not mark the last of their encounters – Mac eventually kills Trina and steals her money – it does represent their last home together and serves as a biting commentary on the mollifying character

---

<sup>264</sup>We see that often the subjects of these requests for narratives did not comply, and those who did, did so with the expressed intention of narrative control. For a thoughtful analysis of this very issue see Genaro M. Padilla, *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

of home life. Given Norris's claim to the ability of naturalist fiction to depict true life, this representation of ethnic working class urban life becomes a tramp through an exotic and violent world for the art of fiction.

Mac's murder of Trina, discussed earlier in this chapter, does not take place in a domestic setting. Instead, he kills her in the closet of the kindergarten where she works as a cleaning woman. Her murder there – a horrific scene of pummeling fists and bloody hiccoughs – brings their violent interaction into a space that embodies the social reform movement. Given the prominence of women in educational reform, and other types of reform work, this murder re-inscribes these spaces of empowerment with the brute objections of misogynistic violence. The children's eventual discovery of her body makes it all the more traumatic. But the novel does not end in that kindergarten. Instead, Mac's primal escape to the wilderness draws him irrevocably from those spaces of urban order and domestic economy. But his sojourn through the old camps, and attempt to forge a life in hiding, is thwarted by his sentimental attachment to the canary in its gilt cage. This symbol of stifling luxury is at odds with Mac's own coarse living conditions and station in life. As a genteel middle class possession, it stands in stark contrast to the open desert in the final scene. It is also a reminder of Mac's previous life, revealing that his reversion to the wilderness is not a natural process. The final scene in the desert is an aesthetic and material antithesis to the domestic spaces that defined Mac's adulthood. The little flat on Polk Street is now just a distant memory. As he looks around, overwhelmed by the landscape, handcuffed to Marcus, now dead, his canary fluttering in the heat, near death, the enormity of the open world hits him. Mac's demise on the open desert plain has wrenched him from the only world that provided him with a sense of order and meaning.

## Chapter 5: Staking a Claim in the Literary World: Fiction in *The Overland Monthly*

It is said in the Alps that not all the vulgar people who come to Chamonix can ever make Chamonix vulgar. For similar reasons, not all the sordid people who drift overland can ever vulgarize California. Her fascination endures, whatever the accidents of population.<sup>265</sup>

In the September 1868 issue of *Putnam's Magazine*, under the heading of its chatty Table-Talk column, the editorial staff enthusiastically acknowledged the launch of an aspiring literary magazine based in San Francisco, California. *The Overland Monthly* had just begun publication in July of that year but in those first few issues the magazine drew attention for its fiction written by the then-unknown editor Bret Harte. While Putnam's was not the most prestigious of the eastern magazines, its standing was exalted enough to make its recognition of *The Overland Monthly* sound like gracious condescension. On the other hand the premier magazine of literature, culture, and politics by all accounts, the Boston-based *Atlantic Monthly*, noted with a one-word description the "vigorous" character of *The Overland Monthly* but only in contrast to the region's weak wines.<sup>266</sup> Overall, Putnam's greeting was more gracious and thoughtful in its assessment of the nascent literary outlet, and it is the one that most resonated with the editorial staff of *The Overland Monthly* and for that it is included here:

We stretch a long hand of welcome from this desk of ours, by the fair Atlantic wave, across the continent to our brothers in California, and congratulate them on the promising appearance of their latest literary venture . . . To speak generally, the contents are of a solid and valuable, rather than of what is called a brilliant and entertaining, character.<sup>267</sup>

Putnam's measured praise signified that the *Overland's* initial showing was a promising addition to the publishing scene, but they expressed curiosity about the mysterious absence of a "prospectus" or "list of distinguished authors who say they will contribute" or even the name of the editor. It seemed there was "no eastern hand" in this venture.<sup>268</sup> The assumption was that any magazine aspiring to be read by the right people would of necessity draw from the literary worlds of Boston, New York, or Philadelphia. Literary monthlies had a tremendous cultural influence in this period. They printed the social commentary and art criticism that gently prodded the

---

<sup>265</sup>David Starr Jordan, "California and the Californians," *The Atlantic Monthly* 82, no. 494 (1898): 793.

<sup>266</sup>"Recent Travels," *The Atlantic Monthly* 24, no. 142 (1869): 259.

<sup>267</sup>"Table Talk," *Putnam's Magazine* 12, no. 9 (1868): 382-83.

<sup>268</sup>*Ibid.*: 383.

aspirations of the well educated middle class. While religious weeklies and women's domestic magazines often sold more, their moral or pragmatic content was not considered fashionable in the same way.

Even though the publishing industry was highly concentrated in northeastern urban areas, regional magazines like the *Overland* found an audience, though their influence tended to be limited. On the other hand, a handful of magazines published in New York or Boston were distributed and read on a national scale, and their vision was often local, but presented in broad strokes with a voice that spoke for the country. In an early issue, during the height of antebellum tensions, *The Atlantic* expressed its vision as the "endeavor to be the exponent of what its conductors believe to be the American idea," in effect stressing the parity between New England and American ideals.<sup>269</sup> After the Civil War the American south was too economically strapped to offer an alternative narrative at the same scale and the result was that northeastern magazines became the uncontested (though in some circles highly despised) voice of the nation.<sup>270</sup>

Of the literary monthlies, historian Frank Luther Mott listed the most highly regarded as the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. Both were edited by William Dean Howells at their peaks, the 1870s and 1880s, respectively. Both were established in the 1850s when technology and social conditions combined to create a situation ripe for this sort of literary production. Steam presses helped large-scale printing which made book publishing much more affordable and available to a larger population. The native-born population was also highly literate, especially in the northeast. While the publishing houses were printing books, these magazines served as their editorial organs. For this reason what the magazines printed says more about the publishing houses than the books they printed. By the 1870s and 1880s the most prestigious of the magazines, which now included the beautifully illustrated *Century Magazine*, an heir to *Scribner's*, were promoting realism and printing as much southern and northeastern local color as they could acquire. They had extensive budgets and procured the most popular and respected writers (which were not always one and the same) to pen stories and serialized works.<sup>271</sup> *The Atlantic Monthly* alone published Henry James's *Washington Square*, *The Tragic Muse*, *The Aspern Papers*, and *The Princess Casamassima* in installments throughout the 1880s. These magazines defined and reinforced the standards of high culture through editorial choices. Popular literature in the form of dime novel adventure tales or romantic fiction never figured in the scope these magazines but their influence was registered to varying degrees.

It is in this context that *The Overland Monthly* entered the fray. For their part, the early acknowledgment by *Putnam's* prompted the editors of *The Overland Monthly* to gush "with a little awkwardness and provincial pride over this evidence of Eastern courtesy and esteem."<sup>272</sup>

---

<sup>269</sup>Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines: 1741-1930, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 499.

<sup>270</sup>*Ibid.*, 102-03.

<sup>271</sup>Nancy Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>272</sup>Bret Harte, "Etc.," *The Overland Monthly* 1, no. 4 (1868): 385.

But while the editors of *The Overland Monthly* sought a measure of respect from their eastern counterparts, they did not expect to emulate these magazines in every respect. Editor Bret Harte and his staff strove to create a venue for high literature, as they saw themselves in conversation with those northeastern magazines that were the arbiters of culture and the arts. But a magazine published in San Francisco could not have the same interests and concerns as those penned in Boston or New York. In the first issue of the *Overland*, Harte said as much when he ruminated on the other possible titles for the *Overland*, deciding in the end that such options as “Pacific Monthly” would imply that it would be a “feeble echo” of the venerable *Atlantic*.<sup>273</sup> Before the inauguration of *The Overland Monthly* and the establishment of a large scale western publishing venue for fiction and expository writing, easterners at times voiced concerns over the state of California’s cultural integration into the Union. The various accoutrements of high culture were lacking, it seemed. During the Civil War Thomas Starr King, a correspondent for James T. Field, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, said in a letter that California “must be northernized thoroughly, by schools, Atlantic Monthlies, lectures, New England preachers, Library Associations.”<sup>274</sup> “Yankeefication” of other regions, particularly the rebellious South and the savage west, was seen as not only inevitable but as laudable, for as one writer put it, wherever “the Yankee soldier has tramped the Yankee schoolmarm will teach.”<sup>275</sup>

While northeastern publishers dominated the American literary scene, the sense that their influence on the rest of the country was somehow beneficial was not lost on those in the west. But California publishers, emigrants themselves and still eastward-looking, were beginning to articulate a new sense of self that would not be held to the standards of eastern publishers, even as they sought eastern approval. That new expression of California identity, grounded in the recent history of the state and in a sense that the place was peopled by migrants, wanderers, and adventurers, was just beginning to show. *Putnam’s* understood this, and when it came to assessing the contents and presentation of a western magazine penned by eastern transplants in the very cosmopolitan city of San Francisco, they chose to revel in this version of California:

On the cover there is a small vignette, so excellent both in conception and in execution, that we at once predict the best that can be predicted of the contents of the magazine that carries such a pat and comprehensive signal to the fore. . . A grizzly bear – a speaking likeness – stands on the track of the Pacific Railroad snarling at the Locomotive! This is California, the latest field where savage and civilized, the grizzly and the locomotive, meet in grim encounter.<sup>276</sup>

---

<sup>273</sup>Ibid., no. 1: 99.

<sup>274</sup>Warren S. Tryon, *Parnassus Corner; a Life of James T. Fields, Publisher to the Victorians* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 260. See Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910*, 27-28.

<sup>275</sup>James Parton, “The Mean Yankees at Home,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 23, no. 135 (1869): 62.

<sup>276</sup>“Table Talk,” 382.

The eastern imagination that conjured a California of magnificent brutality and savagery could only rely on the old myths. And yet it is this graphic narrative on the emblem, the bear crossing the railroad tracks, acknowledging its rival, that the *Overland* uses to envelop its text. (Fig. 5.1) Despite this gesture toward California's untamed past, the local reader of the *Overland* was presumed to have "good social connections, a seat at the opera, a pew in church."<sup>277</sup> In a word this reader was cultured and San Francisco was not very different from any other eastern city. But northern California was growing by leaps and bounds in these years, and the shock of it all did reflect an exuberance of profit. Whether it was by dint of opportunity or the character of emigrant stock, population growth helped create economic booms on land, wheat, and other commodities and in this there was savage speculation. So while the grizzly bear came to represent the *Overland*, it was not only as a direct reference to the region's fauna, but as a metaphor for the defining characteristics of the local population:

Cautiousness was never an active element in California civilization. But it is possible that we have looked too much at the poetry of California recklessness and speculation, to see clearly the selfishness that underlies it. Recklessness is unfortunately apt to mean a disregard for others as well as for oneself. And if at last the conservative sense of society is forced into severe measures for its own protection, and if the chance-taking, gambling, adventurous, risky, romantic Californian won't be vaccinated for his own sake, he must be made innocuous [sic] for the security of society.<sup>278</sup>

This lofty commentary on the region's denizens as brash and reckless provides a glimpse of the substance of regional myth-perpetuation, and this in a plea for vaccinations!

A cursory overview of the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's* reveals that while these magazines certainly printed regular reports about California, mostly in the form of historical or anthropological studies, political commentaries, travelogues, or booster literature meant to encourage migration or tourism, they did not publish much fiction set in California. They were, however, printing regionalist literature by the southern and New England writers. This means that for a certain class of readers, California was a social science curiosity rather than a site for the imaginative subjectivity provided by fiction. *The Overland Monthly*, on the other hand, dealt almost exclusively in western writing, providing its eastern readers with a bit of fictional exotica that would come to define it for decades to come. In the second issue of the *Overland*, Bret Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp" was included to immediate acclaim. It proved to be incredibly popular and was soon followed by "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," which appeared in the January 1869 issue. These stories drew considerable attention for both the magazine and Harte. The *Overland* earned early accolades on the basis of Harte's fiction alone. For Harte it brought fame and the offer to edit *The Atlantic Monthly*. By 1871 he was residing in Boston.

---

<sup>277</sup>Harte, "Etc.," 387. This citation came to my attention by way of Glazener, *Reading for Realism*, 32.

<sup>278</sup>Harte, "Etc.," 388.





Fig. 5.1: Enlarged image of the *Overland Monthly* grizzly crossing the tracks.

As the premier literary journal of the west, *The Overland Monthly* was beholden to certain lofty goals. Chief among them the creation of a narrative about the west in general, but more specifically of California. Expository writing made up a large part of the magazine's format, and gives us a good indication of the way that writers were coming to terms with the rapid development in the region. The fiction writing, the focus of analysis here, was often trying to gauge a different sort of development in giving voice to the inchoate hopes, dreams, and nightmares of these subjects. The temptation is to say that such a literary project would seek to represent all aspects of the far western scene for the edification of the east and the self-referential expression of the natives.

If the *Atlantic* sought to be the voice of the country, the *Overland* was looking beyond the horizon. As the post-bellum era progressed, imperialist visions crept into the national imaginary. California became the locus of these ventures through Pacific commerce and travel and the *Overland* saw itself as the medium of communication for the far-flung agents of change.<sup>279</sup> There is an acquisitive aspect to this attitude, as the *Overland* in later years claimed a territory for itself far exceeding the boundaries of national affiliation. The result is a visionary and adventurous tone in the magazine in the latter decades of the century that sounds suspiciously like the romantic fiction that was starting to grace its pages. Much of the popular romantic fiction of the time, what would now be called historical romance, was set in medieval Europe and celebrated an aggressive masculinity and primitiveness. This tone went hand-in-hand with the discourse of conquest that was now common as U.S. imperialistic ventures increased.<sup>280</sup> The *Overland* reflected this language in its own vision:

It has been too customary with us to call things the best in the world because they are Californian; we must work now to make things Californian because they are the best in the world.

Californian, we say, because California has been the nucleus of the extreme western expansion of Anglo-Saxondom. But one of the results of experience that we are now sharing with the reader is the knowledge that the appropriate field of the *Overland* is by no means limited to California; it stands rightfully as the literary exponent of the whole Pacific shore, from Patagonia to Alaska, and from Kamschatka to Australia – meeting there, and joining closely with the Eastern edge of English literature. Oregon and Washington Territory and Alaska, Mexico and Central American and the South American coast, Japan and China and the Islands – all hold populations that look to us as their natural spokesman, whenever they need one less transitory, hasty, and miscellaneous than the newspaper, as the natural medium to bring to them the corresponding voices from each other, and, to a less degree, from the older world. We do not speak

---

<sup>279</sup>Though the *Overland* had suspending publication at the end of 1875, it returned through another incarnation, first as the *Californian* in 1880, then again as the *Overland Monthly* in 1883.

<sup>280</sup>Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910*, 159-60.

from theory in this; we find the need among them all, existing and felt, to speak to each other through us: Mexico must know Alaska, Japan must know Chile, California must know Australia, chiefly through the *Overland*.

In this proclamation the *Overland* stands at the nexus of the Pacific rim, giving voice to others, yet also acting as the mediator between parties. This tone is reflected in selections that shadow the emerging military campaigns of the turn of the century. Hawai'i, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba all become topics of social and historical interest in the 1890s.

In considering the fiction of the *Overland* I have taken one story from the early years of publication, and three from the end of the century to illustrate the range of fiction included in its pages. They all provide engaging representations of the state's inhabitants, and all take place in northern California. Ambrose Bierce is the standout writer, the author of *The Devil's Dictionary* and "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," the anthology mainstay. Bierce's "The Haunted Valley" is a powerful story that imagines the personal costs at stake in social conformity. It recounts the tragic murder of a Chinese woman at the hands of her white lover. Bierce is at his most acerbic in this story, condemning the commonplace denial of Chinese immigrants' humanity that seemed to characterize the region. Kathryn Jarboe penned a number of stories for the magazines, but her work has never been read to a degree or with the intent to mark it as great fiction. But her work is important because it registers a number of concepts that are starting to emerge in the narrative of California's past. "Doña Dolores" imagines the psyche of the old Califomio ruling class as they live surrounded by Americans. The protagonist struggles in attempting to reconcile her people's past with a modern California. It is an exercise in futility, as the old California of the Dons is narratively relegated to the past. J. A. Rhodes is not recorded as having authored anything else in any of the major magazines of the day. This may have been a pen name, or it may be a reflection of the editorial choices that often left stories like "Lolita Lavegne" out of the magazines. Rhodes's story does not attempt to imagine any sort of subjectivity for its characters, least of all its title character. Instead, it offers a glimpse of some of the sensationalist literature that graced the pages of the magazine, offering a lurid interpretation of stereotypes about Indian women. Sui Sin Far's work has been the focus of renewed interest for the last twenty years. Her story "A Chinese Ishmael" rounds out the discussion as a love story that operates as a form of advocacy. It attempts to present a Chinese subjectivity to counter the two-dimensional work so common in that day.<sup>281</sup> Regardless of literary value, all of these stories delve into social worlds outside of the mainstream culture, and all deal with the issue of affect and coercion that informs the rest of this study. For that they are included in this chapter. Each of these stories offers a unique perspective on the fictional voices emerging in this period. Sometimes in conversation with the east, sometimes farther west to the world beyond the Pacific.

---

<sup>281</sup> Ambrose Bierce, "The Haunted Valley," *The Overland Monthly* 7, no. 1 (1871). Kathryn Jarboe, "Doña Dolores," *The Overland Monthly* 34, no. 201 (1899). J. A. Rhodes, "Lolita Lavegne," *The Overland Monthly* 33, no. 198 (1899). Sui Sin Far, "A Chinese Ishmael," *The Overland Monthly* 39, no. 199 (1899). Bierce's story will be examined as it appeared in 1871. An edited version of the story was published later. Sui Sin Far's name appeared as Fah in this publication, presumably as an early version of her name. As they are all primary works, all will be cited in the text in parentheses.

## The Haunted Valley, Ambrose Bierce

Ambrose Bierce's "The Haunted Valley," initially published by the *Overland Monthly* in 1871, plays on a number of genre conventions of both regionalist and gothic literature to address what is a horrific miscarriage of justice within the context of a western humor sketch. This odd blending of seemingly disparate genre characteristics and intentions is an indication that the subject matter of the story, which rests on a triangle of desire and coercion, cannot be easily reconciled through traditional narrative forms. The format of the story follows many of the conventions of local color literature, as the urbane outsider travels and comments on regional quirks including customs, dialect, and the landscape of rural California mining country. Of the same class and cultural cohort as the readers of *The Overland Monthly*, those "respectable citizen(s), having good social connections, a seat at the opera, a pew in church," this narrator is both amused and appalled by the conditions of the place and the sentiments of the folk who people this exotic country.<sup>282</sup> The story's attention to coarse characters who swear and lead violent lives is a passing reference to the works of Bret Harte, the popular western humor writer and by the printing of Bierce's story, the former editor of *The Overland Monthly*.<sup>283</sup> But where Harte's characters are menacing roughnecks who prove to be sentimental under the right conditions, Bierce's toughs never redeem themselves in that narratively convenient way. Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp," his most popular story, plays on the imposition of domesticity (in this case a dead prostitute's baby) in a rough-and-tumble mining camp. Bierce's tale of backwoods domesticity includes an ax-murder, communal exoneration of that violent act, psychological haunting, and physical and emotional degeneracy.

While it is true that both gothic and regionalist U.S. literature address alien forms of domesticity, they do so to different ends. The gothic tale, a Jacksonian era expression of romantic discontentment with neoclassical formalism, does this through dislocation or defamiliarization of the domestic space. Coupled with the romantic attention to the elements, the gothic genre creates a sense of the domestic sublime through terror. In regionalism the romantic regard for the exotic is coupled with a realist observation of everyday aspects of domestic culture. The narrative voice in regionalist literature is usually an enlightened urban middle class interloper surrounded by rural folk. This grounds the story's often-provincial Arcadia within a rational perspective. In the end the alien domesticity of regionalist fiction is subsumed within a narrative informed by the industrial machinations that maintained modern modes of transportation and access to spaces deemed exotic.

In the end, the story's gothic and violent elements ultimately undermine the conventions of the local color aspects of the story. The welcoming terrain of local color gives way to a

---

<sup>282</sup>Harte, "Etc.," 387.

<sup>283</sup>Harte published "The Luck of Roaring Camp" in the August 1868 issue of *The Overland Monthly*. The story was a great success and was republished in various outlets and it put Harte's brand of writing and humor on the popular literary map, helping to spark interest in the local color genre. As an example of western regional literature it is distinct in tone and sensibility from the more common New England and southern local color fiction that became popular in the 1870s.

foreboding landscape that inspires a sense of the sublime. From the first informant, Jo. Dunfer, we hear not the wise or thoughtful dialect of rural folk, but instead the spouting of racist diatribes against the Chinese, not exactly the type of regional literary advertising that the genre was often made to be. And as the story tells of the murder of a Chinese servant and subsequent exoneration of his murderer, the lighthearted portrayal of these western characters creates an uncomfortable narrative of institutionalized violence that reveals ever more complex webs of desire and coercion. The social conditions that create the murderous situation, and then allow for the murderer's exoneration, reveal a truly inhumane and horrific level of societal complicity. Bierce's portrayal of these characters and the secrets they keep, including a mystery about the gender of the Chinese servant, expresses the normalization of violence that characterizes the region.

The story's subject matter, the aforementioned murder of that Chinese man, is a situation not un-heard of in California at this time. The story taps into the strong anti-Chinese sentiment that gained ground after many Chinese laborers left the railroad and started to compete with working class white men, mostly Irish, for low wage industry jobs. Many saw Chinese labor as a form of wage suppression. This fueled the popularity of such groups as Denis Kearney's Workingman's Party of California, an Irish-identified group modeled on the Anglo nativist groups that targeted Irish immigrants in the east. Rather than mount a focused battle against the machinations of large-scale industrial capitalist development, many turned Chinese immigrants into scapegoats.<sup>284</sup> Violence against Chinese men was common, as they were easily outnumbered whether in the mining towns of the Sierra Nevada or the coastal cities of California. Given the virulent anti-Chinese sentiments harbored by white working class men and the readiness with which they acted out their frustrations, the economic strategy of many Chinese men was to retreat into service jobs as domestic servants, as service providers for whites and other Chinese, or to work in the formal and informal Chinatown economy including shops and brothels and gambling houses.

Legislative coercion of Chinese immigrants followed in the wake of violent attacks as popular opinion crystalized into a direct antipathy based on labor competition. The Foreign Miner's tax, passed in 1852, was one such example of the means used to limit their economic prospects. The miner's tax was prohibitive, amounting to about fifty percent of a miner's yield. Enforcement was unregulated, and often men were taxed several times per month by

---

<sup>284</sup>Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 169. Robert G. Lee, *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 62. The violence directed at Chinese immigrants was not universally accepted. Many writers, particularly eastern sojourners or social critics, expressed disgust over their ill-treatment. Irish immigrants were often singled out as the perpetrators of these "violent acts of intimidation" toward Chinese men. As a racialized and economically marginalized sector of the population, Irish immigrants saw themselves as vulnerable to the alteration of the labor market by Chinese labor. Pointing out the Irish antagonisms was a way for eastern writers to condemn the assaults on Chinese immigrants while also quarantining that behavior onto an ethnic "other." See A. D. Richardson, "John," *The Atlantic Monthly* 24, no. 146 (1869): 740. Raphael Pumpelly, "Our Impending Chinese Problem," *The Galaxy* 8, no. 1 (1869): 24.

unscrupulous tax collectors.<sup>285</sup> For the still-predominantly male communities along the Sierra Nevada mining towns, the Chinese businesses that developed after they were expelled from the mines focused on services traditionally provided by women. Given the atmosphere, Chinese immigrants became a lightning rod for a whole array of white fears. Some of those men who were not competing with whites for industry jobs established their own businesses, creating the merchant class in Chinatowns. But they were a small minority, most were replacing women in menial jobs such as laundry and domestic service. Men not employed in either of these industries sometimes worked in the informal economy of the gambling houses and brothels of Chinatown, inciting recriminations by women's groups for their abuse of women and their bad moral influence. Although much less visible and comprising only a fraction of the male population, Chinese women were also subject to alternative forms of legislative and physical coercion couched in a language of moral righteousness and public health concerns about venereal disease. Most of the Chinese women who immigrated were brought to the U.S. under false pretenses and forced into prostitution. The profit motive was strong, as a servant girl purchased from a poor farming family in China for \$50 could sell for nearly \$1000 in the San Francisco Chinatown brothels.<sup>286</sup> By 1870, over seventy percent of Chinese women in San Francisco were prostitutes.<sup>287</sup> The high percentage of prostitutes amongst this population made all Chinese women the subject of sociological interest and stigmatization. Legislative attempts to control Chinese prostitution occurred with the passing of the 1866 Act for the Suppression of Chinese Houses of Ill Fame and the 1870 Act to Prevent the Kidnapping and Importation of Mongolian, Chinese and Japanese Females, for Criminal or Demoralizing Purposes.<sup>288</sup> While the conditions that women were subjected to in the sex trade were coercive and many were in fact kidnapped or brought into the U.S. under false pretenses as domestic servants, these legislative acts did not help regulate these industries, they did not help curb the flow of women, and they definitely did not improve conditions for the many women held in deplorable conditions. What they did do was assume that all Chinese women who entered the U.S. were prostitutes and many wives who had been sent for by their husbands were subjected to embarrassing questions and physical scrutiny. Under these new laws, immigration officials were easily paid off and sex workers continued to stream into the country. This is the environment in which Bierce wrote and published his story. His brand of journalistic advocacy (he was a muckraker before the phrase was coined) is evidenced by his investigations into the railroad monopoly in California and his open disgust with anti-Chinese groups.<sup>289</sup> His own opinion on the matters in the story seems clear; the story's

---

<sup>285</sup>Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*, 40.

<sup>286</sup>Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 27.

<sup>287</sup>*Ibid.*, 29. These are Yung's calculations based on the comparison of various sources.

<sup>288</sup>Sucheng Chan, "The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943," in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 97-98.

<sup>289</sup>Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*, 92.

outcome is tragic and unnecessary.

“The Haunted Valley” is deceptively short, but it is a complicated tale of secrets and disclosures. I will give a detailed summary of plot to help sort through the story. On one level, the story tells of a miner’s confessed murder of his Chinese manservant. But that is a bit of information revealed early in the story, and so the story is really about the unraveling of the story. Told from the point of view of a young easterner out in some vaguely described mining country, the narrator describes his experience in this region on two separate occasions four years apart. He makes the acquaintance of Jo. Dunfer, the former miner now prominent citizen and saloon proprietor in those parts, and gives a description of his whiskey-soaked condition and his “deep-seated antipathy to the Chinese.” (88). When prodded on his attitude, his “unchristian spirit” when he denied a traveling man some water, he notes that “ther wusn’t no mention of Chinamen in the Noo Test’ment.” (88) Jo. Dunfer’s response to the narrator’s remonstrance is condescension:

You youngsters are too good to live in Californy: you’d better all of ye git back to New England, fur none of ye don’t understand our play. People who are born with autermatic gold spoons, nine hundred fine, a-shovelin’ choice viuns into ther mouths, can afford to hang out libRARY ideas about Chinagrations”<sup>290</sup> (88)

Jo. Dunfer explains the source of his antipathy with an example of his own experience with a Chinese man-servant, Ah Wee, who he’d hired to replace a Mexican woman as cook. It seems that Ah Wee ruined the tree trunks on his property while attempting to cut wood to build a shanty because he “went to hewin’ away at the saplin’s all round the stems, girdleways.” (89) As Dunfer tells the story to the narrator, he begins to fixate on a knot in the wooden wall of the groggery/shanty where they are seated. And as the narrator looks, he sees that the knot has become a human eye. Horrified by this vision, the narrator takes his leave and as he wanders the area he finds that clearing where the original shanty was to be built. There are clear cut stumps, and others that show they have been hacked at in “a most unwoodman-like manner.” (91) Soon after he runs across a tombstone with the following inscription:

AH WEE—CHINAMAN.

Aig unnone. Wirkt last fur Wisky Jo. This mon-  
ment is ewreckted bi the saim to keep is memmerry  
grean an liquize a wornin to Slestials notter take on

---

<sup>290</sup>With standardized spelling and word choice the passage reads: “You youngsters are too good to live in California: you’d better all of you get back to New England, for non of you understand our play. People who are born with automatic gold spoons, nine hundred fine, and eating fine food, can afford to have liberal ideas about “Chinagrations.”

ayres like Wites. Dammum! She was a good eg.<sup>291</sup>

As the epitaph on a tombstone it memorializes the violence of Ah Wee's death but also enforces the aggressive nature of that warning to others. The narrator is astounded by the epitaph, citing "the insolent frankness of confession, the grotesque and ambiguous anathema, and last but not lest, the ludicrous transition of gender and sentiment, marked this as the production of one who must have been at least as demented as bereaved." (91)

In the next scene the narrator is on a road in the same general area, Dunfer's old property, as a horse-drawn cart comes into his view with a familiar figure at the reins. It turns out to be Dunfer's manservant. The man greets the narrator by asking "W'at di you do to W'isky?" We learn that four years have passed, and the driver informs the narrator that Jo. Dunfer has died and is buried alongside Ah Wee in that clearing. The driver, named Gopher, and the narrator walk up to the graves, where the narrator sees that Jo. Dunfer's tombstone says "Jo. Dunfer. — Done for!" (93) It is at this moment, when regarding the grave, and observing the driver, that the narrator decides to ask him if Jo. Dunfer had in fact murdered Ah Wee. Gopher responds that Ah Wee was not murdered but "justifiably hommycided," a reference to the official governmental narrative on the topic. (93) He reveals that Jo. Dunfer went before the court and that he was exonerated of all wrongdoing in the case, that his justification — that Ah Wee did not know how to cut down trees — was enough. He notes that although this defense, which cleared Jo. Dunfer of all culpability, was not the truth, but that it happened because Jo. Dunfer was jealous of him, Gopher. What he says, and this bears a full quotation, provides the meat of the story. He says:

Jo. thought dead loads o' that Chinaman. Nobody but me ever knowed how 'e doted onto 'im. Couldn't bear 'im out uv 'is sight — the derved fool! And w'en 'e come down to this clearin', one day, an' found me an' Ah Wee neglectin' our respective work — him to sleep an' me to grapple a tarantula out uv 'is sleeve — W'isky laid hold o' my axe and let us have it. I dodged jist then, fur the derved spider had bit me, but Ah Wee got it bad in the breast an' stiffened out. W'isky wus jist a-weighin' me out another one, w'en 'e seen the spider fastened onto my finger, an' 'e knowed 'e'd made jack uv 'isself. So 'e knelt down an' made a dernder one. Fur Ah Wee give a little kick an' opened up 'is eyes — 'e had eyes like mine — an' puttin' up 'is hands, drew W'isky's big head down, an' held it there w'ile 'e stayed — w'ich wusn't long, fur a tremblin' run all through 'im, an' 'e give a long moan an' went off.<sup>292</sup> (93-4)

---

<sup>291</sup>With standardized spelling, it reads: "Ah Wee — Chinaman. Age unknown. Worked last for Whiskey Jo. This monument is erected by the same to keep his memory green and likewise a warning to Celestials not to take on airs like whites. Damn 'em! She was a good egg."

<sup>292</sup>With standardized spelling it reads: "Jo thought dead loads of that Chinaman. Nobody but me ever knew how he doted on him. Couldn't bear him out of his sight — the darned fool! And when he came down to this clearing, one day, and found me and Ah Wee neglecting our respective work — him to sleep and me to grapple a tarantula out of his sleeve — Whiskey laid hold of my ax and let us have it. I dodged just then, for the darned spider had bit me, but Ah Wee



Gopher's description of the murder scene reveals that the relationship between Jo. and Ah Wee was intimate. Jo. is described as doting, an attribute of a lover. The scene between Ah Wee and Gopher, innocent enough, had spurred Dunfer to jealousy.

Gopher then accuses the narrator of killing Jo. Dunfer that day at the groggery, saying he was poisoned. The narrator takes umbrage, and asks Gopher when he had become insane. This query prompts Gopher, mad from grief, to reveal the full extent of the story: he'd been mad for "nine years" and he falls on Ah Wee's grave:

w'en that great broote killed the woman who loved him better than she did me! –  
me who had disguised myself an' follered 'er from 'Frisco, w'er' he won 'er from  
me at poker! – me who had watched over 'er fur years, w'en the scoundrel she  
b'longed to wus ashamed to acknowledge 'er an' treat 'er well! – me who fur 'er  
sake keep' 'is cussed secret fur five years, till it eat 'im up!<sup>293</sup> (94)

Only at this moment do we have corroborating testament that Ah Wee was a woman. The secrecy of this triangular relationship here is revealed in its fullness. Beyond the secret affair between Jo. and Ah Wee, we see that Gopher had a more profound secret. Having found employment with Jo. Dunfer in disguise, he had been living in the house, witness to their relationship and desiring Ah Wee from within that strained triangle. Dunfer's death and subsequent burial beside Ah Wee, performed by Gopher, leaves the last man alone with his grief.

Having just referred to this situation as a triangle, it is important to note that while the narrator hears Jo. Dunfer's and Gopher's versions of Ah Wee's murder, Ah Wee is a silent subject. To speak of her role in this story as the object of resentment, guilt, desire, or curiosity, is to contribute to that silence with more imposed speculation. Ah Wee's say in the matter is eclipsed and presented by each speaker in the service of their greater narratives. In Dunfer's story she is silent and obstinate, refusing rather than unable to chop the trees as instructed: "while I looked at him, *so . . .* he wus all right; but when I looked away, *so . . .* he wus all wrong." (89, author's emphasis) As Gopher tells it, she was the focus of his adoration despite the fact that she "loved *him* (Dunfer) better than she did *me!*" (94) And even as she is dying at Dunfer's hand, she draws him to her, holding his head against her chest as she takes her last breath. In Gopher's version he is an integral part of the relationship, but is outside of that affective bond. Having

---

got it bad in the breast and stiffened out. Whiskey was just weighing me out another one, when he saw the spider fastened onto my finger, and he knew he'd made a jack(ass) of himself. So he knelt down and made a (bigger fool of himself). For Ah Wee gave a little kick and opened up his eyes – he had eyes like mine – and putting up his hands drew Whiskey's big head down and held it there while he stayed – which wasn't long, for a trembling ran all through him, and he gave a long moan and went off."

<sup>293</sup>With standardized spelling it reads: "when that great brute killed the woman who loved him better than she did me! Me, who had disguised myself and followed her from 'Frisco, where he won her from me at poker! Me who had watched over her for years, when the scoundrel she belonged to was ashamed to acknowledge her and treat her well! Me who for her sake kept his cursed secret for five years, until it ate him up."

“follered ’er from ’Frisco, w’er’ he (Dunfer) won ’er from me at poker,” Gopher elides the fact that she has been commodified by the exchange in a most undignified if dramatic manner to instead focus on his devotion. Her experience then, gleaned from this description, is as a prostitute traded amongst men as an object of homosocial relations. The high stakes poker of San Francisco forty-niners in this context conjures the image of male exclusivity. Ah Wee’s inability to control her destiny with regard to the poker game is a replay of the conditions under which many women arrived from China, having been sold and traded by men along a chain of profit. There are no other utterances from Ah Wee apart from the grave which marks the spot where she was killed. It was where the “shanty,” her home with Dunfer, was to be built. The fresh flowers that the narrator spots on the grave during that first visit are an indication of someone’s care and affection, but it is unclear whether it was the work of Dunfer or Gopher.

Jo. Dunfer’s public concealment of Ah Wee’s sex, and her performance in male dress, create levels of acknowledgment and understanding about what is going on in his household while publicly erasing the heterosexual relationship taking place in secret in the house. Early in the story his new place is described as a “hermaphrodite habitation, half residence and half groggery,” as a substitute for the ambiguously sexed Ah Wee now gone. While this is a reference to its variant uses as a domicile and as a grog shop, the reference to Ah Wee’s ambiguous sex is clear. The groggery itself is a semi-public and private space, serving as Jo. Dunfer’s home while also providing a gathering space for drinkers, it embodies the threshold between private desires and public dictates on decorum and propriety. While this might seem laughable given the state of the place, the social rules regarding the cohabitation of heterosexuals of different races often took their cues from the laws dictating separation. Bierce plays with the social acceptability of Dunfer’s and Ah Wee’s cohabitation as men. The story briefly flirts with the idea that Jo. Dunfer’s affection for Ah Wee is that of a man for another man. When Gopher says that Dunfer “thought dead loads” of Ah Wee, and “doted onto ’im” it is a proclamation of sexual attention. Given the then-apparent maleness of Ah Wee, his feminized role in relation to Dunfer sets up an alternative form of housekeeping.

Seeing Ah Wee as a man in this employer/servant relationship provides a whole other set of concerns regarding the racialized Chinese man in the U.S. Dunfer’s exchange of the Mexican woman for a Chinese man conjures questions about the homosocial intimacy between white and Chinese men in these work situations. The work done by Chinese men, as servants, launderers, or cooks, was traditionally viewed as women’s work in U.S. culture and in the eastern U.S. it was often performed by Irish immigrants.<sup>294</sup> But in California the nature of migration, spurred by the gold rush, created a gender disparity that heavily favored men at twelve to one.<sup>295</sup> Therefore the

---

<sup>294</sup>An article in *The Atlantic Monthly* expounded the virtues of Chinese domestic servants in assessing the labor situation and as the perfect antidote to the “servant girl problem.” Irish immigrant women, according to the article, have stopped showing interest in domestic work, or in doing it with alacrity: “democratic ideas, universal suffrage, and a lack of servants, are now in Bridget’s (Irish women’s) favor.” This particular author expressed no misgivings about the inclusion of Chinese servants into the American home. C. C. Coffin, “China in Our Kitchens,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 23, no. 140 (1869).

<sup>295</sup>Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*, 94.

service work that would have been performed by immigrant women was performed by Chinese men. It wasn't until the completion of the transcontinental railroad – work done in large part by Chinese men – that the number of women in the region increased. The railroad did more than just ease overland travel. It changed the population of those who arrived and as a consequence more families arrived. Also, while the completion of the railroad discharged many Chinese men of their work for the Central Pacific Railroad of California, it also facilitated the establishment of heterosexual nuclear families on a large scale throughout the region, including the notoriously male Sierra Nevada mining towns. The introduction of white women into these towns displaced many of the Chinese services that had been crucial to bachelors. While this was sometimes the only economic outlet for Chinese men, their performance of women's work made them targets of animosity and competition from white men and women. The role that Chinese men played in the economics of mining towns was seen as a threat to nuclear families. The other services offered within Chinatowns, gambling, prostitution, opium, were seen as a threat to the sanctity of the family. In both cases, the arrival of white women in California en masse and the increase in families in these mining towns displaced the services offered by Chinese businesses.<sup>296</sup>

One of the aspects of domestic work that complicates the equation is the familiarity bred in such an economic exchange within the home. The introduction of a domestic servant into the household is both an imposition on the privacy of the domestic space and the creation of an extra-domestic community. When men worked as servants in the white middle class home, effectively becoming "domestic males," it required the creation of an "alternative masculinity" dependent upon the idea that he would return to China and to his family and his traditional role.<sup>297</sup> This was a way of rationalizing the foreign male presence in these homes. Hellen Lee-Keller refers to the term "gender neutral" to describe de-masculinization without necessarily feminizing Chinese male domestic workers.<sup>298</sup> Ah Wee occupies an ambiguous position in the story, being depicted as neither entirely male nor female by those who discuss her. She is at various times referred to with masculine pronouns, and described as wearing a pig-tail, all indications of masculinity. The only hint that the narrator receives that all is not as it seems is when he reads the tombstone that indicates Ah Wee's gender by saying "She was a good eg." But rather than take those words for what they impart, the narrator chooses to ignore that bit of information. But when Gopher describes Jo. Dunfer's intense regard for Ah Wee, and that he "doted" on him, "couldn't bear 'im out uv 'is sight" the story seems to be about a secret homosexual relationship between the two, with Gopher as a witness. Ah Wee's indeterminate sex provides more than just the mystery of the story. It is both a commentary on the social role played by some Chinese men in white society as "gender neutral," in a context where the general population was imposing its fear of unchecked racialized male sexuality that could lure white men (through homosexual attraction) and white women (by enticing them into liaisons). The efforts on the part of some to neutralize male Chinese domestic servants could be seen as a

---

<sup>296</sup>Ibid.

<sup>297</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>298</sup>Helen Lee-Keller, "Civilizing Violence: 'the Haunted Valley'," *The Ambrose Bierce Project* 2, no. 1 (2006).

response to the stereotype of their sexually ravenous and predatory behavior with white women. A series of riots against Chinatowns across the country attest to white fears of Chinese “duplicity” in luring white girls into prostitution and marriage, in one case accusing workers of a laundry shop of raping several white girls.<sup>299</sup>

Because of Ah Wee’s public performance as a male, it appears to the town that Dunfer hired a Chinese male cook. He let go of his previous cook, a “Mexican woman,” described as such but then followed up with the sentimental “as nice a Greaser as ye ever seen.” Dunfer’s use of this epithet indicates the ease with which affect and repression can coexist. He does the same in calling Ah Wee a “pagan” but in the next breath lamenting any ill treatment he might receive if fired and left to seek employment elsewhere. Seeing Ah Wee as a woman, this exchange of the Mexican woman for a Chinese woman illustrates the cultural, gender, and class chauvinism at play in the facile substitution of one racialized woman for another.<sup>300</sup> Their social status is confirmed by the racial descriptors combined with their employment in the grog shop. Dunfer’s only reason for his decision to let one go and hire the other is that he had been drinking too much and hence “handn’t no nice discriminatin’ sense of my duty as a free W’ite citizen.” He then notes that the presence of a “pagan” in the shanty is anathema to a Christian household, indicating that he had “got religi’n” and that there was then talk of “runnin’ (him) fur the Legislater.” (89) Dunfer’s explanation about his decision to employ Ah Wee is couched in a suspension of judgement, but more remarkably that judgement is tied to whiteness and its naturalized rights of citizenship. Told in his voice however, it is a farce of disparity between democratic ideals and actual practice. The two women are exempt from those rights by law and by practice.<sup>301</sup>

The most important right officially denied Chinese immigrants and many Mexicans, for the purposes of this story, is the right to testify in court against a white man. Ah Wee’s silence in this context is a profound commentary on the coercive legal structures at play. And while Dunfer enjoys the privileges of whiteness, his murder of Ah Wee is treated as not only justifiable homicide but as entertainment. As Gopher, the other living witness to the murder, tells it: “the inquest was held without my assistance, an’ W’isky went before it an’ told ’is own story, an’ told it so well that the joory all laughed, an’ the Coriner said it wus a pleasure to hev a witness as

---

<sup>299</sup>Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, 160-61.

<sup>300</sup>Lee-Keller, “Civilizing Violence: ‘the Haunted Valley’.”

<sup>301</sup>Chinese immigrants could not acquire U.S. citizenship nor could they be naturalized. Mexicans in the U.S. had forged a complicated truce that acknowledged their status as white and guaranteed rights of citizenship, but in practice this was not upheld, particularly for the working classes. In *People v. Hall*, the California Supreme Court ruled that Chinese were not white, and were second-class citizens along with blacks and Indians. They were therefore denied citizenship rights, including the right to testify against a white man in court. It remained in effect until it was rescinded in 1872. See Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, 162-63. Of course one of the most important rights of citizenship – the right to vote – was at that time denied women.

hadn't any nonsense about 'im." (94) Dunfer's performance as court jester here buys him societal approval and absolution. But the jury's readiness to not only believe but to laugh at the story, despite its tragic end, is indication of the dehumanizing tactics at play in the portrayals of Chinese immigrants at this time.

In the end, the story should be no more or less tragic for the revealed secret of Ah Wee's sexual identity. And it should certainly be no more or less tragic for Dunfer's overwhelming guilt. But the pathos of this tale of jealousy and woe *is* the heart of the story; it turns on the tragic revelation of this triangle of affect and it turns on the tragic revelation of Ah Wee's identity. This brings us back to that "joory," waiting for the entertaining tale, getting glimpses of Dunfer's folksy humor. There is an uncanny resemblance between a "joory" that will laugh at the well-told story of the murder of Ah Wee, finding no tragedy in one man's killing of a Chinese servant, and a magazine reader who remains disinterested in the murder of Ah Wee until finding that *she* was Dunfer's lover, finding the murder of a female lover more tragic than the murder of a male servant. That gasp of reader sympathy is similarly under scrutiny by Bierce because it relies on the condition of affective violence instead of disinterested compassion.

In all fairness Bierce reveals very little about Ah Wee's identity or feelings, but what breadcrumbs there are he saves for the end. Up until that point Ah Wee is but a stock figure, speechless and indistinguishable from all the other Chinese men that the fine folk of the Haunted Valley, the narrator, or the reader, have seen on the pages of magazines, the streets of Chinatown, or the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. But that is the point. Ah Wee shouldn't have to be a woman, or in love, or the object of obsession for the story to be horrific. That element is already present in the communal negation of Ah Wee's humanity by juries that exonerate murderers and men who wager on women in poker games. It is under these conditions that the gothic humorous western sketch comes into being.

### **Doña Dolores**

Kathryn Jarboe's "Doña Dolores" is a tragic love story written in the popular literary style of the day, with a flash of local color, moonlight, and the scent of violets. Published in *The Overland Monthly* in the September 1899 issue, the story deals with the issue of regional memory and cultural erasure in portraying the Mexican protagonist's final days. Jarboe's story is an important specimen of the minor literature that appeared in the *Overland Monthly*. Some of her other work appeared in such publications as *House and Garden* and *Munsey's Magazine*. These were not high culture literary outlets the likes of *The Atlantic Monthly* or *The Century Magazine*, but they were respectable, and the addition of this story into the *Overland Monthly* is perfectly understandable. Jarboe's foray into Californio subjectivity here provides some insight into the ways that Anglo writers, and dominant cultural forms in general, were constructing a narrative about the political and cultural transformation of California fifty years after the Mexican American War. The world that Jarboe portrays in this story is one that self-consciously engages the emerging Anglo nostalgia for old "Spanish" California. While the cultural forms of that nostalgia, the "fantasy Spanish Heritage," would find their greatest expression in the architecture of the region, the glorification of a Mediterranean past was an attempt to both negate an Indian presence in the state and to ignore the mestizaje that was such a common fact of Mexican life in

nineteenth century California.<sup>302</sup> Doña Dolores, the protagonist, embodies that nostalgia. Her childhood home Casarosa, an old low slung adobe with patios and trellised vines, is the architectural expression of that nostalgia in this story. Her American husband buys a summer home in Casarosa's likeness. Once she has moved into the house her heart begins to clamor for the old ways. The overwhelming influence of adobe home is a siren call revealing the overwhelming power of domestic practice in reinforcing identity.

Doña Dolores has by all outward appearances adjusted to living in a California ruled and dominated by the "hated Americanos." She is married to an Anglo, has a daughter with him, and seems to be living a comfortable life free of worry, but the memory of old California haunts her, and she ultimately cannot reconcile her desire for the life of the "early Spanish days" with a present that is decidedly less romantic and still very foreign to her. At the end of the story Doña Dolores lies dead of a gunshot wound, a presumed accident. But her alternating distress and ennui, visible to others, leads her dearest friend to consider that the death may have been a suicide. This story not only engages in the nostalgic reflections that elide the Mexican presence in California, it also hints at the sexual propriety of Californianas. Dolores's attraction to a man who is not her husband, a Californio, is constructed as natural, an affiliation of like beings. In the end, her death allows the narrative to erase her and other Californios from the region, relegating the Mexican population to a curious historical phase in the history of the state.

A quick summary will suffice as the story does not lead the reader down any surprising paths or present any taxing complications, but for the services of this analysis it is important to get a substantial sense of the story. The scene opens with Dolores Bellamy as she sits at her desk compiling a guest list for a weekend house-party. She seeks the advice of her husband, Dick, on the inclusion of one Horace Grey to their party. We find later that Dolores is drawn to him.

The narrative then turns to a backstory, noting that Dick Bellamy found the young Dolores while passing her grandmother's old adobe house. Dolores's grandmother, Doña Ysabel, came to California from Mexico as a young woman and married a man who became a casualty of the Mexican American War. Her only son died at a young age as well, leaving behind baby Dolores. Doña Ysabel nursed a profound hatred for the "Americanos" and shared her opinions with her granddaughter, instilling in her the same hatred and resentment. Both lived in extreme seclusion from the changing world outside the walls of their estate. Dick was one of the new rich American neighbors. Doña Ysabel reluctantly consented to their marriage and then died. Dolores and Dick traveled to Europe and lived well, but Dolores missed her old home Casarosa. So Dick buys a country house, a summer home, in the old California style made of adobe.

The story returns to the discussion of the party – the party guests have arrived. Bessie Fairfax, Dick's cousin, is waiting impatiently for Horace Grey. He does arrive, and displays an easy intimacy with Dolores. They speak to each other in Spanish, as we find out that his mother was Spanish. Dolores feels a "curious sensation" in Grey's presence.

One night, amidst the leisure and gaiety, Dolores wonders aloud what her grandmother would think if she could witness this scene and see her granddaughter socializing with the "hated Americanos." Conversation then turns awkwardly to Dolores namesake, her daughter Dolly. When asked why the little girl does not go by her formal, "adorable" name, she responds: "you

---

<sup>302</sup>Carey McWilliams and Matt S. Meier, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 43-48.

would n't have me call that blue-eyed, white-haired mite 'Dolores,' . . . She is . . . American through and through." (269) Dolores starts to show signs of dissatisfaction with her husband and her life. She is increasingly drawn to Horace Grey. The visit ends and the guests depart for their trains, leaving Dolores in a state of restlessness and desolation.

The narrative shifts to discuss the accidental death of Dolores from a gunshot wound. She had been packing the family's bags for a hunting trip and it was presumed she killed herself. Her good friend Bessie Fairfax wonders whether it was suicide, but she does not even venture to say the word. Horace Grey, showing no signs of grief, comments in trite indignation that such tragedy "comes from trusting women with things they don't know how to handle." (273)

What is most striking, apart from the facile erasure of the Californiana at the end of the story through suicide, is the degree of hatred that she harbors for the conquering "race" in her midst. The narrative attention to Dolores's sense of rancor and resentment is a major element in her suicide, as it arises from a sense of hopelessness about the U.S. annexation of California. Her resentment is not grounded in a critique of the way that Mexicans in the U.S. have been racialized, or been disenfranchised. Rather, it is rooted in a cultural nostalgia. In some sense, Jarboe's decision to focus on this sentiment, this hatred so profound that it has some part in Dolores's suicide, could just be a plot device. But it serves to construct a narrative about a native fatalism that is an important part of the hegemonic shift in the region. Dolores's is a resentment passed through the generations from her grandmother, distilled in a time warp on an old Mexican rancho closed off from the rest of the world that was increasingly peopled with emigrants. In commenting on this, the narrative assumes that this feeling of rancor is an anomaly, and that history is best left in the past. The two women:

"shut in from intercourse with the world, nursed the wrath of a whole nation against an invader. The feud had been over for years and all hostile feeling was buried; but to these two women the grievances were as fresh, the bitterness as intense, as in the first years of conquest" (265)

Oddly, narrative fixation on Dolores's hatred of the Americanos has the double-edged effect of aggrandizing that resentment and making it an insurmountable obstacle to reconciliation but also it diminishes that rancor by making it emotional and tied to cultural markers exclusively. Dolores's reflexive feelings are spurred by pangs of nostalgia even as she fails to look around her to see how Mexicans are being disenfranchised through both official laws and informal customs. The old rancho where Dolores grew up would have seen a steady decline in the years after annexation as the region developed capitalist style agriculture. The introduction of wheat, corn, and barley provided the type of monoculture in the Central Valley that would have relegated the Californios to relative obscurity.<sup>303</sup> Dolores's bitterness does not arise out of any concrete sense of righteousness, but out of a sense of cultural pride. When speaking to her American friends of her memories of her grandmother, she says: "she would have remembered always that you belonged to the hated race, the race that killed and crushed her people and her hopes." (269) This shocks her friends, and one chides Dolores, calling her "impolite."

---

<sup>303</sup> Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, 31.

It is with some frankness that she tells her husband and friends that when they pronounce her name, it sounds like the prattle of a language student: “When the rest of you say ‘Dolores,’ when Dick says it, I feel that he ought to go right on with the first sentence in the *Meisterschaft* . . . it sounds like a lesson he has learned.” (269) Dolores’s fixation on the pronunciation of her own name, the most intimate of utterances, gets to the heart of the problem. She has kept a part of herself hidden away from her husband and her friends. When asked by her good friend Bessie why her daughter “Dolly” did not go by her given name “Dolores,” the mother responds with seeming exasperation: “you wouldn’t have me call that blue-eyed white-haired mite ‘Dolores’ . . . she is the image of Dick, – American through and through.” (269) Though the product of both Mexican and Anglo parents, the child’s appearance has erased the visage of the mother, leaving the next generation “without one trace” of “Spanish blood.” As a response, Dolores’s insistence upon calling her daughter “Dolly” is another indication of the sort of cultural erasure that the story assumes will occur in the course of time.

The potency of addressing Dolores by her name, pronouncing it as her grandmother did, is evidenced by her response to the utterances of Horace Grey, the summer visitor who elicits strong emotions from various members of the group. She tells him:

When you call me ‘Doña Dolores,’ it brings back all the memories of my old home . . . And with them all my old grandmother, so fierce, so vindictive, but at the same time so full of sweet passionate love for her own people, her dead husband, her dead son, and her own race!” (269)

Having witnessed her own grandmother’s complicated and rancorous nostalgia, Dolores has come to identify and equate “vindictive” and bitter emotions with “sweet passionate love.” This poisonous combination of emotions sets the tone for Dolores’s affective exchanges – with her husband, her daughter, and Grey – by prompting her to seek in them “fierce” and negative elements. And it is the memory of Grey’s pronouncement of her name that Dolores repeats to herself. This is what she keeps telling herself near the end of the story.

Horace Grey, it turns out, is half-Spanish, a fact revealed when Dolores contemplates her own “intensely Spanish” name. (269) But only Grey’s mother was “Spanish,” and his Anglo name is an indication that he is more aligned with the dominant culture. His Californio identity is only discernible through the stereotypical markers: “inefficient,” “easy for girls to fall in love with,” a “flirt.” Grey is the consummate Spanish Don whose swagger provokes Anglo men while he enchants the women. And Dolores cannot deny his charm. For his part, Grey is “absorbed, body and soul, in Dolores.” (269) Grey expresses his affection for Dolores by conjuring the old “Spanish days,” saying he would like to be a monk, separated from life “in a cloister” and to have his “senses and passions numbed by prayers and thoughts of a future life.” In essence, Grey is describing Dolores’s old life in Casarosa. The nostalgic pull of the domestic, the quotidian elements of the old life, has created an intimate shared connection between Dolores and Grey.

The connection that Dolores makes between Spanish, affective bonds, and violence, is extraordinary. When Grey speaks in Spanish to her, “low, soft and sweet,” Dolores notes that it elicits a “curious feeling,” which is again that “intense rage and hatred for the Americans.” (270) Dolores makes the connection once again between the dulcet tones of her mother tongue and an impulse to violence, “clenching” her hands in response. She tells Grey about an instance in Spain, on her honeymoon, when she and her husband were lounging in a park. “On the other side of the



wall,” she says, “I heard two lovers talking. I could only hear a word or two, but the music of their voices was wonderful. If I had closed my eyes I would have imagined myself back in the old court with Doña Ysabel. All at once I was filled with an intense rage and hatred for the Americans, our conquerors.” (270) The trigger here, spoken Spanish, is cherished but it becomes tainted by the accompanying rancor that it recalls. Even though Dolores is overwhelmed by feelings of anger or hatred, it is an emotion that can be contained, as she cannot act on that hatred. That she shares this sentiment with Grey, a substitute for lovers’ flirtations, reinforces that connection between affect and the impulse toward violence. So, rather than engage in any unseemly behavior she shares her bitterness. Though she can do nothing about her affection for Grey, based as it is in some sort of cultural affinity, she remains the sexually restrained woman that defined her class. By substituting sexual transgression with acrimony, she is acting as a good Californiana of the upper class, ever faithful to her husband even if her emotions act to alienate her.<sup>304</sup> In the end, Dolores is the perfect depiction of the old Californians. Contained within an Anglo American narrative of conquest and assimilation, Dolores comes to embody a way of life “nearing its end.” (265) Her hatred toward the Americans is ineffectual and romantic, and as time marches on, she has become a relic of a romanticized way of life. But at one point she tells Grey “I am an American myself now,” asserting her own national loyalties. (271) And her legacy bears this out, as her daughter “Dolly,” will inevitably assert a claim to old California heritage without the troublesome associations about race, with none of her mother’s rancor, and with no outwardly discernible linguistic markers. She will be “American through and through,” as her mother said. Dolores’s suicide, an act of defiance against having to live in this world, has erased her presence. In death the narrative refers to her as “Mrs. Richard Bellamy,” no longer the Californiana, no longer an individual in her own right.

### **Lolita Lavegne**

J. A. Rhodes’s story “Lolita Lavegne,” published in the June 1899 issue of *The Overland Monthly*, is somewhat different from the other stories in this collection. It is written in the dime novel fashion as a tale of gratuitous violence. The author does not bother to flesh out the main character, a young Yokio woman. Whether J. A. Rhodes was a pen name, or the real name of a writer who did not produce many pieces for publication, it is hard to say. But this one piece, accepted for inclusion by the magazine, presents one of the dominant imaginative constructs about California Indians. And while the story does not attempt to reach the lofty romanticism of Doña Dolores’s suicide, or the tragedy of Ah Wee’s story, it does engage the dominant trope of violence that informs those works.

One thing to remember about Lolita, whose father was European, and whose mother had a fair amount of European ancestry is that Lolita is quite fair. So while this story is about someone who is for all intents Yokio she looks European. Her grand literary predecessor is Ramona, Helen Hunt Jackson’s heroine made into a regional legend. In this story the young Indian woman might be a pointed jab at the innocent and loving Ramona. Unlike Ramona, Lolita

---

<sup>304</sup> Antonia Castañeda, "Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish-Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California," *Frontiers* 11, no. 1 (1990): 13.

has no heart, no goodness and no tendency toward kindness.

“Lolita Lavegne” is the story of a young woman who lives on the Round Valley Indian Reservation in Mendocino County, the home of the Yokio people. Presented as a mysterious figure at the story’s inception, Lolita’s “life has been much more than common, and her singular career and romantic past would put to shame the most fanciful air-castles of her white sisters.” (552) Lolita is the daughter of a Yokio mother and a French father. Her father is “naturally vicious,” and maternal grandfather was also “a man of very cruel nature.” (552) Through the course of the story we see as several of Lolita’s lovers are mysteriously murdered by a dagger to the heart. The men who are interested in her run the gamut of western types: the son of a chief of a neighboring tribe, a fellow Yokio tribesman, a Spaniard, an “American and Spanish half-breed,” a Mexican soldier, and a Modoc warrior. The ones who win her hand are eventually killed. Evidently, Lolita’s sexual awakening is a dangerous prospect for the neighboring men, as they all seem to die in secluded areas that are perfect for lovemaking. The final lover to meet this fate is the Modoc warrior, Chiparo, who wins her hand in combat with the Mexican soldier. The Mexican, a stereotypically proud and violent man, is shamed by the loss and decides to take his revenge by killing the two lovers. In staking out their love-nest, he waits in preparation for an attack. But he is surprised to find that as the two lovers sit together, Lolita takes out a dagger and stabs Chiparo in the heart, just like all the others. The narrative does not attempt to reconcile these actions with any sort of character motive or insight. Instead, it is Lolita’s savage nature to act this way, a trait inherited from both her father and maternal grandfather.

The narrative tone seems to express a certain delight in recounting Lolita’s sexual and violent conquests. Whether for the victimization of these men, all villainized to some extent, or for the glorification of this black widow of the rancheria, it is unclear. The affect and aggression contained here present a literary sensationalist expression of the old notions about venereal disease. It ravaged the California native populations in the Mission period, and sent many to an early grave.<sup>305</sup> The Spanish fathers found much fault with Indian customs, which they thought promiscuous. Lolita’s readiness to become intimate with men, “never hesitating,” serves to seal their fates. (554) Lolita wields her control over these men through sexual promiscuity. The narrative desire to ascribe such characteristics to an Indian woman is drawn from sensationalist representations of Indian men. If their prowess on the battlefield becomes an ingrained or iconic representation of the Indian man, then Lolita is the female equivalent.

Oddly, the narrative ends with its one bit of character motivation, a vague explanation for all the violence.

With an inherited passion for murder, this strange human character made love to those persons she had marked as her victims, that she might the more easily gain an opportunity to take their lives. (557)

For Lolita, the first priority is the marking of victims, from there she then engaged them. The affective element is left undiscussed. Whether Lolita cared for her victims, or found her time with them a means to an end, is not clear.

---

<sup>305</sup>Virginia Marie Bouvier, *Women and the Conquest of California, 1542-1840: Codes of Silence* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001), 109.

## A Chinese Ishmael

The final story presented in this chapter is Sui Sin Far's "A Chinese Ishmael," which was published in the July 1899 issue of *The Overland Monthly* with her name appearing as Sui Sin Fah. Sui Sin Far was the pen name created by Edith Maude Eaton (1865-1914), the daughter of a Chinese mother and English father. As her pseudonym suggests, Sui Sin Far chose a literary personae that reflected her Chinese heritage, though she did sometimes publish under the name Edith Eaton. Her fiction attempted to represent Chinese subjectivity at a time when other Anglo-phone writers, mostly white, more readily caricatured Chinese immigrants. In this way her fiction could be perceived to speak from a "representative subject position."<sup>306</sup> But Sui Sin Far's situation is more complicated, since her mixed heritage and unfamiliarity with the Cantonese that was spoken in American Chinatowns made her an outsider to that community. However, her own self-identification as Chinese gave her a sympathetic stance from which to write, making her fiction a form of representational advocacy. In fact, this outsider status was an overriding theme in her works, as has been noted by scholars. So, while Eaton herself straddled two identities, as Sui Sin Far she made a decision to render the inhabitants of Chinatown with dignity and respect.

In "A Chinese Ishmael" we find a romantic story of thwarted love that appeals across cultural boundaries, giving the story a universal appeal: the two lovers at the center of the story encounter several obstacles to their relationship. While the title of the story suggests that the storyline would be familiar to nineteenth century American readers, who would know the reference to the Biblical Ishmael, the actual storyline veers from that expected plot. The story of Ishmael is a compelling one, he is the firstborn son of Abraham with his wife Sarah's Egyptian slave-girl Hagar. It is an arrangement made by Sarah, who cannot bear children. But when she finally bears a child, Isaac, she sees Ishmael as a threat and has Abraham expel Hagar and Ishmael. This reference to Ishmael does not directly allude to any part of the plot line of the story, but may instead refer to the general sense of despair and the more particular forms of alienation suffered by the characters. But this explanation is only minimally satisfying, and the title of the story continues to confound this reader, as it just does not seem to reflect any of the characters' experiences in any substantial way.<sup>307</sup>

The author makes a point of showing the commonality of her characters' feelings, but their obstacles are unique to their community, as Ku Yum, the young woman, is a slave and her lover Leih Tseih has a large debt of indentured servitude. These characters, then are living in a community buffered from U.S. laws and constraints. So while these two are identifiable as sympathetic characters, the world they live in and the different interests they must negotiate mark their difference from those most likely to read the story.

A detailed plot summary follows in order to provide a sense of the storyline. The story opens by revealing the fate of the two main characters. The narrator contemplates the shore near the Cliff House where the local sea lions spend their time, wondering if those animals might

---

<sup>306</sup>Joy M. Leighton, "'a Chinese Ishmael': Sui Sin Far, Writing, and Exile," *MELUS* 26, no. 3 (2001).

<sup>307</sup>See Ibid. Leighton also expresses bewilderment over the story title, and ultimately decides that the reference must refer to Ishmael's exile.

know the whereabouts of Leih Tseih and Ku Yum, two lovers who jumped to their deaths on that spot.

The story introduces Ku Yum, a young girl brought as a slave to work for a Chinese couple, the Lee Chus. One day, while standing on the balcony of the Lee Chus' apartment, she spots Leih Tseih walking down the street. As he passes under the apartment balcony, she drops a Chinese Lily. He looks up and falls in love with her on the spot. He continues to return to that spot, but Ku Yum is shy and does not venture out on the balcony. Eventually, Leih Tseih manages to toss a note up to her, and she hides it. Mrs. Lee Chu finds the note and beats Ku Yum. A neighbor in the building, A-Chuen, hears Ku Yum's screams and decides to help the young girl. She contacts Leih Tseih and she arranges to hire Ku Yum evenings under the pretense of doing embroidery work. This gives the lovers an opportunity to meet. Ku Yum informs her lover Leih Tseih that another man, Lum Choy, has an agreement with her masters, the Lee Chus, to purchase her. She describes Lum Choy as a man who wears American clothes and sometimes passes as Japanese, two acts that strike at their ethnic pride. Leih Tseih tells her that he is the son of a high Mandarin who ran away from home because he was restless and rebellious. It turns out that Leih Tseih knows Lum Choy from his gambling days and that Lum Choy had attempted to cheat on one occasion. Leih Tseih scarred him badly then had to go into hiding to avoid prosecution for the assault. Leih Tseih then reveals that he is saving money to pay his debt to the Six Companies for his original passage to the U.S., but he suggests they run away with the money instead. Ku Yum refuses, and suggests that instead he pay his debt of passage and that they run away before she is sold to Lum Choy. Having agreed to run away the two lovers confide in their old friend, A-Chuen.

Back at the Lee Chus's house, Ku Yum has gone missing on the day she is to be handed over to Lum Choy. The Lee Chus will not refund the money to Lum Choy, so together they plot to find her through her lover, who Mrs. Lee Chu had seen walking under that balcony. Lum Choy spots Leih Tseih and recognizes him. He goes before the presidents of the Six Companies to press charges against Leih Tseih for three things: Leih Tseih's debt to the Six Companies, the theft of Ku Yum, and for the physical assault. They refuse, as his debt to the Six Companies has recently been paid and the sale of Ku Yum is illegal in the U.S. Consumed by rage, Lum Choy decides that the only way to permanently separate the two lovers is to commit suicide and to frame Leih Tseih for the murder. He will do this by offering Leih Tseih an arrangement to live peacefully and pay off Ku Yum's price. After Leih Tseih leaves, Lum Choy will commit suicide.

Leih Tseih returns to Ku Yum with news of Lum Choy's death and blood on his clothes. He tries to convince Ku Yum to leave him, as he is now a condemned man. She refuses, saying it would be an honor for a slave girl to walk the Halls of Death with the son of a high Mandarin. They Clif, share one last embrace, and leap to their deaths. In doing so they have become a part of the landscape and a part of Chinatown lore, as the residents of that part of the city say the two have become sea lions.

While the interior world of Chinatown may have been off limits to most of the readers of *The Overland Monthly*, this portrayal of the enclave's women provides a rare glimpse of what in these years was a decidedly small and secluded group. Women numbered approximately two percent of the Chinese population through the 1850s and rose up to about five percent by 1900.<sup>308</sup>

---

<sup>308</sup>Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*, 18, 24.

While a very high percentage of the Chinese women in San Francisco were prostitutes, approximately seventy-one percent in 1870, two percent of Chinatown women were listed as domestic servants.<sup>309</sup> This means that a significant proportion of women of Chinese descent in San Francisco were engaged in some form of work for compensation. While the labor of prostitutes was the most profitable to the men who controlled the conditions of their labor, these women lived in the most destitute and compromising conditions. Often they were brought under false pretenses and then sold to brothels. But some young women were brought to the U.S. as domestic servants.

The young girls brought to the U.S. as servants, called *mui tsai* (in Cantonese it means “little sister”), were part of a tradition that was common in China. In return for indentured servitude, the girls were said to benefit from the association with great families. In China, this sort of work was seen as a “form of charity for impoverished girls.”<sup>310</sup> But in China these *mui tsai* were often protected by their proximity to family that guaranteed the social and legal enforcement of their contracts. Under those conditions the girls would usually be free of their obligation at eighteen and could then marry. Those girls brought to the U.S. as *mui tsai* did not have the same kinds of assurances. While in theory they were to gain their freedom, their isolation from family made them vulnerable to unscrupulous masters and mistresses. As we see in this story, soon Ku Yum will no longer be the property of the Lee Chus, but she will pass from one master to another. Whether or not Lum Choy plans to marry Ku Yum after purchasing her, the transaction is troubling because it reinforces Ku Yum’s status as property. This speaks to the interchangeable nature of servitude and marriage for women at this time. While the proportion of *mui tsai* was small in Chinatown, they performed the most public of roles in the community as they ran errands and operated in the public realm. Their mistresses, who were often the wives of merchants, were often home-bound either by physical constraints such as bound feet, or by social convention that severely limited the mobility of wives of professional men. In this isolated community then servant girls in the same position as Ku Yum would have the most broad access to other members of the Chinatown community.

Ku Yum’s relative freedom under such conditions makes her an interesting figure who is able to find a limited amount of control over her destiny. While this does not seem to be the case, especially in light of her impending sale to Lum Choy, her actions and sentiments throughout the story reveal this. Even though she has been promised to Lum Choy, essentially amounting to a threat of prostitution, she engages Leih Tseih by dropping a flower in his path. She is the one to make first contact, owing to the fact that she can view the street from her balcony. When she drops the flower to draw Leih Tseih’s attention, it is her last chance to be an active agent in her life. When Leih Tseih expresses a desire to purchase her freedom, she refuses, instead proposing to run away with him in an act she calls “a righteous theft.” (44) Ku Yum’s sense of righteousness here is striking because she weighs the payment for her freedom against Leih Tseih’s payment of his passage debt to the Six Companies and finds one an unjustifiable debt and the other honorable. Though Leih Tseih is ready to abide by the informal laws of Chinatown and purchase Ku Yum’s freedom, she instead asserts an ambiguous inalienable right to freedom.

---

<sup>309</sup>Ibid., 29, 37.

<sup>310</sup>Ibid., 37.

While she does not articulate fully the reason for why it would be a “righteous theft,” her escape would be an enactment of American democratic ideals.<sup>311</sup> The Six Companies agree that the sale of women is unenforceable in the U.S., but for more pragmatic reasons. The presidents respond to Lum Choy’s grievances by saying: “the purchase of slave-girls, which is just and right in our country, is not lawful in America.” (48) In refusing to help Lum Choy recover Ku Yum, the Six Companies have expressed their unwillingness to counter U.S. law in any official capacity. They will, however, turn a blind eye to any actions “conducted secretly.” (48)

The social role of the Six Companies, which was a coalition of groups based on clan affiliation and origin in China is notable in this story. Eventually known as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, the Six Companies was a fraternal organization that provided a number of services to the community including credit for passage to the U.S., housing for recent arrivals, legal representation when members went through the U.S. legal system, and any arbitration for disputes.<sup>312</sup> The Six Companies were the official moderator between Chinatown residents and white governmental and business interests and they had a powerful position within the community. This was a shift from the social structure in China, which had a gentry-scholar class at the top. For Chinese immigrants abroad, the merchant class filled that void and the Six Companies solidified that role.<sup>313</sup>

In giving Ku Yum’s servitude an English description, by calling it “slavery,” Sui Sin Far linguistically alters the nature of the girl’s servitude by giving it a permanent state, “I am only a slave,” Ku Yum says in one instance and in another refers to herself as a slave in the afterlife. It is this sense of hopelessness that symbolizes Chinese women’s lack of agency, whether in China or the U.S. (44) Yu Kum’s status as a slave has a special connotation for a U.S. readership, as the memory of American slavery still represented an especially pernicious form of labor control and abuse. As Yu Kum cannot control her fate, she is subject to the violent outbursts of her mistress, who takes to whipping her when she finds a love note from Leih Tseih. “Her mistress fell to beating her with a little switch. Ku Yum screamed; but instead of receiving help, her mistress’s husband appeared and relieved his wife as switcher, having a stronger arm.” (43) The Lee Chus try to control Ku Yum’s sexuality and her will by subjecting her to physical duress and violence. Ku Yum’s first exchange with her lover, then, is tied to this act of violence.

---

<sup>311</sup>Many women did run away, aided by women’s missionary groups, including the Women’s Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Mission Home, which helped several hundred mui tsai and prostitutes escape their situations. While these were the only groups to help these women, their assistance was often problematic, as they sought to convert these women and to indoctrinate them to value Victorian gender roles. Their aggressive tactics were quite harmful at the personal level, even though they did provide women with an option for a better life. Ultimately, many women married Christian Chinese men, others returned to China, still a few returned to the brothels. See *Ibid.*, 34-37.

<sup>312</sup>Clare V. McKanna, *Race and Homicide in Nineteenth-Century California* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002), 35.

<sup>313</sup>Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 48.

As she is beaten, Ku Yum's screams reach a different set of ears, and upon hearing them A-Chuen, the neighbor, decides to stealthily help the lovers.

When Ku Yum's screams rent the air, her heart swelled big with pity, and though she dared not interfere between mistress and maid, she resolved to watch for Leih Tseih and tell him what she knew concerning Ku Yum. (43)

A-Chuen's hesitation reveals that the community operates by the understanding that domestic boundaries are to be respected. Though the beatings that are confined within the home may be heard through open windows and acknowledged by neighbors, that exchange between mistress and maid is not a public act. A-Chuen understands that her attempts to help Ku Yum directly would be openly rebuffed, because it would assume an acknowledgment of the violent exchange in the Lee Chus's home, but by operating in circularity, she is able to help the young girl. A-Chuen decision to turn her house into a safe haven for the lovers initially marks her as a Celestina figure, as one who is enabling an illicit liaison or procuring an innocent girl for Leih Tseih, but her intentions turn out to be honorable. In fact, in assisting the pair A-Chuen's gesture embodies Sui Sin Far's yearning for a certain camaraderie between women in Chinatown, regardless of class. As the wife of a merchant, the type of husband "who loved her well enough to do all that she wished," she is in an enviable situation, privileged in the community and within the home, and yet she is kind and generous to a slave girl.

What we see of the men of Chinatown is a bit more contentious. While Leih Tseih may have his faults, enthralled by the "Gambling Cash Tiger" and quick of temper, he honors his debts and has a healthy sense of justice. His nemesis Lum Choy is an especially reviled character in this story. In his endeavor to purchase Ku Yum he shows no regard for the rights or will of women. And in comportment, he is seen as a traitor to his culture and his people. When describing him, Ku Yum says: "He is a man who, wishing to curry favor with the white people, wears American clothes, and when it suits his convenience passes for a Japanese." (44) Passing for Japanese (an ethnic group that was not demonized or attacked the way the Chinese were in these years), presents a particular form of betrayal on Lum Choy's part. It also speaks to the performative aspects of ethnic identity in nineteenth century California. While in some respects Chinese dress and the maintenance of the queue were reactions to pressure from mainstream culture to assimilate, it wasn't that simple. Immigrants were under social pressure to maintain Chinese dress and to forgo the adoption of western dress. Embracing such habits sometimes led to ostracism and the denial of membership to fraternal organizations.<sup>314</sup> As the queue signified Han loyalty to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), it was by this time an accepted part of the Han Chinese aesthetic and political identity. Those who wished to return to China were required to wear the queue on pain of death. Because of this strong attachment to the queue, as a matter of identity and as a way of maintaining a connection with their homeland, the general public found ways to aggressively punish Chinese men. The San Francisco queue ordinance introduced in 1873 forced all men who were arrested to submit to a haircut with hair "cut or clipped to an

---

<sup>314</sup>Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), 140.

uniform length of one inch from the scalp.”<sup>315</sup> This ordinance was specifically directed toward Chinese men, who in general were arrested for non-violent infractions. These infractions were often the result of city ordinances written with the Chinese community in mind. The cubic air ordinance, for instance, stipulated a occupancy limit on housing, and violations of it resulted in arrest. Those arrests then unfairly targeted Chinese men, who often lived in cramped conditions. Even though the loss of one’s queue was often due to such unfair legislation or to random assaults, the loss of the queue would “entail disgrace and humiliation,” and A-Chuen sums up the general opinion among Chinatown residents when she remarks: “shame on him!” upon hearing that Lum Choy has adopted a western look willingly.<sup>316</sup> (44) To choose to forgo the queue as Lum Choy has, then speaks of a willingness to not only deny one’s Chinese identity in the U.S., but to abide by the kinds of aggressive legislation that sought to alienate and victimize Chinese men. The ordinance was invalidated in July of 1879 before the California circuit court in *Ho Ah Kow v Matthew Nunan*.

While Lum Choy may dress as an American, he is very un-American in his form of revenge, which involves the self-effacing act of suicide. This form of revenge is calculated to most hurt the two lovers by embroiling them in his death. Spurred by “desire for a woman, and hate for a man,” his feelings come to embody a hateful yearning devoid of affect. (48) This decision is anathema to the strident individualism of American culture. It is also a way to bind all three together in a narrative of love, hate, and revenge. The end result is that Leih Tseih and Ku Yum jump to their deaths to avoid prosecution for Lum Choy’s murder. When the Chinatown gossips reflect on the dead lovers, it is in the context of their desperate response to Lum Choy’s suicide. Their love, then, has become embroiled in the story of his hate. It is fitting, as the forces at work in the U.S. were persistently against Ku Yum and Leih Tseih’s love: “here, there are laws to separate us, but none to bind.” Leih Tseih says in considering their options for marriage.

As the *Overland Monthly* set out to define a literary expression of California, it did so in reaction to the eastern magazines that were so influential. But that was a difficult prospect. The way that the east had come to perceive of California was already set. The most popular early stories to come out of the *Overland* were Harte’s, and they celebrated a California of forty-niners. Bierce’s story reveals the complex nature of this aesthetic. In the opposite direction, Lolita Lavegne does not seem to be at all troubled by the violent scenes that it depicts. The character’s betrayal of her lovers’ trust, and her lack of real motive paint the native population as uncaring and violent. Jarboe’s story revels in the myth of an old California, but it creates a tension when the protagonist cannot reconcile old hatred with the present. And Sui Sin Far portrays a U.S. where there is no space for affective connection.

---

<sup>315</sup>Franklin Odo, *The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 52.

<sup>316</sup>Charles J. McClain, *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 48.



## Conclusion

Writing about her visit to the home of Antonio Coronel, former Los Angeles Mayor and state treasurer, Helen Hunt Jackson declared that the private-sphere lives of Mexicans in 1880s California were as they had been for decades:

Whoever has the fortune to pass as a friend across the threshold of this house, finds himself transported, as by a miracle, into the life of a half century ago.<sup>317</sup>

Marking time back to “a half century ago,” the 1830s, her assessment of Californio domesticity – impervious to the changes of time and the political and economic influence of Anglo emigration – is part of the myth-formation that occurred in the region in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Her observation provides a bit of nostalgic relief while glossing over the aggressive economic and political measures employed by recent emigrants against the native residents to delimit their influence in the public sphere. Despite what can arguably be termed good intentions, Jackson’s fictional and journalistic representations of Mexican and Indian domesticity not only contributed to but set the blueprint for the regional narrative that relegated these populations to the past. In the aftermath of *Ramona*, adobes all over southern California were purported to be the inspiration for the Moreno ranch, mixing regional history with fictional storytelling.

Just four years after *Ramona*’s publication, Charles F. Lummis, journalist and Indian-rights activist, published *The Home of Ramona* (1888), claiming that Rancho Camulos, home of the del Valle family, in Ventura county, was the real-life site of the novel’s rancho. This book was but one of many outlets that made such claims for a multitude of locations, including Ramon’s birthplace and her marriage site, helping to create an emerging regional tourism and city-development centered on the area’s romanticized Spanish past. And to prevent speculation about Jackson’s characterization of the cruelty and dysfunction that characterized the Moreno home in the *Ramona*, Lummis assured his readers that only the architecture and setting of Camulos, but none of the characters of the del Valle family, were inspiration for the novel.

Speculation about the homes of Californios and other marginalized populations expressed a prying desire to explore the private spaces of conquest. Regional fiction, in turn, fed this curiosity by engaging an imaginative subjective space peopled by exoticized Californians: Mexicans, Chinese immigrants, former neophyte Indians, working class ethnics, or former prospectors of the gold rush, creating access into the perceived psyche of the Other. The melding of fact and fiction created a myth that was impossible to disentangle. In this process the authors discussed in this dissertation were inscribing meaning not only to geography, but to spaces within that geography. The result was that the aggressive dynamics of the domestic spaces depicted here became representative depictions.

Dana’s assessment of Mexican promiscuity, and the violent consequences of sexual transgression, reveals an uneasy detente in the Mexican home based not on sincerity or affect but instead on fear of retribution. His perspective on the region, from under the violent supervision

---

<sup>317</sup>Helen Hunt Jackson, "Echoes in the City of Angels," *The Century Magazine* 27, no. 2 (1883): 205.

of the *Pilgrim's* captain, encompasses this representation within a grander narrative of coercion and fear as the ship travels along the Pacific coast. Dana's memoir was the first mass-produced and mass-consumed work of literature about the region, and its significance cannot be overstated. It is for this reason that his perspective on Mexican domestic relations in the region serves as a defining representation. Its placement within this greater narrative of fear and intimidation creates a connection between the emotional registers of fear and love.

Jackson's story of Ramona's love for Alessandro was suppressed in the Moreno home, with the weak-willed Felipe and merciless Señora overseeing. When the two lovers eventually leave and stake out on their own, their attempts to establish a home are undermined by legal and economic factors that work against them. The project of westward migration and settlement in *Ramona* is revealed as the work of thugs; Anglo migration to southern California is represented as an aggressive takeover spurred by greed.

Ruiz de Burton's young heroine is plucked from captivity with a California Indian tribe, only to carry the taint of abduction with her to New England. But instead of the refuge that one expects she'll find, the home that welcomes her offers another form of captivity. She is equally vulnerable to sexual predators in the more "civilized" surroundings of her adopted New England home. Ruiz de Burton's dual critique of American domesticity and American politics becomes embodied in Lola's person and her position in the family. Questions about her racial identity, puzzling to those who have only considered a racial binary of black or white, reveal the exclusionary nature of affective relations along racial lines. This commentary on race and intimacy focuses its most critical eye on the American home as the source and the repository of these restricted affiliations.

The works situated around the turn of the century were reconciled to the issue of migration as at this point the region was overwhelmingly populated with emigrants. Northern California in particular was overrun by newcomers and was quickly assimilated due to the gold rush. Frank Norris's *McTeague* represents a San Francisco tainted by that association as its denizens crawl through the wreckage of an urban geography built on speculative ventures and degraded opulence. Norris's literary sojourn through the world of working class domestic spaces and manners was an example of the curiosity for exploring contested spaces. Norris's exploration of the degenerate domesticity of the working class denizens of Polk Street subsumed the specific tale of Mac and Trina's downfall into stereotyped violence. *McTeague's* basis in the lurid newspaper stories of a husband's violent murder of his wife gives the work the stamp of history, but with the symbolism of fiction, it inscribes the region within this narrative of violence and desire.

The stories published in *The Overland Monthly* provided narratives set in California, exploring subjects that were representative of the population of the region. The stories I chose to examine in this study illustrated how fictional portrayals of culturally marginalized people struggled with the question of social inequality. The subterfuge and gender-bending of Bierce's interracial cohabitation ends in murder due to another instance of confusion. The resulting story of pardoned murder reveals the extent of societal complicity in violence against Chinese men. But the revelation that the murdered man was a woman, and the lover of her murderer, reveals the extent to which interracial violence is preferred over interracial affection. The aggrieved Mexican housewife of Jarboe's Doña Dolores committed suicide in the bedroom of her new home because the new order in California held no charm for her. Her decision to end her life is construed as a form of cultural melancholy for the old order. She leaves behind a daughter who

can lay claim to a Californio birthright but without the memory or trauma of cultural loss. Sui Sin Far's story of thwarted love, ending in a triple suicide, reveals a resignation over all the barriers to the establishment of Chinese domesticity in San Francisco. The star-crossed lovers who want to establish a home must contend with obstacles from China as well as those imposed by the U.S. And Rhodes's story of an Indian girl, Lolita Lavegne, voracious lover and killer, ascribes to her the threat of sexual violence as she murders her fiances. This sensationalist story demonstrates the continued disparagement of Indian character through stories such as this which deny them subjectivity and emotion.

In all these works, the aesthetics of coercion and violence became imprinted on domestic spaces in the region, developing an uneasy relationship between affection, desire, and coercion. These depictions of domestic strife in turn symbolically enacted forms of public coercion that occurred regularly in nineteenth century California through legislation, forms of "frontier justice," or forms of control. While some of these authors depicted their characters and situations from a position of advocacy, sympathizing with the plight of people who were disenfranchised, others were speaking from a position of self-representation. Others still were not writing from a position of either self-representation or advocacy; they were representing an Other for literary consumption. In addressing these issues in a literary context, they helped define a regional literature, contributing to the narrative of California.

## Bibliography

- Adams, Henry. *The Education of Henry Adams*. New York: The Modern Library, 1931.
- Alemán, Jesse. "Historical Amnesia and the Vanishing Mestiza: The Problem of Race in *The Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*." *Aztlan Journal* 27, no. 1 (2002): 59-93.
- . "'Thank God, Lolita Is Away from Those Horrid Savages': The Politics of Whiteness in *Who Would Have Thought It?*" In *María Amparo Ruiz De Burton: Critical and Pedagogical Perspectives*, edited by Amelia María de la Luz Montes and Anne E. Goldman, 95-111. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.
- Almaguer, Tomás. *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991.
- Applegate, Debby. *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher*. New York: Doubleday, 2006.
- Aranda, José F., Jr. "Contradictory Impulses: María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Resistance Theory, and the Politics of Chicano/a Studies." *American Literature* 70, no. 30 (1998): 551-79.
- Bacon D.D., Rev. L. "The Political Outlook." *New Englander and Yale Review* 37, no. 142 (1878): 80-92.
- Bakewell, P. J. *A History of Latin America: C. 1450 to the Present*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2004.
- Baym, Nina. *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-70*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Beard, George Miller. *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1881.
- Bederman, Gail. *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Beecher, Catharine Esther. *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845.
- Beecher, Catharine Esther, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. *The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes*. New York: J.B. Ford and Company, 1872.
- Beidler, Peter G. "The Indian Half-Breed in Turn-of-the-Century Short Fiction." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 9, no. 1 (1985): 1-12.
- Bender, Bert. *Sea-Brothers: The Tradition of American Sea Fiction from Moby-Dick to the Present*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.
- Bierce, Ambrose. "The Haunted Valley." *The Overland Monthly* 7, no. 1 (1871): 88-95.
- Blumin, Stuart M. *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Bouvier, Virginia Marie. *Women and the Conquest of California, 1542-1840: Codes of Silence*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001.
- Bramen, Carrie Tirado. *The Uses of Variety: Modern Americanism and the Quest for National Distinctiveness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

- Brandt, Maria F. "'For His Own Satisfaction': Eliminating the New Woman Figure in *McTeague*." *American Transcendental Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (2004): 5-23.
- Brechin, Gray A. *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Brereton, Virginia Lieson. *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women's Conversions, 1800 to the Present*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Brimblecom, Charles E. "A Masque at an Old Mission." *The Overland Monthly* 17, no. 101 (1891): 482-89.
- Brodhead, Richard H. *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Brooks, James F. *Captives & Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Brown, Gillian. *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Browne, John Ross. *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849*. Washington, D.C.: John T. Towers, 1850.
- Byers, S. H. M. "The Bells of San Diego." *The Overland Monthly* 13, no. 78 (1889): 589-90.
- Campbell, Donna M. *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885-1915*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997.
- Carroll, Mark M. *Homesteads Ungovernable: Families, Sex, Race, and the Law in Frontier Texas, 1823-1860*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001.
- Castañeda, Antonia. "Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish-Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California." *Frontiers* 11, no. 1 (1990): 8-20.
- Cavalier, Philip Acree. "Mining and Rape in Frank Norris's *McTeague*." *American Transcendental Quarterly* 14 (2000): 127-41.
- Chan, Sucheng. "The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943." In *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*, edited by Sucheng Chan, 94-146. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.
- Chávez-García, Miroslava. *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1770s to 1880s*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004.
- Chen, Yong. *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Chesnutt, Charles W., and Richard H. Brodhead. *The Conjure Woman, and Other Conjure Tales*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Chvany, Peter A. "'Those Indians Are Great Thieves, I Suppose?': Historicizing the White Woman in *The Squatter and the Don*." In *White Women in Racialized Spaces: Imaginative Transformation and Ethical Action in Literature*, edited by Samina Najmi and Rajini Srikanth, 105-18. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.
- Coffin, C. C. "China in Our Kitchens." *The Atlantic Monthly* 23, no. 140 (1869): 747-52.
- Covey, Sylvia Lawson. "Mission San Gabriel." *The Overland Monthly* 20, no. 116 (1892): 188.
- Cromley, Elizabeth Collins. "A History of American Beds and Bedrooms, 1890-1930." In *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*, edited by Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, 120-41. Knoxville: University of Tennessee

- Press, 1992.
- Cunliffe, Marcus, ed. *American Literature to 1900*. New York: Penguin Books, 1987.
- . "New England: The Universal Yankee Nation." In *American Literature to 1900*, edited by Marcus Cunliffe, 253-72. New York: Penguin Books, 1987.
- Curtis, George William. "Editor's Easy Chair." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 75, no. 446 (1887): 309-15.
- Dana, Richard Henry. *Two Years before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea*, Penguin American Library. edited by Thomas Philbrick. New York: Penguin Books, 1981.
- Den Tandt, Christophe. *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.
- Deutsch, Sarah. *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1977.
- Ebersole, Gary L. *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Domestic Life." In *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume 5*, 345-69. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902.
- Etulain, Richard W. *Re-Imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996.
- "Evolution in Domestic Architecture." *The Manufacturer and Builder* 9, no. 12 (1887): 286.
- "Evolution in Domestic Architecture." *The Manufacturer and Builder* 10, no. 1 (1878): 22.
- Far, Sui Sin. "A Chinese Ishmael." *The Overland Monthly* 39, no. 199 (1899): 43-49.
- Fisher, Beth. "The Captive Mexican and the Desiring Bourgeois Woman: Domesticity and Expansionism in Ruiz De Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?*" *Legacy* 16, no. 1 (1999): 59-68.
- Fiske, John. "Completed Work of the Federal Convention." *The Atlantic Monthly* 59, no. 356 (1887): 817-32.
- Fleissner, Jennifer. *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004.
- Foy, Jessica H., and Thomas J. Schlereth, eds. *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992.
- Franchot, Jenny. *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Friedberg, Anne. *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Gardner, Mrs. R. C. "'Mind Your Own Business'." *The Ladies' Repository: A Monthly Periodical Devoted to Literature, Arts, and Religion* 20, no. 8 (1860): 453-58.
- Gibson, Campbell. "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790-1900." Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 1998.
- Giles, James Richard. *The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel in America*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995.
- Gillman, Susan. "Ramona in 'Our America'." In *Jose Marti's 'Our America': From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies*, edited by Jeffrey Grant Belnap and Raul A. Fernandez, 91-111. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- . "The Squatter, the Don, and the Grandissimes in Our America." In *Mixing Race, Mixing*

- Culture: Inter-American Literary Dialogues*, edited by Monika Kaup and Debra J. Rosenthal, 140-59. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Home: Its Work and Influence*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972.
- Glazener, Nancy. *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Godfrey, Kathleen. "Visions and Re/Visions of the Native American." PhD, Arizona State University, 1998.
- Goldman, Anne E. "Beasts in the Jungle: Foreigners and Natives in Boston." In *María Amparo Ruiz De Burton: Critical and Pedagogical Perspectives*, edited by Amelia María de la Luz Montes and Anne E. Goldman, 75-94. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.
- . *Continental Divides: Revisioning American Literature*. New York: Palgrave, 2000.
- . "'I Think Our Romance Is Spoiled,' or, Crossing Genres: California History in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* and María Amparo Ruiz De Burton's *The Squatter and the Don*." In *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West*, edited by Valerie J. Matsumoto and Blake Allmendinger, 65-84, 1999.
- Gonzalez, John M. "The Warp of Whiteness: Domesticity and Empire in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*." *American Literary History* 16, no. 3 (2004): 437-65.
- Gordon, Beverly. *Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998.
- Gottheimer, Josh. *Ripples of Hope: Great American Civil Rights Speeches*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003.
- Green, L. Worthington. "San Gabriel Mission." *The Overland Monthly* 25, no. 146 (1895): 195.
- Grier, Katherine C. *Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997.
- Gronning, Robyn McAtavey. "Revising the Revisionists: Re-Evaluating Turner's 'Frontier' and Limerick's 'Conquest' through Three Novels About the California Mission Era." University of Denver, 1994.
- Gutierrez-Jones, Carl Scott. *Rethinking the Borderlands: Between Chicano Culture and Legal Discourse*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Haas, Lisbeth. *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Hart, James David. *The Popular Book; a History of America's Literary Taste*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1950.
- Harte, Bret. "Etc." *The Overland Monthly* 1, no. 4 (1868): 385-88.
- Harte, Bret. "Etc." *The Overland Monthly* 1, no. 1 (1868): 99-100.
- Heizer, Robert F., and Alan F. Almquist. *The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination under Spain, Mexico, and the United States to 1920*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Henderson, George L. *California and the Fictions of Capital*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Herndl, Diane Price. "Miscegen(R)ation or Mestiza Discourse?: Feminist and Racial Politics in *Ramona* and *Iola Leroy*." In *Beyond the Binary: Reconstructing Cultural Identity in a Multicultural Context*, edited by Timothy B. Powell, 261-75. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999.

- Hochman, Barbara. *The Art of Frank Norris, Storyteller*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988.
- . *Getting at the Author: Reimagining Books and Reading in the Age of American Realism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001.
- Howells, William Dean. "A Case in Point." In *Criticism and Fiction, and Other Essays*, edited by Clara Marburg Kirk and Rudolph Kirk, 279-82. New York: New York University Press, 1959.
- . "Editor's Study." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 76, no. 451 (1887): 153-56.
- Hug, William J. "McTeague as Metafiction? Frank Norris' Parodies of Bret Harte and the Dime Novel." *Western American Literature* 26, no. 3 (1991): 219-28.
- Hulme, Edward. "A Relic of the Missions." *The Overland Monthly* 23, no. 137 (1894): 549.
- Hurtado, Albert L. *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- . *Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999.
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
- Jackson, Helen Hunt. *Bits of Talk About Home Matters*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1873.
- . *A Century of Dishonor; a Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes*. Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1964.
- . "Echoes in the City of Angels." *The Century Magazine* 27, no. 2 (1883): 194-210.
- . Jackson to Abbot Kinney, January 29, 1882. Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.
- . Jackson to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, February 5, 1884, in "The Contributors' Club: How Ramona Was Written." *The Atlantic Monthly* 86, no. 517 (1900): 712-20.
- . "Outdoor Industries in Southern California." *The Century Magazine* 26, no. 6 (1883): 803-20.
- . "Ploughed Under by William Justin Harsha, Review." *The Critic* 1, no. 4 (1881): 46-47.
- . "The Present Condition of the Mission Indians in Southern California." *The Century Magazine* 26, no. 5 (1883): 511-29.
- . *Ramona: A Story*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Jackson, Helen Hunt, Abbot Kinney, and United States. Office of Indian Affairs. *Report on the Condition and Needs of the Mission Indians of California*. Washington, D.C.: Govt. print. off., 1883.
- Jackson, Helen Hunt, and Valerie Sherer Mathes. *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.
- Jacobs, Margaret D. "Mixed-Bloods, Mestizas, and Pintos: Race, Gender, and Claims to Whiteness in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* and María Amparo Ruiz De Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?*" *Western American Literature* 36, no. 3 (2001): 212-31.
- Jamieson, Ross W. *Domestic Architecture and Power: The Historical Archaeology of Colonial Ecuador*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000.
- Jarboe, Kathryn. "Doña Dolores." *The Overland Monthly* 34, no. 201 (1899): 265-73.
- Jordan, David Starr. "California and the Californians." *The Atlantic Monthly* 82, no. 494 (1898): 793-801.
- Kaplan, Amy. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.



- . "Manifest Domesticity." In *No More Separate Spheres!*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher, 183-207. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- . *The Social Construction of American Realism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Kimmel, Michael S. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free Press, 1996.
- King, Clarence. "Wayside Pikes." *The Atlantic Monthly* 28, no. 169 (1871): 564-77.
- Klein, Marcus. *Easterns, Westerns, and Private Eyes: American Matters, 1870-1900*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994.
- Kolodny, Annette. *The Land before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.
- Konig, David Thomas. *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Koven, Seth, and Sonya Michel. *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- "Last Week in Chicago: Criticisms by Lillian Bell." *The New York Times*, February 19 1899, 13.
- Lawrence, D. H., Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey, and John Worthen, eds. *Studies in Classic American Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Lee, Robert G. *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999.
- Lee-Keller, Helen. "Civilizing Violence: 'The Haunted Valley'." *The Ambrose Bierce Project* 2, no. 1 (2006).
- Leider, Emily Wortis. *California's Daughter: Gertrude Atherton and Her Times*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Leighton, Joy M. "'A Chinese Ishmael': Sui Sin Far, Writing, and Exile." *MELUS* 26, no. 3 (2001): 3-29.
- Levenson, J.C. "The Red Badge of Courage and McTeague: Passage to Modernity." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism*, edited by Donald Pizer, 154-77. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Leverenz, David. *Manhood and the American Renaissance*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Lincoln, Abraham. "Annual Message to Congress, December 1, 1862." In *The Language of Liberty: The Political Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Joseph R. Forniari, 634-53. Washington, D. C.: Regnery Publishing, 2009.
- Lindley, Daniel. *Ambrose Bierce Takes on the Railroad: The Journalist as Muckraker and Cynic*. Westport: Praeger, 1999.
- Ling, Huping. *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.
- Livermore, Mary A., Carrie Chapman Catt, and National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection (Library of Congress). *My Story of the War: A Woman's Narrative of Four Years Personal Experience as Nurse in the Union Army, and in Relief Work at Home, in Hospitals, Camps, and at the Front During the War of the Rebellion. With Anecdotes, Pathetic Incidents and Thrilling Reminiscences Portraying the Lights and Shadows of Hospital Life and the Sanitary Service of the War*. Hartford: A.D. Worthington and

- company, 1888.
- London, Jack. *The Human Drift*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917.
- Luis-Brown, David. "'White Slaves' and the 'Arrogant Mestiza': Reconfiguring Whiteness in *The Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*." *American Literature* 69, no. 4 (1997): 813-39.
- Lutz, Tom. *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Manning, Agnes M. "Monterey." *The Overland Monthly* 9, no. 52 (1887): 393-4.
- Marchand, Ernest. "1899 Reviews of *McTeague*." edited by Donald Pizer, 328-32. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977.
- Marks, Patricia. *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990.
- Mathes, Valerie Sherer. *Helen Hunt Jackson and Her Indian Reform Legacy*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.
- McClain, Charles J. *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- McCullough, Kate. *Regions of Identity: The Construction of America in Women's Fiction, 1885-1914*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- McDannell, Colleen. "Parlor Piety: The Home as Sacred Space in Protestant America." In *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*, edited by Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, 162-89. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992.
- McElrath, Joseph R. *Frank Norris Revisited*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992.
- McFatter, Susan Prothro. "Parody and Dark Projections: Medieval Romance and the Gothic in *McTeague*." *Western American Literature* 26, no. 2 (1991): 119-35.
- McKanna, Clare V. *Race and Homicide in Nineteenth-Century California*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002.
- McKay, Ernest A. *The Civil War and New York City*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990.
- McMahon, Helen. *Criticism of Fiction: A Study of Trends in the Atlantic Monthly, 1857-1898*. New York: AMS Press, 1973.
- McWilliams, Carey. *California, the Great Exception*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- . *Southern California: An Island on the Land*. Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1990.
- McWilliams, Carey, and Matt S. Meier. *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*. New York: Praeger, 1990.
- Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick*. edited by Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker. New York: W. W. Norton, 1967.
- Menchaca, Martha. *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001.
- Michaels, Walter Benn. *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
- Monroy, Douglas. *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Montejano, David. *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987.

- Montes, Amelia María de la Luz. "María Amparo Ruiz De Burton Negotiates American Literary Politics and Culture." In *Challenging Boundaries: Gender and Periodization*, edited by Joyce W. Warren and Margaret Dickie, 202-25. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000.
- Montoya, Maria E. *Translating Property: The Maxwell Land Grant and the Conflict over Land in the American West, 1840-1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Morris, Roy. *Ambrose Bierce: Alone in Bad Company*. 1st ed. New York: Crown Publishers, 1995.
- Mott, Frank Luther. *A History of American Magazines: 1741-1930, Volume 2*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957.
- Moylan, Michele. "Materiality as Performance: The Forming of Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*." In *Reading Books: Essays on the Material Text and Literature in America*, edited by Michele Moylan and Lane Stiles, 223-47. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.
- Muccigrosso, Robert. *Celebrating the New World: Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893*. Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1993.
- Nichols, Thomas Low. "Marriage as It Is." In *Marriage: Its History, Character, and Results*, edited by Thomas Low Nichols and Mary Sargeant Gove Nichols, 81-89. New York: T. L. Nichols, 1854.
- Nordhoff, Charles. *California for Health, Pleasure, and Residence: A Book for Travellers and Settlers*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1973.
- Norris, Frank. *McTeague*. edited by Donald Pizer. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977.
- . *The Octopus*. New York: Signet, 1964.
- . *The Pit: A Story of Chicago*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1903.
- . "A Plea for Romantic Fiction." In *McTeague*, edited by Donald Pizer, 313-16. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977.
- . *The Responsibilities of the Novelist, and Other Literary Essays*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1903.
- . "Zola as a Romantic Writer." In *McTeague*, edited by Donald Pizer, 308-10. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977.
- Odell, Ruth. *Helen Hunt Jackson ("H.H. ")*. Lincoln: The University of Nebraska, 1942.
- Odo, Franklin. *The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Olmsted, Frederick Law. *Civilizing American Cities: Writings on City Landscapes*. Edited by Silvia Barry Sutton. New York: Da Capo Press, 1997.
- Osio, Antonio María, Rose Marie Beebe, and Robert M. Senkewicz. *The History of Alta California: A Memoir of Mexican California*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
- "Our Domestic Affairs." *Continental Monthly: Devoted to Literature and National Policy* 6, no. 3 (1864): 241-54.
- Padilla, Genaro M. *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.
- Padget, Martin. "Travel Writing, Sentimental Romance, and Indian Rights Advocacy: The Politics of Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*." *Journal of the Southwest* 42, no. 4 (2000):

- 833-76.
- Parton, James. "The Mean Yankees at Home." *The Atlantic Monthly* 23, no. 135 (1869): 61-81.
- Pearce, Roy Harvey. *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Pérez, Vincent. "South by Southwest: Land and Community in María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* and Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo's *Historical and Personal Memoirs Relating to Alta California*." In *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage, Volume IV*, edited by José F. Aranda Jr. and Silvio Torres-Saillant, 96-132. Houston: Arte Público Press, 2002.
- . "Teaching the Hacienda: Juan Rulfo and Mexican American Cultural Memory." *Western American Literature* 35, no. 1 (2000): 33-44.
- Philbrick, Thomas. Introduction to *Two Years Before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea*, by Richard Henry Dana, 7-32. New York: Penguin Books, 1981.
- Phillips, George Harwood. *Chiefs and Challengers: Indian Resistance and Cooperation in Southern California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.
- Phillips, Kate. *Helen Hunt Jackson: A Literary Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Pilcher, James E. "Outlawry on the Mexican Border." *Scribner's Magazine* 10, no. 1 (1891): 78-87.
- Pita, Beatrice. "Engendering Critique: Race, Class, and Gender in Ruiz De Burton and Martí." In *Jose Martí's "Our America": From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies*, edited by Jeffrey Grant Belnap and Raul A. Fernández, 129-44. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Pitt, Leonard. *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Pizer, Donald. *The Novels of Frank Norris*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966.
- Porter, Noah. *Books and Reading; or, What Books Shall I Read and How Shall I Read Them?* New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1881.
- Post-Lauria, Sheila. *Correspondent Colorings: Melville in the Marketplace*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.
- Price, Kenneth M., and Susan Belasco Smith, eds. *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995.
- Pumpelly, Raphael. "Our Impending Chinese Problem." *The Galaxy* 8, no. 1 (1869): 22-34.
- Rabasa, José. *Writing Violence on the Northern Frontier: The Historiography of Sixteenth Century New Mexico and Florida and the Legacy of Conquest*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Rappaport, Erika. "A New Era of Shopping." In *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, 151-64. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Rawls, James J. *Indians of California: The Changing Image*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984.
- "Recent Travels." *The Atlantic Monthly* 24, no. 142 (1869): 254-60.
- Reynolds Vs. *United States*, 98 U.S. 146 (1878).
- Reze, Michel, and Ralph Bowen. *The American West: History, Myth and the National Identity*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1998.

- "The Rhode Island Question." *United States Democratic Review* 11, no. 49 (1842): 70-83.
- Rhodes, J. A. "Lolita Lavegne." *The Overland Monthly* 33, no. 198 (1899): 552-57.
- Richardson, A. D. "John." *The Atlantic Monthly* 24, no. 146 (1869): 740-52.
- Riis, Jacob A. *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*. New York: Dover, 1971.
- Roberts, Brian. *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Robinson, W. W. *Land in California*. New York: Arno Press, 1979.
- Rodríguez, Gregory. *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans, and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in America*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2007.
- Romero, Lora. *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Rosenthal, Debra J. "Race Mixture and the Representation of Indians in the U.S. and the Andes: *Cumanda, Aves Sin Nido, the Last of the Mohicans, and Ramona*." In *Mixing Race, Mixing Culture: Inter-American Literary Dialogues*, edited by Monika Kaup and Debra J. Rosenthal, 122-39. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.
- Ross, Kristie. "Arranging a Doll's House: Refined Women as Union Nurses." In *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, edited by Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, 97-113. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Rossetti, Gina M. *Imagining the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006.
- Rowe, John Carlos. *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Ruiz de Burton, María Amparo. *The Squatter and the Don*. edited by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1992.
- . *Who Would Have Thought It?* edited by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1995.
- Ruiz de Burton, María Amparo, Rosaura Sánchez, and Beatrice Pita. *Conflicts of Interest: The Letters of María Amparo Ruiz De Burton*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 2001.
- Ruiz, Julie. "Captive Identities: The Gendered Conquest of Mexico in *Who Would Have Thought It?*" In *María Amparo Ruiz de Burton: Critical and Pedagogical Perspectives*, edited by Amelia María de la Luz Montes and Anne E. Goldman, 112-32. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.
- Russell, Charles. "Our Domestic Relations; or, How to Treat the Rebel States." *Continental Monthly: Devoted to Literature and National Policy* 5, no. 5 (1864): 511-17.
- Ryan, Mary P. *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing About Domesticity, 1830-1860*. New York: Copublished by the Institute for Research in History and The Haworth Press, 1982.
- Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Saldívar, Jose David. *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Samuels, Shirley. *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- . *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the*

- Early American Nation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Sánchez, María Carla. "Whiteness Invisible: Early Mexican American Writing and the Color of Literary History." In *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion*, edited by María Carla Sánchez and Linda Schlossberg, 64-91. New York: New York University Press, 2001.
- Sánchez, Rosaura. "Dismantling the Colossus: Martí and Ruiz de Burton on the Formulation of Anglo America." In *Jose Martí's "Our America": From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies*, edited by Jeffrey Grant Belnap and Raul A. Fernández, 115-28. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- . "Nineteenth Century Californio Narratives: The Hubert H. Bancroft Collection." In *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage, Volume V*, edited by Ramón Gutiérrez and Genaro Padilla, 279-92. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993.
- . *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
- Sánchez, Rosaura, and Beatrice Pita. Introduction to *Who Would Have Thought It?*, edited by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, vii-lxv. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1995.
- Sánchez-Eppler, Karen. "Then When We Clutch Hardest: On the Death of a Child and the Replication of an Image." In *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*, edited by Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, 64-85. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Sandos, James A. "'Because He Is a Liar and a Thief', Conquering the Residents of 'Old' California, 1850-1880." In *Rooted in Barbarous Soil: People, Culture, and Community in Gold Rush California*, edited by Kevin Starr, Richard J. Orsi and California Historical Society, 86-112. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Sawaya, Francesca. "Sentimental Tentacles: Frank Norris's *The Octopus*." In *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*, 259-71. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Schurz, Carl. "Manifest Destiny." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 87, no. 521 (1893): 737-46.
- Scollard, Clinton. "In the Mission Burial-Ground, San Gabriel." *The Overland Monthly* 4, no. 19 (1884): 89-90.
- Senier, Siobhan. *Voices of American Indian Assimilation and Resistance: Helen Hunt Jackson, Sarah Winnemucca, and Victoria Howard*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001.
- Shapiro, Samuel. *Richard Henry Dana, Jr., 1815-1882*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1961.
- Shinn, Charles Howard. "Mission Bells." *The Overland Monthly* 19, no. 109 (1892): 1-16.
- Shirreff, Emily. "What Is Women's Work in the World." *Journal of Education* 10, no. 232 (1888): 519-20.
- Short, Bryan Collier. *Cast by Means of Figures: Herman Melville's Rhetorical Development*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.
- Shrock, Joel. *The Gilded Age*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004.
- Sielke, Sabine. *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790-1990*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Silber, Nina. *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- Sklar, Kathryn Kish. "The Historical Foundations of Women's Power in the Creation of the

- American Welfare State, 1830-1930." In *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, edited by Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, 43-93. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Slotkin, Richard. *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1994.
- Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.
- Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Starr, Kevin. *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- . *Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: New American Library, 1966.
- Sumner, Charles. "Our Domestic Relations; or How to Treat the Rebel States." *Atlantic Monthly* 12, no. 71 (1863): 507-29.
- "Table Talk." *Putnam's Magazine* 12, no. 9 (1868): 382-84.
- Tanghetti, Rosamaria. "María Amparo Ruiz Burton and *The Squatter and the Don*." In *The Human Tradition in the American West*, edited by Benson Tong and Regan A. Lutz, 35-49. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2002.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1897.
- Tompkins, Jane P. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Trachtenberg, Alan. *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.
- Tryon, Warren S. *Parnassus Corner; a Life of James T. Fields, Publisher to the Victorians*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963.
- Twain, Mark. *Roughing It*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Van Doren, Carl. *The American Novel*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926.
- Venegas, Yolanda. "The Erotics of Racialization: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of California." *Frontiers* 25, no. 3 (2004): 63-89.
- Warner, Charles Dudley. *Our Italy*. New York: Harper & brothers, 1891.
- Waxham, F. E. "The Outdoor Treatment of Tuberculosis." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 288, no. 2754 (1902).
- Weber, David J., ed. *Foreigners in Their Native Land; Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973.
- Wexler, Laura. *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Wiebe, Robert H. *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980.
- Winship, Michael. *American Literary Publishing in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century: The Business of Ticknor and Fields*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Witschi, Nicolas S. *Traces of Gold: California's Natural Resources and the Claim to Realism in Western American Literature*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002.
- Wyatt, David. *The Fall into Eden: Landscape and Imagination in California*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

- Yung, Judy. *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Zboray, Ronald J. *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.