Frontier Modernisms:

Form, Race, and Rupture in 1920s Novels

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Abstract

Working toward a definition of American modernism that recognizes the necessity of including Asian American, Native American, and noncanonical African American texts for understanding the full range of subjectivities that create and are created by the modernist moment in America—the years between the World Wars, but especially the decade of the 1920s—my dissertation argues that American modernism emerged at an overdetermined, ruptural moment in U.S. history when racial tensions transformed the national identity and subjugated citizens sought to represent their lived experiences in fiction. Current definitions of modernism, I show, therefore must be revised to position the American frontier as a central, contested site where writers voice differing perspectives on imperialism, community, and heterogeneity.

To make my argument, I group novels by Mourning Dove, Langston Hughes, Willa Cather, and Winnifred Eaton. Chapter One outlines the history of the period and various materialist approaches to the field of modernism, stressing that, because history determines form, lived experiences alternative to dominant norms produce a variety of formal manifestations. Chapter Two posits Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* (1927) as a modernist text that struggles with contradictions brought on in missionary boarding schools and finds resolution in a return to Okanogan tradition. Chapter Three shows the ways in which Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter* (1930), as a modernist text, grapples with the dominant culture's concept of primitivism, using African American sounds to disrupt white power structures. Chapter Four explores Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*

(1925) as a modernist reaction to changing racial dynamics on the American frontier that falls back on a mythical connection between white American identity and an indigenous past. Chapter Five argues that Winifred Eaton's *Cattle* (1924) envisions a utopian, heterogeneous space outside of the dominant culture and the constricting social construction of race, creating a modernist, fictional vantage point from which to criticize United States' imperialism.

These four novels offer a view of modernism more diverse than traditional readings of the field and call for a re-envisioning of modernism as an early twentieth-century literary movement that expresses in a wide variety of forms—sometimes detached and experimental, at other times revisionist and appropriative—the struggle to resolve the contradictions that determine them. To understand those resolutions and their contradictions, I emphasize, it is paramount that we take a materialist approach and consider each text in its historical specificity.

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> If we are to break out of the non-historical fixity of *post*-modernism, then we must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century, a tradition which may address itself not to this by now exploitable because quite inhuman rewriting of the past but, for all our sakes, to a modern *future* in which community may be imagined again. (35)
>
> --Raymond Williams, "When Was Modernism?"

> "Wha! Wha! … You chillen sho can sing!" Tom Johnson shouted his compliments from across the yard. And Sarah, beside him on the bench behind their shack, added: "Minds me o' de ole plantation times, honey! It sho do!"
>
> --Langston Hughes, *Not Without Laughter*

Since 1987, when Raymond Williams called on literary scholars to expand the canon of modernism and "counterpose an alternative tradition," the field of modernist studies has changed dramatically. Recent scholarship adds political manifestos, romances, and pulp fiction to the list of modernist genres[1] and legitimately considers the contributions of writers like Richard Wright, Anzia Yezierska, Mourning Dove, and members of the Harlem Renaissance.[2] Williams argued in his lecture that canon formation is a highly political endeavor which traditionally valorizes the mode of expression of a select few at the expense of alternate viewpoints, hence presenting one kind of experience as the "true" modernist worldview. Different kinds of representations, because not

"modernist," have conventionally been deemed inferior and not worthy of close reading, for that label inherently suggests its opposites: old fashioned, out dated, obsolete. And yet, the new modernist studies insists that one of the more remarkable features of the early twentieth-century is the emergence in the literary world of writers outside of the mainstream culture who represent in print their own unique encounters with modernity: Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna became the first Chinese Americans to publish in "little magazines"; Mourning Dove wrote the first known novel by a Native American; the Harlem Renaissance introduced a new generation of black American artists. Accordingly, I leave Tom Johnson's loud interjections to resonate in my second epigraph, which demonstrates Langston Hughes' use of black dialect and communally-based sound; in doing so, I want to assert the vitality of alternate stories circulated from front porches, around campfires in elders' tents, or in the fields while sowing wheat—for these are some of the forms that modernism takes.

The primary underlying assumption of this dissertation is that one cannot gain a full view of what American modernism means without considering the wide range of experiences that represent in literature that historical moment, hence the plural version of the term "modernisms" in my title. This study asks, what does modernism look like when we remove it from its traditional moorings and, following much of the recent criticism in the field, add to the mix authors not easily granted access to the publishing industry or to the realm of the dominant literary culture and who have to make their rhetorical choices accordingly? Further, what happens when we expand the geography of our analysis beyond the

metropolitan centers of the United States and Europe and toward the equally contentious site of America's "frontier"? And, finally, what will we find if we understand modernism not as a unified artistic movement but as competing and dissenting attempts to articulate a complex historical *condition*—namely, the bubbling to the surface of contradictions created by one hundred and fifty years of United States imperialism, conquest, and racial ideology?

At its root, modernism attempts to convey the effects of ideological rupture upon the people living through the early twentieth-century and the subsequent contradictions and alienation created by such breaks. Whether one agrees with Henry Adams' estimation that "in 1900, the continuity snapped," Virginia Woolf's famous declaration that "on or about 1910, human character changed," or Willa Cather's assertion that "the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts," one thing is clear: during the first decades of the twentieth-century, the West experienced a historical rupture that intensely changed the ways in which people perceived their world. Attempts to articulate that transformation have come to be called "modernist." In my reading of modernism, though, I want to emphasize that while canonical white writers like Adams, Woolf, and Cather express an ideological rupture within the mainstream cultures of the United States and England, writers of color in many cases experienced concrete and often physically enforced rifts that added and contributed to those in the ideological realm—Native American children were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in boarding schools and African Americans dealt with the neo-slavery of the Jim Crow South, to name two specific examples that I will discuss in depth in

Chapters Two and Three, respectively. Because a writer's lived history determines the appropriate form in which to capture that experience, how we define modernism depends on through whose eyes we survey the field.

With that in mind, my dissertation explores and theorizes the rupture at the heart of literature from the 1920s by reading one canonical and three noncanonical texts by authors from very different cultural backgrounds—Mourning Dove, Langston Hughes, Willa Cather, and Winnifred Eaton—to investigate what might be gained from seeing the modernist era from the vantage point of colonized and excluded peoples writing from and about America's frontier and, in Cather's case, the attempt from a white woman's perspective to re-establish the frontier's centrality in defining American identity. Removing modernism from the cities with which it is usually associated is an important exercise, in that the frontier materially and ideologically provided the raw materials for modernism and acted as a contact zone inhabited by European and Asian immigrants, indigenous people, and descendants of slaves. The continued conquest of First Nations, increasingly characterized by a strategy of assimilation, forced Native people to balance tradition with forced integration into the economic and political realm of the United States; the failed Reconstruction sent waves of black Americans from the rural South to northern cities, destroying communities; for white writers, the frontier provided a foil against which to imagine their alienation and disconnection in modern cities; changing immigration policies excluded Chinese people from United States citizenship

after a century in which Chinese labor helped to further the expansion of the nation by mining, building railroads, and tenant farming.

Living through these historical conditions, Mourning Dove, Hughes, Cather, and Eaton sought out forms that could both articulate their encounters with modernity on the frontier and provide a means through which their voices might be heard and recognized as legitimate in the cultural realm. At times, I will show the ways in which these writers accomplish from very different subject positions the literary techniques revered in canonical modernism—intense subjectivity, narrative incongruity, intertextuality—to convey the common modernist themes of fractured identity and the clash of the old world with the new; but I will also argue that we must be prepared to alter our preconceived notions of which stylistic conventions best capture this moment of historical rupture, as those writers outside of the dominant culture must speak in its tongue and in its established forms to find inclusion and voice. Cultural outsiders on America's frontier, I will argue, must negotiate with the publishing industry and work within recognized novel forms—the Western romance and *Bildungsroman*—even as they reshape them into repositories of experiences alternative to the dominant. Thematically, frontier modernisms often echo ideas of fragmentation and alienation traditionally seen in canonical modernism but consistently emphasize the power of community and the importance of maintaining cultural heritage while rewriting entrenched racial narratives and criticizing the system of imperialism that seeks to assimilate them.

In this opening chapter, I begin by defining modernism and exploring its radical potential before entering into conversation with the many scholars who have worked in the last couple of decades to stress the vital undercurrents of race in American modernism. I then turn to materialist theory to conceptualize the dialectical relationship between history and form in modernist art and to show that specific historical conditions help to explain the drastically different formal strategies found in frontier modernisms. Finally, I discuss some important historical contexts that define modernism, stressing the divisiveness within the nation, changes in the frontier, and the backdrop of imperialism.

What is "Modernism"?

First, I must answer this fundamental question, because while there are certain enduring definitions of what modernism means, much has been done in the last 20 years to reconfigure our understanding of it. I see American literary modernisms as artistic responses to a specific historical period—especially the 1920s—that experiences a breaking point brought on by the historical factors which I outline later in this chapter and throughout my dissertation. The traditional reading points to a break from the Victorian nineteenth-century and a corresponding pervasive doubt concerning the existence of God, the linear narrative of progress, the representational abilities of language, the possibility of a unified, objective experience, the coherent self. The horrors of World War One, its mechanized warfare, and the communist revolution in Russia shocked the empires of Western Europe and the European and American citizens who experienced the war, while monumental breakthroughs in philosophy and the

sciences attempted to articulate these changes within Western culture as Marx, Darwin, Freud, James, Einstein, Nietzsche, Boas and others changed the ways in which people thought about themselves and their world. [3] Although such radical rethinking of past truths sometimes proved frightening and disorienting for artists, driving them to look backward in search of wholeness, they at other times found it liberating, as they considered the chaos to provide an escape from what Theodor Adorno calls "instrumental reason"—the confining, routinized, administered quality of everyday bourgeois life.[4]

Early attempts to define and categorize modernist literature viewed the period as an immensely liberating era in which writers broke free from the shackles of realism and naturalism, forms better suited to the restricting Victorian culture out of which they emerged. Alfred Kazin saw the post war years as a celebration of youth and newness: "The young writers were in at last, with the new manners and Prohibition and the post war hangover; after so many years of siege, they had become the latest fashion" (192). Writing forty years after Kazin, Daniel Singal characterizes modernist culture as "negative and rebellious" (8), a stance that Susan Stanford Friedman reinforces while also acknowledging the extent to which this revolutionary potential is increasingly contested. Emphasizing its radical possibilities as understood before the ascendancy of postmodernism and poststructuralism, Friedman describes modernism as "the (illusory) break with the past, a willed forgetting of tradition, continuity, order. It is the embrace of chaos. It is the crisis of representation, fragmentation, alienation. It is indeterminacy, the rupture of certainty—material and symbolic"

(494). The qualities of modernism that Kazin, Singal, and Friedman celebrate suggest its radical promise, yet Friedman also points out that the traditional focus on high culture and predominantly white, male authors has compromised that potential in the present. As an illustration of this issue, Singal's reading indicates a problematic sense of wholeness in the modernist project, in which he sees an attempt to "restore a sense of order to human experience under the often chaotic conditions of twentieth-century existence" (8) and "to reconnect all that the Victorian moral dichotomy tore asunder—to integrate once more the human and the animal, the civilized and savage, and to heal the sharp divisions that the nineteenth century had established in areas such as class, race, and gender" (12).

I admire Kazin's and Singal's attention to the rebellious, populist nature of American modernism and especially the latter's suggestion that we must look for its manifestations in places other than radically experimental artists, yet both of these thinkers at times speak of American culture as a monolithic phenomenon rather than as a sphere of competing interests, and at times they idealize the extent to which modernism attempts to integrate disparate parts to achieve wholeness. Perhaps on the surface modernist culture seeks unity, but underlying factors of race, class, and gender determine all modernist texts, and these are not easily shrugged off. While many canonical modernist texts certainly seek a return to a more "innocent" past and often use primitivism as an imaginary means of finding it,[5] Singal's emphasis on integration paints an idealized picture. Following Howard Zinn, I would point out that historical distortions which blur the existence of competing interests in a nation characterized more by fracture than unity are

always ideological in nature,[6] just as canon formation serves specific establishment interests in the academy. Responding to the need for a more complicated, race-conscious reading of modernism in precisely the same journal in which Singal posits the democratic quality of American modernism, Houston A. Baker complicates the picture, advancing a theory of African American modernism that restores modernism's radical potential.

Most of the efforts to recover and define alternative modernisms have come in African American studies, one of the earliest examples of which is Baker's seminal *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987), which makes a breakthrough statement about the ways in which the works of black American writers must be judged by different criteria than those of the dominant white culture. Black writers, Baker argues, must demonstrate a "mastery of form" before they are allowed to speak in a racist society and, consequently, should not be judged by how well their works resemble those of James Joyce and T.S. Eliot. Instead, we must investigate the ways in which they accomplish a "deformation of mastery" through their uniquely African American *soundings*. Baker includes previously neglected authors like Charles Chesnutt, Claude McKay, and W.E.B. Dubois in the pantheon of modern writers, a move that has become widely accepted. In gauging the importance of Harlem Renaissance writers by another set of aesthetic standards, Baker opened up the field of modernism and changed the rules by which we judge writers from different cultural traditions. Like Baker, my analysis of American modernism explains the different ways in which writers from traditions alternative to the dominant express their relationship to modernity

in their own culturally specific ways, often accomplishing a mastery of form in order to resist and critique that very mastery.

In the last decade or so, there has been an outpouring of studies that follow Baker's lead and explore the ways in which African American, Native American, Asian American, and "ethnic" modernisms differ from canonical white modernism, providing the foundation upon which my dissertation builds. One important shift involves an ongoing investigation of border modernisms, literary representations of the multi-ethnic contact zones of the frontier and other liminal spaces outside of the modern metropolis. In *Crossroads Modernism* (2002), for example, Edward Pavlić points to an intimate connection between modernism and black culture in America, arguing that modernism is all about the nexus, or crossroads, at which two worlds meet, and that for "African-American identity understood in terms of double-consciousness, the 'truly indigenous' site is the junction between any complex of would-be identities" (xii). He goes on to show the ways in which black writers like Richard Wright, Zora Neal Hurston, and others, explore this junction, sometimes with techniques resembling European modernism—he calls this form "Afro modernism"—and at other times inventing wholly new means of expression, which he calls "diasporic modernism." Christopher Schedler's *Border Modernism: Intercultural Readings in American Literary Modernism* (2002) explores the cultural exchanges between Mexican, Chicano, Native American, and white authors in borderland spaces not often considered appropriate breeding grounds for modernist art in order to look at the period from a different vantage point. Schedler writes,

> I would argue that modernism does look surprisingly different when one leaves the metropolis and stands not in the province (which denotes for the ideology of modernism the narrowness of a bourgeois culture and outmoded traditions), but on the border—that marginal space (the frontier, the colonial periphery, the borderlands) beyond the metropolitan center, where distinct cultural groups come into contact and conflict. (xi)

By decentering modernism and removing it from the metropolis, Schedler illustrates that while the modernisms originating in the city exhibit a turn inward, "in border modernism, the external world is seen as constitutive of the self, and identity is explored through association with those defined as culturally, racially, or linguistically 'other'" (xiii). Like Pavlić and Schedler, I propose that writers on the American frontier necessarily envision their relationship to modernity according to their encounters with those culturally foreign to them. Mourning Dove, Hughes, and Eaton all work through the problem of carving out definitions of self that counter the double consciousness inducing, imposed designations of the white world, and Cather struggles with redefining white American identity in relation to Native and Jewish people.

Adding to the discussion of border modernisms, Rita Keresztesi's *Strangers at Home: American Ethnic Modernism between the World Wars* (2005) examines writers seldom seen as modernists and seeks to engage "with modernist literary studies from the perspective of minority discourse" (x) by looking at writers from "an international cast of ethnic artists, all of whom address the

condition of modernity within the United States, in its borderlands with Mexico, and from the eastern, western, and southern ports that are its cultural contact zones with Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean" (ix). In Keresztesi's estimation, the ethnic authors about whom she writes have been neglected because their minority discourse is misrecognized as "regionalist" and "marginal," much like the frontier writers that I will examine. Even Cather, as I show in Chapter Four, has frequently been thought of as a regionalist author because she sets most of her novels on the western plains and in the American Southwest. Of greatest importance to my own reading of modernism, Keresztesi pays close attention to the imperialist and multiethnic dimensions of the period, showing that these are integral, constitutive features of modernism. Including texts by authors from different cultural traditions who have endured the violence of United States imperialism, Keresztesi argues, is paramount to understanding the racial dynamics of modernism.

The fact that writers from outside the dominant culture play a major role in constituting the very fabric of modernism, as Keresztesi insists, is vital to understanding the field, and this is a point to which recent scholarship frequently returns. Geoffrey Jacques, in *A Change in the Weather* (2009), proposes "a genealogy of modernism in Anglo-American literature that puts African American culture, and African American artists, at its center" (4) and, by doing so, looks at black culture as an essential catalyst of modernism. Indeed, the very possibility of a truly pluralist, multiethnic society, argues Werner Sollors in

Ethnic Modernism (2002), drives modernism, and ethnic writers played a central role in advancing this exciting if sometimes idealistic vision:

> The cultural work of recasting the United States as a multiethnic country was undertaken by American ethnic writers in the period, who like Abraham Cahan or Jessie Fauset were often fluent in other languages and well-versed in international debates about cosmopolitanism and art. American ethnic writers were increasingly drawn to ethnic pluralism or at least to a broader definition of the American "host culture" to which immigrants and minorities were to be "assimilated." (13)

As Sollors and Jacques make clear, America's heterogeneity and diverse range of perspectives create the context out of which modernism emerged, establishing the very conditions of its possibility. Without taking into account this plurality of experience and its role in constructing modernism's foundations, the entire edifice crumbles.

Of course, a major part of the story of modernism involves the countless negative responses to those who would celebrate and encourage the vision of the United States as a multiethnic society, which has fueled another important trend in modernist studies: to uncover the racist, imperialistic dimensions of canonical modernist texts. Although nearly twenty years old, Walter Benn Michaels' *Our America* (1995) is still the most influential of these types of analyses. Michaels outlines a phenomenon that he calls "nativist modernism" and claims that this phenomenon has two driving fantasies: "about language, that the word can be

made flesh and, about family, that endogamy can supplant exogamy" (1). Using Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) as a model, Michaels equates Quentin's desire to sleep with his sister as indicative of nativist modernisms' larger desire to keep America "pure," that is, free from foreign influences. Michaels argues, "the great American modernist texts of the '20s must be understood as deeply committed to the nativist project of racializing the American" (13), and he demonstrates that the 1920s see a shift in how writers figure American identity. While earlier authors (Thomas Nelson Page and Thomas Dixon are Michaels' examples) imagine the possibility of a white-ruled nation that could assimilate people of color, writers of the 20s began to doubt the United States ability to integrate utterly foreign and inassimilable people, a point to which I turn in Chapter Four when I discuss the character of Louis Marsellus in Cather's *The Professor's House*.

Adding another layer to Michaels' line of thought, Betsy Nies' *Eugenic Fantasies: Racial Ideology in the Literature and Popular Culture of the 1920s* (2002) explains the racializing project of American modernism in terms of Lacanian desire, arguing that it consists of a simultaneous fascination and fear of the other:

> Ruptures in history can stimulate, among the ruling class, fears of identity loss when confronted with disruptions in class or racial lines, reminiscent of the panic evoked by initial fusion with the mother/caretaker. Adopting narratives of white supremacy helps

> calm this terror, anchoring traits, meaning, identity on the body as a means for substantiating class or national hierarchies. (2)

Here Nies posits that an intimate encounter with one's homeland, or "mother/caretaker," sparks a desire to both merge with and break away from that point of origins, a desire that informs Anglo encounters with European immigrants. To merge with these foreign cultures, however strong the inclination, would mean a loss of self. The fear, then, holds sway and forms the basis for what she calls "eugenic fantasies." While acknowledging that many American modernists (she primarily targets Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Hilda Doolittle) condemned eugenics as a science, Nies shows that the racial tensions that play out in their works result from this fear/fascination dynamic and subsequent need to separate from the "mother." To do so requires a clear demarcation of boundaries: "[they] turned to images of whiteness or some transformation of eugenic logic to restore what had been lost—the boundaries and markers of a concrete white identity in the encounter with new immigrant intruders" (3). Just as a child cannot separate its identity from the mother, Nies suggests, a reencounter with one's ethnic roots confuses one's established individuality, and reestablishing that identity becomes a necessity. Michaels' and Nies' readings of the racist subtext of canonical, white modernism illustrate the psychological impact of encounters between white America and the racial others against which whiteness is defined, offering a valuable theoretical lens for interpreting a text like *The Professor's House*. It is equally important to understand the material bases of American

modernism and the role that those conditions play in shaping modern art, a point to which I will now turn.

Theories of the Novel: The Relationship between History and Form

With these last three points established—the role of borderland contact zones, the promise of cultural pluralism, and the negative responses it elicits—it should not be surprising that we must significantly alter our understanding of the formal, stylistic shape of modernism. After all, contact between the diverse peoples and cultures of early twentieth-century America inevitably created a multifaceted tapestry of experience, as languages and modes of representation confronted and borrowed from one another. Addressing this phenomenon in *African, Native, and Jewish American Literature and the Reshaping of Modernism* (2007), Alicia Kent calls for "a more historically and culturally inclusive understanding of the modern era" by exploring the "meanings of modernity not only for those sanctioned as Modernist but for those considered outside of the early-twentieth-century literary movement in the United States" (2). Kent argues that "African, Native, and Jewish Americans, among others, were constructed as the antithesis to modernity, the foil upon which mainstream society could define itself as modern" (4), and she proposes that we look at the cross cultural exchanges that characterize American modernism. To do so, she focuses on the "politics of genre choice" in several texts by African, Native, and Jewish writers in order "to understand the formalist response that their rhetorical movement constitutes" (7). Following Kent, I propose that the choices made by writers from traditions outside of the dominant culture to write in the established,

traditional Western and *Bildungsroman* give particular insight into these writers' positions in relation to the hegemonic culture and the context of imperialism. Mourning Dove blends Western romance with traditional Okanogan storytelling to represent her conflicted relationship to white, imperialist domination; Winnifred Eaton criticizes exclusion and individualistic cowboy culture by rewriting the Western; Langston Hughes revises the *Bildungsroman* to illustrate a young African American's response to growing up in a racist society. These genre choices, moreover, exhibit not only the mastery of form (to use Baker's terminology) but also the deformation of mastery, as the writers in this study repeatedly alter and appropriate those forms by using their own culturally specific codes. Therefore, the language of frontier modernisms often takes a colloquial form, creating sounds and codes that disrupt the "proper" English of high modernism; as I argue in Chapter Three, for example, Hughes uses of black dialect in *Not Without Laughter* to unsettle the white power establishment that controls its protagonist's coming-of-age.

These masteries, deformations, appropriations, and recodifications prove an important point about the many stylistic shapes that American modernisms assume: that in the contact zone of the frontier, history and form are always in a dialectical embrace. The studies above conceive of modernism in ways that correspond to the histories out of which their chosen texts emerge—Kazin sees modernism as white writers' attempts to break away from the restrictive past, Baker reads black modernism in relation to white power, Schledler and Pavlić look at border encounters, Kent shows that modernism's cross-cultural exchanges

affect rhetorical choices. All of these disparate readings signal the recent shift in what we have come to accept stylistically as modernism, challenging the long-held argument that a detached narrative proves the most capable of representing modernist experience, a stance that centers bourgeois, white experience attempting to articulate alienation and loss within consumer capitalism. Even Sollors' recent study on ethnic modernisms discusses Gertrude Stein as a quintessential modernist whose prose is detached and even "reader unfriendly" (18).

Western Marxism has done much to inform our conception of the aesthetic shape of modernism by connecting history with form and debating how experimental modernist art represents experience in the first half of the twentieth-century, a discussion worth revisiting here to help us investigate how other types of stylistic choices convey alternate experiences. In the modernism-realism debates involving Georg Lukács and members of the Frankfurt School, the argument revolves around how aesthetics reveal the irreparably damaged and alienated subject in a capitalist system controlled by instrumental reason. Whereas Lukács champions works of social realism for their ability to represent the social world in its totality, Adorno finds "immanent meaning" in experimental texts that capture *in their form* the horrors of the modern world:

> What looks like formalism to [Lukács], really means the structuring of the elements of a work in accordance with laws appropriate to them, and is relevant to that 'immanent meaning' for which Lukács yearns, as opposed to a meaning arbitrarily

> superimposed from outside, something he objectively defends while asserting its impossibility. […] The objectivity he misses in modern art and which he expects from the subject-matter when placed in 'perspective', is in fact achieved by the procedures and techniques which dissolve the subject-matter and reorganize it in a way which does create a perspective—but these are the very procedures and techniques he wishes to sweep away. (153)

Rather than provide a direct, objective critique of its ideological determinants, modern art in Adorno's estimation moves beyond the mimesis of realism and instead, in its fragmentation, resembles the splintered nature of human consciousness in the late stages of capitalism. Traditionally, literary historians have accepted Adorno's argument that experimental forms best capture the new realities of the twentieth-century, but new thinking in the field, as Baker, Kent, and others have shown, makes room for what Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz call "bad modernism," articulations of experience that differ from the revered experimental forms and often break down the distinction between art and popular culture.[7]

Distinguishing between aesthetics and science as means of producing knowledge and further elucidating the purpose of formalism, Louis Althusser points to the affective understanding produced by art, as distinguished from scientific knowledge. Rather than producing objective knowledge, he maintains, novels "make us *see*, *perceive* (but not *know*) something which *alludes* to reality," allowing us to recognize "*from the inside*, by an *internal distance*, the very

ideology in which they are held" ("Letter on Art" 152, author's italics). Like Adorno, Althusser contends that formal techniques distinguish art for its subtle ability to capture the intangible effects of ideology on the human subject, and, although he did not write about aesthetics to the extent that Adorno did, Althusser seems to favor more figurative renderings. For instance, he celebrates Leonardo Cremonini as a "painter of the abstract" ("Cremonini" 158) who is able to represent on canvas "animals and men [who] are distanced from the nature fixed for them by our 'idea', i.e. by the ruling ideology, of man" (159). In placing seemingly incongruous objects in relation to one another, Althusser explains, Cremonini helps us to perceive the forces that create our own relationship with the object world and with one another, and thus represents the contradictions that obtain in our relationship with ideology. Similarly, I argue in the following chapters that each primary text in its own way helps readers to perceive through internal tensions the contradictions that drive the narrative and the struggle to find the most suitable form to express those inconsistencies, whether that ends up being a revisionist *Bildungsroman* or a romantic Western. One can perceive in *Cogewea's* form, for example, Mourning Dove's struggle to tell her own story within the confining expectations of her editor, Lucullus McWhorter; the inconsistent narrative that results from that uneasy collaboration makes readily apparent the contradictory ideological forces that determine the novel.

Cogewea and the other novels that make up the focus of this dissertation reveal in their own culturally specific ways the conflicts and contestations at the center of American modernism. These struggles play out in the forms that they

adopt and rework to effectively capture their singular realities. Investigating the ways in which these writers co-opt popular forms and revise them to account for their encounters with the West, I follow Mary Layoun, who sees in the formation of the modern novel a "site of active struggles and conflicts" (3) signaling that "the hegemonic narrative technologies of the novel were confronted by counterhegemonies" (11). In other words, a struggle takes place in the realm of culture as writers from outside the dominant appropriate for their own uses the language and forms that seek to colonize them, dialectically creating something wholly new. This struggle and the ensuing genesis of new novel forms inherently lend it the immanent meaning which Adorno seeks and the power to convey a feeling and perception unique to art—it makes these works modernist.

Resisting cultural colonization, Mourning Dove, Hughes, and Eaton project their voices to rewrite what Toni Morrison calls the "master narrative" and challenge its tendency to write nonwhite characters as mere shadows to their well-defined white counterparts.[8] In a more recent iteration of the challenge to master narrative, Kimberly Benston insists on the importance of recognizing black modernism "as an adversary culture cultivating styles of dissonance and refusal in an effort to resist the closures of all received narratives and codes" (4). The unwillingness to accept, the interaction with and modification of, established narratives in the early twentieth-century mark Mourning Dove, Eaton, and Hughes as modernist writers. Mourning Dove feels compelled in *Cogewea* to respond to the white fantasies captured in popular Western romances like *The Brand*, which Cogewea condemns as "an unjust presentation of Indian sentiment

and racial traits" (88). Likewise, Winnifred Eaton enters into textual dialogue with stereotypical representations of the rudderless, wandering Chinese cook, endowing Chum Lee with a pivotal role in the resolution of *Cattle*. Langston Hughes grapples with the discourse of primitivism and explores the power of African sounds in opposition to that confining ideology. By conversing with the dominant discourse circulating in modernist culture, these writers prove that they are not stuck in an outmoded literary universe, but are very much involved in the vibrant, intertextual realm of modernism.

Adding one more layer to this discussion of the form best suited to capture modernist experiences, a fundamental problem that drives canonical modernist texts is the perceived impossibility of sharing experience. Walter Benjamin finds that the novel in particular is perfectly suited for expressing the position of the hyper-isolated individual of the modern age, and he contrasts the novel form with the traditional storyteller, whose importance and immediacy has faded from contemporary life. Benjamin laments, "it is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences" (83). In storytelling, there is a vital connection between teller and listener, a companionship and community. The storyteller is rooted in the people. By contrast, "the reader of a novel […] is isolated, more so than any other reader. […] In this solitude of his, the reader of a novel seizes upon his material more jealously than anyone else. He is ready to make it completely his own, to devour it, as it were" (100). Thus, Benjamin sees the novel not only as the perfect vehicle for expressing the human in isolation but also the

consumptive nature of modernist culture; stories circulate, while novels are devoured and placed on a bookshelf.

Adorno, Althuser, and Benjamin offer ways of historicizing modernist art by drawing attention to the relationship between the artist and her conditions of existence under capitalism, which is a crucial exercise when looking not only at white artists from the centers of colonialism but also at the perspectives of those on the other side of the imperialist project, under the boot heel of empire; for, as Layoun, Morrison, and Benston make clear, these writers take up the novel as sites of that colonization in the cultural realm. The alternative modernisms that provide the objects of this study explore their positions as subjects coerced and oppressed within the system of United States capitalism, but they have not traditionally been recognized as modernist because they do not stand up to the experimental rigors expected by Adorno, and, unlike Benjamin, they still have faith in the power of stories. In fact, the literatures of Native American and African American writers often demonstrate the enduring ability of oral traditions to communicate experience and emphasize their power to counter the damaging effects of a worldview thrust upon them. Mourning Dove's subjective experience of modernity varies dramatically from, say, Hemingway's, so why would her narrative style mimic his? To better understand the relationship between history and form, we need to look at each modernist text in its specific context and acknowledge its unique relationship with its singular history.

Alternative Histories and Geographies

When judging which modes of representation best convey and embody the history of an era, the question we must ask is, "whose history?" As Jane Tompkins and others have shown, poststructuralism makes clear the problems associated with trying to come up with a coherent picture of a historical moment in that, "the historian can never escape the limitations of his or her own position in history and so inevitably gives an account that is an extension of the circumstances from which it springs" (73). Ironically, while experimental modernist texts treat history as subjective, the traditional narrative of modernism relies on a fairly coherent historical frame and sees the modernist moment in America primarily through the eyes of white writers. Hence, the battles of World War One are generally thought to be more constitutive of modernist subjectivity than the Battle of Little Big Horn or the United States invasion of the Philippines, the Treaty of Versailles more notable than The Dawes Act, The Chinese Exclusion Act, or Plessy versus Ferguson. Not only is the experience of history subjective, as Tompkins suggests, but the selection of which histories merit consideration is an ideological process, and this dissertation shifts the focus by looking at some historical phenomena that receive too little treatment in traditional readings of American modernism.

When I look at the first third of the twentieth-century, I see heightened conflict between the white establishment and a heterogeneous population comprised of people brought to the United States to further its economic and infrastructural development—black ex-slaves and Chinese railroad workers, for example—as well as indigenous people increasingly penned into reservations and

with their populations at historic lows. Despite continued resistance by Native people, the United States government declared that "The Indian Wars" were over and developed strategies of domestication and brainwashing. The massive migration of African Americans to northern industrial cities caused uproars like the Chicago race riots in 1919, "in which 23 whites and 15 Negroes were killed, 537 people injured, and 1,000 left homeless" (Gossett 371), while black communities in the South and in Langston Hughes' Kansas continued to struggle with neo-slavery conditions more than a half century after The Emancipation Proclamation. As a labor movement dominated by immigrant workers raged across the United States, Eugene Debs won 900,000 votes in 1912 as a socialist presidential candidate (Zinn 341). To the south, the conditions that caused the Mexican Revolution forced unprecedented numbers of Mexican workers to cross the border into the U.S. (Takaki 312-13). A Jewish exodus out of the ghettos of the Lower East Side of Manhattan and into traditionally Christian neighborhoods and schools caused widespread anti-Semitism (Takaki 308-9). Meanwhile, the United States legislature sought to protect itself from these conflicts by enacting laws intended to segregate, exclude, and pacify its subjects. In the 1920s, The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 for the first time established a quota system to limit immigration according to race and nationality.[9] In the same year, the Indian Citizenship Act established citizenship for all American Indians, continuing the process of assimilation and eroding of sovereignty that began with the Dawes Act. Meanwhile, Plessy versus Ferguson and Jim Crow maintained legal segregation and continued inequality for black Americans. This history

demonstrates the divisiveness of the nation in the 1920s and widespread resistances to white American hegemony, contexts that play a central role in modernism.

In addition to foregrounding this contentious history, my dissertation also displaces modernism geographically. Literary historians have generally associated modernism with the rise of the metropolis and its attendant effect on experience, leading Raymond Williams to perceive in emerging modernism, even as early as Dickens, "a specific and unmistakable emphasis on the vitality, the variety, the liberating diversity and mobility of the city" (*Politics of Modernism* 43). Undeniably, for white writers free to move unhindered through city streets and then remove themselves to a comfortable space outside of the chaotic throngs, the modern city provided adventure. Yet, Williams also notes "a conventional theme of escape to a more peaceful and innocent rural spot" (43), which underscores the freedom to cross boundaries and find a space removed from the simultaneously exciting and frightening perils of the city. As Peter Nichols describes it, "the city, then, was both dangerous and exhilarating. Writers could either retreat from it into pastoral fantasy, withdrawing into the safer, more remote worlds of Arthurian legend or Trecento Italy; or they could plunge into the urban chaos" (17). For the privileged writer, the city provided both the opportunity to mingle with the masses and a counterpoint against which to dream the erasure of that mixing. Jay Gatsby could cross the Valley of Ashes into Manhattan to see the unimaginable white chauffeur driving "three modish negroes, two bucks and a girl," and rejoice that "anything can happen now that

we've slid over this bridge" (Fitzgerald 69); yet he could still retreat safely to his suburban home in West Egg.

For writers not from privileged backgrounds, of course, this kind of mobility did not exist, as evidenced in narratives like Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), in which Irene constantly feels confined, even within the semi-comfortable realm of Harlem. For Irene, there exists always a feeling of paranoia and fear as she expresses the anxiety-ridden effects of white America's persistent surveillance and the impossibility of the kind of social mobility enjoyed by her white countrymen. While Larsen and other Harlem Renaissance writers appreciated the relative freedoms and intellectual community afforded by the metropolitan environs of Harlem in relation to the overt repressive strictures of the South, that degree of autonomy still did not exist for them to the extent that it did for members of the dominant white culture. Nora Ascough, the protagonist of Onoto Watanna's *Me: A Book of Remembrance* (1915), undergoes similar scrutiny during her time in Chicago, at one point exclaiming, "people stared at me, too, but in a different sort of way, as if I interested them or they were puzzled to know my nationality. I would have given anything to look less foreign. My darkness marked and crushed me, I who loved blondness like the sun" (91). In addition to the racism and surveillance that hinder characters like Irene and Nora, writers from the early twentieth-century also make clear that gender, social class, and the economic realities of the city compromise the flexibility of others, as Theodor Dreiser's Caroline Meeber discovers on her introduction to Chicago and Anzia Yezierska's Jewish heroines bemoan in tenements on the Lower East Side

of Manhattan. Certainly, the metropolis plays an important part in constituting modernist identity for some, but its effects vary depending on a person's accessibility to the freedoms that the city can offer and one's ability to move between social spaces.

One of the most important elements of the metropolis in creating modernist subjectivity, the thinking goes, comes from the cacophony of voices and clash of cultures mixing for the first time, and at the same time this provided the sense of adventure of which Williams and Nichols speak, it also defamiliarized a component of life once thought natural: language. As Williams puts it,

> [language] was no longer, in the old sense, customary and naturalized, but in many ways arbitrary and conventional. To the immigrants especially, with their new second common language, language was more evident as a medium—a medium that could be shaped and reshaped—than as a social custom. (45-46)

Experiencing the plethora of sounds and languages that converge in the modern city drives home the fact that language is not natural, but associative, a point that Ferdinand Saussure would crystalize on his lectures about sign systems in 1907 and 1911. As Saussure has shown, a sign functions only through its value relationship with other signs and in relation to its linguistic system, or *langue*.[10] The multilingual metropolis of the early twentieth-century confirmed this fact and influenced the modernist crisis of representation.

But the metropolis is not the only space in which disparate, competing cultures and languages converge. In fact, the frontier is a site of dramatic coming together of different peoples and belief systems, a "contact zone" that resembles José David Saldívar's description of the United States-Mexico border as a "social space of subaltern encounters, the Janus-faced border line in which peoples […] negotiate with one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics" (14). Writers on the frontier encountered the same jarring impact of the defamiliarization of language, and those excluded from the dominant culture found that they must learn to mimic the master's tongue in order to survive, especially if they hoped to represent their experiences and circulate them in print. The violent clash of language and the "multiple-voiced aesthetics" of which Saldívar speak are apparent in the texts that I study here—in the overt struggle for rhetorical power that permeates *Cogewea*, the shifting personas that Winnifred Eaton/Onoto Watanna occupies throughout her literary career, and in the struggle for self-representation that emerges in the language of the blues in *Not Without Laughter*; however, these writers also insist on the immense power of language and voice, the enduring immediacy of stories.

The texts at which my dissertation looks offer different interpretations of the very meaning of the frontier, making it a contested site. The proclaimed "closing of the frontier," announced by the census bureau in 1891, had a dramatic impact on white modernist writers who not only relied on its existence as a form of escape, but also saw the frontier as constitutive of a uniquely American identity, an idea that I explore at length in Chapter Four. Frederick Jackson

Turner articulated the centrality of the frontier in the forging of American identity in his 1893 paper, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in which he claims that America is exceptional due to the frontier experience. In Turner's estimation, the repeated advance into the "wilderness" and the taming of the land differentiates Americans from the citizens of all other nations:

> The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. (20)

Essentially, Turner advances the thesis that prolonged existence at "the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (19) gives Americans a uniquely innovative and enterprising personality that carries over to every element of American society. While historians like Richard White still question the validity of Turner's telling of frontier history (White points to the myth of a "largely empty continent peacefully occupied" [51]), the influence of the frontier on the modernist imagination is clear in writers like Willa Cather and Ernest Hemingway.

While canonical modernists struggle to preserve whiteness and cope with the realities of the frontier, Mourning Dove, Hughes, and Eaton emphasize that the frontier is still a place of resistance and vitality, a site that begs close examination if we are to understand the larger context that determines modernist subjectivities. For the history of primitive accumulation on the American frontier made the emergence of the modern metropolis possible, and the reverberations of that violence linger in the texts that are the object of this study, as they demonstrate that the land occupied by American settlers is anything but an empty wasteland to be conquered and exploited. Mourning Dove, Winnifred Eaton, and Langston Hughes' narratives serve as reminders that the United States appropriated that wilderness by destroying existing societies and by importing and casting off the labor necessary for such a project. Mourning Dove, for example, draws upon the strength of Okanogan stories that teach respect for the land. Winnifred Eaton's *Cattle* criticizes imperialist land grabbing.

With the increased influence of postcolonial studies, modernist studies increasingly recognize imperialism as a defining factor of the genre. In the study of British modernism especially, an outpouring of criticism has shown that modernist texts both criticize and support the project of empire building. For example, Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby's introduction to the book-length study *Modernism and Empire* (2000) finds that "colonialist tropes coexisted with the ideas and narratives that questioned, and in time helped to end, formal British imperialism"(2). The relationship between American modernism and imperialism is often harder to tease out, because the United States did not emerge as an overt

empire in the sense of a nation going far outside of its borders to exert its influence until the close of the nineteenth-century, when it annexed the Hawaiian Islands and invaded the Philippines. Up until that point, the United States was concerned with securing and extracting raw materials within its own borders, subduing the indigenous peoples who stood in its way, and harnessing and importing the cheap labor necessary for building a world power. This history, I will argue, much like the context of imperialism in British modernism forms a vital backdrop for understanding the dynamics of modernism in America.

Significantly, the end of the frontier coincides with this emergence of the United States as a full-fledged imperial power as continued expansion required it to look overseas for new resources, a shift in policy that also colored contemporary ideas about race. Thomas Gossett has shown that Roosevelt and other expansionists claimed that Anglo-Saxons were inherently an adventurous, virtuous race destined to spread over the globe and that "pioneers […] should not be judged by ordinary moral standards," because "those who had complained about the lack of regard of the pioneers for the rights of Indians were usually people who didn't have enough initiative to go West in the first place" (Gossett 319-20). These sorts of sentiments are of course nothing new in American history. From the moment that William Bradford raided Wampanoag corn reserves and declared them a gift to God's chosen people, European expansion in what was to become the United States established ideological bases for its encroachments, and such practices continued as the country looked to justify its actions in the Philippines, Hawaii, and Cuba. All of this history—the violence

and the mixing of cultures on the frontier, the backdrop of United States imperialism, continued racial conflict and resistance from subjugated peoples—informs my readings of frontier modernisms in the next four chapters. Based on the understanding that history determines form and building on recent criticism that insists on the plurality of modernist experiences and representations, the remainder of this dissertation will show the ways in which Mourning Dove, Langston Hughes, Willa Cather, and Winnifred Eaton offer differing versions of modernism that correspond to their own unique subjective experiences.

In Chapter Two, "Contradictions and Cultural Return in Mourning Dove's *Cogewea*," I argue that after European contact, an abrupt shift in the life ways of the Okanogan people created contradictions that inhere in the novel, and that it resolves them through an emphasis on Okanogan stories, traditions, and practices. Mourning Dove asserts her right to speak while negotiating that right within the confining strictures of the publishing industry and merging her voice with that of her editor, Lucullus McWhorter, a comingling of narrative styles that creates a heteroglossic text which makes readily apparent the struggles of the Okanogan people under the subjugation of the United States. Insisting on the primacy of storytelling and the power of Okanogan religious practices, the text asserts the ability of those ways to restore what Paula Gunn Allen calls the "hoop dance."

In Chapter Three, "Re-Sounding the *Bildungsroman* in Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter*," I argue that Hughes appropriates and disrupts the traditional literary form of the *Bildungsroman* to express the effects of growing up in a community that for generations has suffered enslavement and poverty.

Fighting the psychological effects of Du Boisian double consciousness and the prevalent discourse of primitivism and, like Mourning Dove, balancing the right of self-expression with the need to cater to the tastes of his benefactor, Charlotte Mason, Hughes infiltrates a traditional Western form by projecting the sounds of the black vernacular, popular music, and storytelling to create a modernist, subjective expression of life for a young black man on the frontier. In the end, I maintain, *Not Without Laughter* finds resolution by reestablishing community and insisting on the importance of economic self-determination.

Chapter Four, "Frontier Mythology and the Search for White American Identity in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*," investigates a narrative obsessed with the loss of the frontier as the prime determinant of white American identity and the increased presence of unwanted outsiders that threaten the American family, a problem manifested in the figure of Louis Marsellus. I show that the novel's protagonist, Godfrey St. Peter, exemplifies the disconnected, alienated figure found often in American modernism, as he attempts to cope with the changing conditions of modernity. Intent on finding a replacement for the frontier and a solution to St. Peter's malaise, the text locates in Tom Outland's Blue Mesa an alternative site of transformative power and envisions a mythic relationship between white America and the history of indigenous people in the Southwest. Ultimately, though, this resolution breaks down due to the violent underpinnings of that past and the impetus within consumer culture to appropriate and commodify the Native presence.

In the final chapter, "Voice, Self-Fashioning, and the Critique of Imperialism in Winnifred Eaton's *Cattle*," I demonstrate that the history of Chinese American immigration and exclusion influence Eaton's rhetorical choices late in her career, when she begins writing popular Western novels. By adopting a Japanese persona throughout most of her career in response to racism against the Chinese and the exotic lure of Japan in her white readers' imaginations, she played a trickster role that has recently inspired more critical attention to those early works. Yet, in her final two novels, which have received scant attention, Eaton makes dramatically different generic choices and rewrites the Western to seek resolution to the forces that drove her to create the persona of Onoto Watanna. *Cattle* critiques the imperialist figure of Bull Langdon and insists on the power of alternative voices and subaltern communities to overcome violent white masculinity.

These four novels offer a view of modernism more diverse than traditional readings of the field and call for a re-envisioning of modernism as an early twentieth-century literary movement that expresses in a wide variety of forms—sometimes detached and experimental, at other times revisionist and appropriative—the struggle to resolve the contradictions that determine them. To understand those resolutions and their contradictions, I emphasize, it is paramount that we take a materialist approach and consider each text in its historical specificity. Building on the work of modernist scholars over the last twenty five years, this dissertation will work to realize Raymond Williams' imperative at the

beginning of this chapter to uncover alternative traditions that renew modernism's potential as a radical aesthetic.

Notes

1. I discuss many of these new perspectives later in the chapter, but Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz's *Bad Modernisms* (2006) provides a great example of stretching definitions of modernism to include forms not traditionally associated with the field. Laura Winkiel's *Modernism, Race, and Manifestos* (2008) takes an extended look at the manifesto as a form uniquely suited to express crisis and breaks with the past. Joseph Entin's *Sensational Modernism* (2007) explores the power of affective forms, such as photography, to capture modernist impulses.
2. For me, some of the most helpful book-length studies that consider authors not traditionally thought worthy of inclusion within the modernist canon are Alicia Kent's *African, Native, and Jewish American Literature and the Reshaping of Modernism* (2007), Rita Keresztesi's *Strangers at Home* (2005), and Christopher Schedler's *Border Modernism* (2002). Anita Patterson's *Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms* (2008) goes even further by looking outside of national borders and including authors from the Caribbean, as well as French writers with ties to the Americas.
3. These broad historical contexts are often discussed as constitutive of both American and European modernism and can be found in such overviews as Malcolm Bradbury's *The Modern American Novel* (1983), Jesse Matz's *The Modern Novel: A Short Introduction* (2004), and Michael Whitworth's *Modernism* (2007).
4. See, for example, *Minima Moralia* pg. 69, in which Adorno argues that objective "facts" are administered and individual subjectivity devalued under consumer

capitalism. Simon Jarvis offers a detailed discussion of "instrumental reason" in *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, pgs. 13-14.

5. I discuss Langston Hughes relationship with primitivism at length in Chapter Three.
6. Zinn astutely argues in the opening chapter of his *A People's History of the United States* that historical distortions attempt to render invisible the country's contentious past and paint the nation as "a community of people with common interests" (9).
7. Recognizing that modernism's badness has always been a part of its appeal as a confrontational, subversive art, Mao and Walkowitz use the term to describe complications to "high" modernist forms, including "styles of dress, philosophical treatises, Hollywood backbiting, popular fiction, anthropological field work, advertising campaigns, and other realms of life and art the extent of whose interconnection is perhaps just beginning to be appreciated" (10).
8. This topic is the main focus of Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, in which she challenges the traditional belief in literary studies that "canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States" (5).
9. See the first two chapters of Mae Ngai's *Impossible Subjects* for a prolonged look at the effects of the Johnson Reed Act.
10. For a detailed exploration of Saussure's ideas about the sign's arbitrary nature and its relationship to the overall system of language, see the section "Linguistic Value" in *Course in General Linguistics*.

Chapter Two:
Contradictions and Cultural Return in Mourning Dove's *Cogewea*

> The whole body of American Indian literature, from its traditions, ceremonial aspects to its formal literary aspects, forms a field, or, we might say, a hoop dance, and as such is a dynamic, vital whole whose different expressions refer to a tradition that is unified and coherent on its own terms.
>
> --Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*

> If this contradiction is to become an "active" in the strongest sense, to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of "circumstances" and "currents" so that whatever their origin and sense[…]they fuse into a ruptural unity.
>
> --Louis Althusser, *For Marx*

On the surface *Cogewea, The Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range* (1927) seems an odd mix of romantic Western novel and expository text delineating the many injustices perpetrated against the Okanogan people of Washington state's high plains. Looked at closer, though, *Cogewea* exemplifies many of modernism's celebrated traits: multiple perspectives shape the narrative, and the text is rife with contradictions and discontinuities. In both plot and structure, it captures the jarring impact of the United States government's conquest of the Northwest and the Okanogan people and thus expresses the common modernist theme of conflict between tradition and modernization. My reading of the novel will map the many forces that overdetermine the text and its heroine to clarify what Louis Althusser describes in my second epigraph as the "accumulation of 'circumstances' and 'currents'" inherent in its ruptural moment,

but I will finally argue that the novel finds resolution in unity, not fragmentation. This unity reveals the author's worldview and her participation in what Paula Gunn Allen calls a "hoop dance," an outlook at odds with the alienating perspective of most white canonical modernist writers. While Althusser's theory of contradiction helps to explain the text's conflicts, one must ultimately think outside of Western Enlightenment rationality fully to grasp Mourning Dove's work.

In recent years, a few critics have begun to look at *Cogewea* as a modernist work. Dilia Narduzzi finds in the novel "a marked response to the destructive forces of the modern for Indigenous peoples" (62) and uses an ecocritical framework to show that "Cogewea's subjectivity and objectivity as an Aboriginal woman operates by and through her associations and connections with the land" (64). The latter point demonstrates Cogewea's agency and the complexity of a text that has often been regarded as a simple dime store Western. Alicia Kent, revising common readings of modernism by pointing out that theorists like Fredric Jameson and Michel Foucault conceptualize modernism as either an inevitable or an intentional break from the past, insists that for indigenous people of North America, this break from the past is forced upon them. She argues that Mourning Dove participates in this modernity thrust upon her by entering the literary realm and "critiquing and rewriting three central (yet inter-related) social constructions about the American Indians": the half-blood as social outcast, Native Americans as a "vanishing" race, and the nonexistence of "a salvageable 'authentic' Indian past that needed to be preserved" ("Writing Her

Way" 47). My reading of the novel builds upon these analyses by demonstrating the ways in which *Cogewea* can transform and expand our understanding of modernism; but instead of focusing on the rewritings that Kent eloquently explores, I emphasize the contradictions that the text attempts to work out and the means by which it seeks to resolve them through a return to Okanogan culture.

In my introductory chapter, I argued that all modernist novels attempt through formal and thematic elements to resolve the contradictions that inhere in their historical moment, and Mourning Dove's work is no exception despite its divergences from experimental modernist texts by white writers. While I understand the danger of applying Marxist theories of contradiction to a work of art from a non-capitalist, non-Western culture, during the author's life the Okanogan people were undeniably forced into the system of capitalism, and the struggle against that mode of production plays a central role in *Cogewea*. The text documents a historical rupture for the Okanogan people as they grapple with the contradictory forces that seek to shape their future, including legislative control, such as the Dawes Act (1887) and the Homestead Act (1862), and imposed ideological apparatuses in the form of Christianity and the residential boarding schools system. Imperialism seeks to draw its subjects into the fold, while simultaneously keeping them at arms length, and these repressive and ideological forces sought to make the Okanogan people racially inferior (secondary) citizens of the state and interpellate them as such.

For Marx, contradictions are a necessary, inherent feature of dialectical thinking. When he claimed to stand Hegel's dialectic on its head, he wanted to

salvage the process by which Hegel thought of history but demystify Hegel's sense of an imaginary unity by thinking materially. As Althusser puts it,

> the reduction of *all* the elements that make up the concrete life of a historical epoch (economic, social, political and legal institutions, customs, ethics, art, religion, philosophy, and even historical events: wars, battles, defeats, and so on) to *one* principle of eternal unity, is itself only possible on the *absolute condition* of taking the whole concrete life of a people for the externalization-alienation[…]of an *internal spiritual principle*, which can *never definitely be anything but the most abstract form of that epoch's consciousness of itself; its religious or philosophical consciousness, that is, its own ideology.* (*For Marx* 103, emphasis original)

One's "concrete life," or lived experience, as Althusser labels it in other places, is determined by an amalgamation of competing structures—the economic, social, and so forth—which create an overdetermined subject confused about his or her real, material conditions of existence. For Marx and Althusser, to posit a spiritual unity from which people have been alienated is to lose sight of the fact that spiritual consciousness is merely ideology and only one of the many defining factors of subjectivity. A ruptural moment such as that represented in American modernisms originates because of a bubbling to the surface of all of the contradictions that overdetermine subjects in that historical moment, and this is why Althusser can help us to understand the forces that shape an American Indian

modernist text like *Cogewea*. However, as I will argue, an immense difficulty arises when one considers that the cultural and social work performed by the text relies on a return to Okanogan beliefs, traditions, and spirituality. To automatically stamp this return as an ideological mystification would perpetuate the colonial domination that the text critiques, which is why Paula Gunn Allen's idea of the sacred hoop offers such a crucial critical perspective.

While Western Enlightenment thinking usually works in terms of binaries, either/or, Allen's explanation of the sacred hoop allows for the possibility of a more complex view of the relationships between humans and their world. Allen writes,

> [American Indian] tribes seek—through song, ceremony, legend, sacred stories (myths), and tales—to embody, articulate and share reality, to bring the isolated, private self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalize the sense of majesty and reverent mystery of all things, and to actualize, in language, those truths that give to humanity its greatest significance and dignity. To a large extent, ceremonial literature serves to redirect private emotion and integrate the energy generated by emotion within a cosmic framework. The artistry of the tribes is married to the essence of language itself, for through language one can share one's singular being with that of the community and know within oneself the communal knowledge of the tribe. […]This idea is apparent in the Plains tribes' idea of a medicine wheel or a sacred

> hoop. The concept is one of singular unity that is dynamic and encompassing, including all that is contained in its most essential aspect, that of life. (*The Sacred Hoop* 56)

As I understand it, the key to the sacred hoop involves understanding disparate selves, human and other-than-human, as part of the unity of the hoop without erasing difference. While the possibility of such unity may seem a mystification to structural Marxism, and perhaps even a prison to poststructuralism, the philosophy that Allen explains allows for fluidity and mystery. This belief system is not the opiate that Marx perceived in nineteenth-century European religions. While Althusser, for instance, presumes an incompatibility between the imaginary (ideology) and the real (economic conditions), the indigenous peoples of North America would not make such a distinction. For them, the imaginary and the real exist on the same plane. Visions, for example, which Althusser would most certainly consider part of a mystifying spiritual world, offer real information about and understanding of the world. Applying the ideas of contradiction and overdetermination to *Cogewea* helps to explain the text's driving conflicts, but an understanding of the sacred hoop proves necessary for understanding its resolution. To explain, the next section will explore the text's contradictions and determinants before I move into a discussion of its reliance on tradition and ritual to restore the sacred hoop.

Okanogan History and the Struggle for Survival

Cogewea grapples with contradictions brought about by the many changes imposed upon the Okanogan people by United States imperialism, the most

fundamental of these being in the mode of production. In 1914 when Mourning Dove met her editor, Lucullus V. McWhorter, and had recently finished a draft of the novel, the Okanogan people had gone through a century of abrupt change in which they were forced to transform from a hunting and gathering to an agricultural society. In her autobiography, Mourning Dove chronicles the influx of white people into Okanogan territory beginning in 1811 with the arrival of David Thompson, a representative of the Northwest Company of Montreal (*MD* 149), and the subsequent expansion of the fur trade in the Northwest, a development that drastically changed the Okanogan economy. Mourning Dove writes, "My people began to hunt and trap fur-bearing animals and trade them for guns, cloth, blankets, and trinkets. Eventually they began to think of these as necessities" (*MD* 150). Because whites arrived slowly, for the most part the Okanogan people accepted their encroachment. When Isaac Ingalls Stevens, governor of Washington Territory held a treaty meeting at Walla Walla in 1855, he told the Okanogan people, "This is your land. No white man shall take it away from you without your consent" (*MD* 153). However, government policy and white people's hunger for land, furs, and minerals eventually proved otherwise.

The over-harvesting of game and fish by white settlers forced the Okanogan people to adopt agriculture as a means of survival. As Mourning Dove writes, "My people did not farm and had no use for crops until the fish runs began to disappear from the streams and rivers. White activities causing pollution, and commercial fishing projects were the cause of this" (*MD* 155). The Dawes Land Allotment Act in 1887, following lengthy wars with Native people culminating in

the Battle of Little Bighorn, then enacted assimilation into law. As Ward Churchill puts it,

> At least as early as the administration of Ulysses S. Grant in the mid-1870s, there was an influential lobby which held that the final eradication of native cultures and population could be achieved more cost-effectively—and with a far greater appearance of "humanitarianism"—through a process of "assimilation" than by force of arms. (*A Little Matter of Genocide* 245)

Churchill goes on to explain that the Allotment Act "voided the customary collectivity of land holdings still prevailing among American Indians during the early reservation period, imposing in its stead the supposedly more 'civilized and enlightened' Anglo-Saxon model of individual property ownership" (*A Little Matter of Genocide* 245). By splitting tribal lands into individual tracts, the Allotment Act not only turned the Okanogan people into farmers; it also enforced a whole new way of thinking about property, community, and the land itself.

The transformation of the Okanogan economy contradicted deep seated, ancient ways of thinking about their world, a problematic that drives *Cogewea's* conflict. As Cogewea's grandmother, the Stemteema, bemoans, "The land is now all turned to the production of the white man's food, which we must also use. But we old people prefer our natural food; that which the earth gave us without scarring its bosom" (128). This scarring of the earth that the Stemteema opposes effectively captures the ways in which the very act of agricultural production conflicts with traditional ways of food gathering and instills a different

understanding of one's relationship to the land. As Dilia Narduzzi argues, *Cogewea* works to resolve this contradiction by reasserting Native beliefs about the people's relationship to the Earth. Narduzzi sees Cogewea "as a woman of the wild, her person constructed as a piece of the wild landscape of which she is seen to be a part" (65). By looking at various passages illustrating Cogewea's skill on horseback gliding across stretches of land, Narduzzi demonstrates that "these passages also articulate the freedom afforded to Cogewea by the land, a freedom that, at this particular moment experienced by Cogewea, appears unobstructed by 'civilization' or by a modernizing influence" (65). Movement and fluidity characterize the lifestyle of hunting and gathering groups, as Mourning Dove notes in her autobiography when she writes of the long journeys that hunters would take to hunt buffalo, sometimes staying away for up to a year. The changing seasons required the Okanogan people to move their camps and remain relatively unburdened. But the adaptation to agriculture forever changed these kinds of practices and, consequently, the way of life that had long determined their understanding of themselves.

In addition to making the Okanogan people into farmers, the Dawes Act effectively robbed them of their sovereignty by making them subject to the laws of the state. Section six of the Dawes Act declares,

> That upon the completion of said allotments and the patenting of the lands to said allottees, each and every member of the respective bands or tribes of Indians to whom allotments have been made

> shall have the benefit of and be subject to the laws, both civil and criminal, of the State or Territory in which they may reside. (3)

Thus, to achieve their apportioned tract of their own tribal lands, this legislation forced indigenous people to become subjects of the state, a development that validates Churchill's claim about the U.S. government in this era enacting "a process of 'assimilation.'" Althusser calls this processes "interpellation," when he explains the practice through which ideology constitutes individuals as subjects: "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (*Lenin and Philosophy* 117). He likens this interpellation or "hailing" to an individual responding to the call of a police officer: one must heed that call or fall subject to the state's repressive apparatuses. Keeping the Okanogan people tied to small tracts of land and subject to the laws of the state formed the basis for a long, protracted experience of state interpellation, to use Althusser's language.

Likewise, residential schools played an important role in enacting the United States government's policy of forcing assimilation on indigenous peoples, another policed interpellation of Native people into state subjects. Both the author, Mourning Dove, and the character, Cogewea, attended the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, opened in November 1879 in an unused army barracks in Pennsylvania. Captain Richard Henry Pratt, former warden of the Fort Marion military prison who founded the school, fashioned it after the military institutions from which he came; and Carlisle became a model for all of the government's Indian residential schools, as they sought to, in Pratt's often cited words, "Kill the

Indian, Save the Man." It is no coincidence that these institutions were based on military values, since the assimilation era sought the same result as the previous century of outright conquest: genocide. As Churchill explains in *Kill the Indian, Save the Man* (2004), "the objective of assimilation policy was from the outset to eliminate all American Indians culturally recognizable as such by some point in the mid-twentieth century" (12). In practice, the residential schools did more than kill the Indian; they far too often killed the man as well. While the practice of sending fatally ill students home before death skewed mortality statistics, possibly fifty percent or more died of starvation and disease (*Kill the Indian* 34).

Those who survived in the residential schools faced a deliberate, calculated brainwashing. After arriving at one of the schools, a child would first be "disinfected." For males, "the next step was to undergo the humiliating experience of having their heads shorn, military style" (*Kill the Indian* 19), a humiliating assault discussed in many boarding school narratives such as when, in *My People the Sioux* (1928), Luther Standing Bear claims, "I felt that I was no more Indian, but would be an imitation of a white man" (141). In *Old Indian Stories* (1921), Zitkala-Ša explains, "Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy" (54). As these testimonials illustrate, having one's hair cut short represented weakness and a loss of self. Next, authorities stripped children of all of their personal belongings and issued them standard uniforms, and then to finalize the stripping process, the children were renamed, effectively turning each child into another person altogether. After this systematic stripping, the school system acculturated

the children with Christian proselytizing, an "education" that stressed the United States' superiority over indigenous "savagery," and placed a ban on speaking Native languages. Clearly, the residential Indian school system sought, and many times achieved, cultural genocide.

Contradictions and Performance in Cogewea, the Character

All of these forces—economic, legislative, cultural—create contradictions that play out in *Cogewea*, making it a complex, modernist text. At first glance, the novel's plot is pretty straightforward and modeled after typical melodramatic Western romances of the day. Cogewea works and lives on the Horseshoe Brand Ranch—owned by her brother-in-law John Carter, a white man married to her eldest sister, Julia—on the Flathead reservation. Shortly after the novel begins, her traditional grandmother, the Stemteema, and her younger sister Mary McDonald come to visit, residing in the Stemteema's tepee, a space which represents traditional ways and knowledge. When Cogewea and some of the other ranch hands pick these two up at the train station in Polson, Cogewea hires a "tenderfoot" white man from the east coast, Alfred Densmore, to help with the approaching roundup. From their first encounter, Densmore intrigues Cogewea, and his boredom and curiosity lead him to pursue a romantic relationship, setting up the novel's conflict between Densmore and James LaGrinder (Jim), a mixed blood person whom Cogewea claims to love only as an older brother. Densmore quite clearly desires Cogewea only for her money and her exoticism, a motivation which Jim and the Stemteema immediately recognize.

Cogewea embodies the text's contradictions. Struggling to find her place and her identity (like Luther Standing Bear), she wonders if "she could fill any sphere of usefulness" (17), or if she must live a life of liminality; and she vacillates between defending traditional ways and championing the "progress" brought by whites. At times, she favors the white way of life and Western education that she acquired during her time at Carlisle, where "she graduated with high honors at the age of twenty-one" (16). Following her sister Julia's lead, Cogewea imagines marrying a white man, a fantasy that almost surely fuels her desire for Densmore upon their first meeting. At one point she tells Silent Bob, "If permitted, I would prefer living the white man's way to that of the reservation Indian, but he hampers me" (41), while at other times, she feverishly defends Okanogan ways, especially when talking with Densmore, who confronts Cogewea with her vacillations when he asks, "You are as much of one race as the other! How can you consistently choose the one over the other?" (232). Cogewea replies, "Of the two, I prefer the one of the highest honor, the Indian! But why not stay in my own class, the mixed-blood?" (232)—a question that occupies much of the text.

At times, *Cogwea* expresses the difficult situation of the mixed blood person through a discussion of embattled blood: "But a rider should be immune to fear, should never show the least indications of white-blood" (24). Even after claiming that she would choose to live in the white man's world, Cogewea says that she "will never disown [her] mother's blood" (41). This rhetoric of different kinds of blood pulling Cogewea in two directions reveals the dominant culture

subtext of racial ideology circulating in the early twentieth-century, which residential schools surely impressed upon Mourning Dove in her time at Carlisle where students were taught to emulate the superiority of "white blood." Thomas Gossett and others have shown that race theory at the time largely depended on an understanding of the superiority and purity of Anglo-Saxon "blood" relative to other heritages.[1] Exploring this issue in *Cogewea,* Arnold Krupat has found that the discourse of blood imposes constraints on its protagonist, while more recent Native American fiction suggests "more open possibilities for the 'mixed-blood'" (2), although Krupat does recognize that Cogewea's performance in the Fourth of July races "for a brief moment suggests something that goes against the grain of the discourse of blood that otherwise dominates the novel, namely that identity may be a matter of performance" (4). I agree with Krupat that the Fourth of July scene offers an important representation of the ways in which Cogewea deals with the contradictions which she embodies.

Cogewea demonstrates the ability to don various masks to suit a given context. During the rodeo scene, in which she enters both the "ladies" and the "squaw" races, she quickly changes costumes to indicate her performance of different roles (64) and refuses to accept that her mixed blood excludes her from any activity, exclaiming, "If there's any difference between a *squaw* and a *lady*, I want to know it" (58-9, emphasis original). With a prevailing sense of stubbornness, Cogewea sometimes insists that her biracial status warrants her inclusion in competing public spheres, and her ability to use different discourses and idioms lend her a sort of chameleon power. As Susan M. Cannata suggests,

"in her discourse Cogewea illustrates her consciousness of her ability to enter both worlds by code-switching when addressing particular audiences" (4). In the context of ranch life, anyway, Cogewea has access to and feels equally at home in town, out on the range, and in the Stemteema's tepee; she can draw from her Western-style education to express to Densmore the injustices in U.S.-Okanogan relations and then slip into "the easy range vernacular" (203) when exchanging barbs with Jim. In this way, she acts as one vehicle for what Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia" to enter the novel, a fascinating feature of *Cogewea* that plays out not only in Cogewea herself, but in the many voices that inhabit the text.

Heteroglossia and the Question of Authorship

Bakhtin argues that the novel, wherever and whenever it appears, offers the possibility of representing multiple voices and is therefore a truly democratic art form capable of expressing the many chaotic manifestations of language and experience. In "Discourse in the Novel" he writes,

> Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter a novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (263)

The novel, through all of the ways of speaking which Bakhtin mentions here, is polyvocal, and this array of voices, this heteroglossia, allows *Cogewea* to express the various contradictions which determine it. The text contains several clashing points of view which represent the many forces with which the text struggles and,

while these competing voices have led critics to lament the text's disjointedness, they allow readers to perceive the ruptures in the moment from which the text emerges.

As many have noted, the novel's publication history raises questions about whose voice and ideas comprise the text. Dexter Fisher explains in his introduction to the 1981 edition that Mourning Dove first began consulting her future editor, Lucullus V. McWhorter, when they met in Walla Walla in 1914, and with McWhorter's help she finally published *Cogewea* thirteen years later in 1927. When Mourning Dove received a copy of the final, published product, she wrote in a letter to McWhorter, "I felt like it was someone elses (sic) book and not mine at all. In fact the finishing touches are put there by you, and I have never seen it" (qtd. in Fisher xv). While McWhorter—an adamant opponent of the Bureau of Indian affairs and adopted member of the Yakima tribe (Fisher vi)—seems genuinely to have wanted to help Mourning Dove reach a large audience, his appropriation (and at times, domination) of her voice is problematic and has led many to focus on this aspect of the novel.

The various positions on Mourning Dove and McWhorter's collaboration range from those which acknowledge a white editor's importance in getting the text published to those that see the novel as irreparably damaged. Paula Gunn Allen falls into the latter camp when she argues, "[Mourning Dove's] attempt to satisfy both white and tribal literary requirements resulted in a maimed—I should say martyred—book. *Cogewea, the Half-Blood* is far from being great literature. Rather, it is a melodramatic dime-novel western" (83). Allen recognizes that the

novel "integrates ritual symbolic, thematic, and structural elements and as such is one of the first Indian books of its kind" (83-4), but the brevity of her discussion of the text (it takes up only two paragraphs of her book) underscores her belief that the demands of the white publishing world irrevocably "maimed" Mourning Dove's work. Elizabeth Ammons, in her study of women writers in the early 20th century, *Conflicting Stories* (1991), prefers to focus on the context that allowed McWhorter to "[exercise] his privilege as an elite white male by correcting and managing (appropriating) the story of his dark-skinned colleague" (138) and concludes, "what McWhorter did was rewrite Humishuma. He took over her story to make it his own" (138).[2] Both Allen and Ammons draw our attention to important and unfortunate power relations in McWhorter and Mourning Dove's relationship, and it would be irresponsible to talk about this text without acknowledging the stifling of Mourning Dove's voice.

Others, however, have attempted to recover that voice and even find value in the text's clashing perspectives. Alanna Kathleen Brown has shown that McWhorter's interest in Mourning Dove and in the novel suggests the importance of her particular vantage point at this historical moment, "a time and place where in living memory, men and women had seen the end of the buffalo herds and the Indian way of life" ("Mourning Dove's Voice" 4). She goes on to show that the similarities between Mourning Dove and the novel's heroine give the text important autobiographical dimensions by drawing our attention to "the skillful use of material from the oral traditions of Mourning Dove's family and tribe" (11). In Brown's estimation, these three features unmistakably make this novel

Mourning Dove's work, despite McWhorter's imposition. Linda Karell, without placing a value judgment on *Cogewea's* publishing history, acknowledges a situation in which American Indian texts had no hope of reaching a large audience without help and points out the history of many such collaborations, leading one to recall Phyllis Wheatley's need for a white man to lend credibility to her poetry and countless slave narratives whose title pages bore the stamp of the master's approval. Karell goes on to ask why the "maiming" of this text has led many critics to gloss over it:

> In varying degrees, [Fisher's and Allen's] assessments emphasize what appear to be the negative effects of the narrative disruptions and implicitly regret that the novel is not, at the very least, a more unified collaboration. I understand the text as one marked by splinters and fractures, as resisting simplistic and stereotyped understandings of an essentialized Native American harmony, one perhaps desired by a white audience in search of a redemptive spirituality. Rather than being a failure because it does not achieve a wholeness, *Cogewea's* accomplishment is that it refuses such narrow expectations. (6-7)

If I understand Karell correctly, I am not sure she fully comprehends Allen's meaning, deriving from her articulated concept of the sacred hoop, which would not wish to essentialize Native people or erase their differences by integrating them into some sort of false harmony. Rather, the point of the sacred hoop is to recognize the types of fractures Karell mentions and work to draw individuals into

a community to heal those divisions. While canonical white modernism generally focuses on alienation as an inherent condition of modernity, Allen shows the ways in which the literature of indigenous people offers a different model. At the same time, however, the splinters and fractures of which Karell speaks are extremely important to my own interpretation of the novel, and I do feel that the absence of a "unified collaboration" contributes to its heteroglossic nature and demands that we include it as one kind of modernist expression.

While disturbing and at times quite distracting, McWhorter's voice adds a layer to this text that produces some interesting results by, in a sense, adding another character to the novel, and, even further, another worldview. McWhorter's passages are often easily distinguishable from Mourning Dove's as a western Enlightenment perspective is layered upon Mourning Dove's use of oral tradition and romantic Western genre. When McWhorter clearly is speaking, the whole tone of the text dramatically changes to political discourse, allowing readers to, in Althusserian terms, "perceive" and "feel" (*Lenin and Philosophy* 152) the cultural battle through the clashing voices of the authors. These different ways of speaking reinforce the struggle played out in the narrative through the polar opposite characters of Densmore and the Stemteema in that McWhorter, while he condemns Densmore, represents the culture that creates such a character, while Mourning Dove's voice is more akin to the oral tradition represented by the Stemteema. Much as Willa Cather incorporates Tom Outland's and the Professor's differing voices into her narrative, a point I discuss in Chapter Four,

the coexistence of McWhorter and Mourning Dove as authors captures and creates the same sort of jarring narrative incongruity.

In many ways, McWhorter's voice in the novel is more straightforward than Mourning Dove's, in part, no doubt, because he is confident that his position as editor and member of the dominant culture gives him authority in the literary realm and because, unlike Mourning Dove, he is working in a familiar form. His voice provides much of the text's political rhetoric, evident in this passage most certainly written by McWhorter:

> The outskirts of this reservation "city" was dotted with Kootenai Indian camps, where the cowboys and the "breeds" played monte [sic] with the tribesmen on the quiet; where also the irrepressible bootlegger was busy selling the natives an inferior grade of firewater at from five to ten dollars the quart. The penalty for this is a fine and possible imprisonment, when caught, but the lure of excessive profit is strong and there are always unscrupulous whites who engage in this debauchery of the child-minded Indian. Despite the efforts of the usually alert officers of the U.S. Special Indian Service, whose business it is to ferret out these miserable law-defying creatures, the traffic flourishes. Ofttimes the victim of appetite will give his last pony for a single drink. When drunk, his family suffers. The wife with her little pappooses deserts the tepee for the brush, or any place where she may find protection. (40)

This passage reveals McWhorter's political purpose, his authoritative voice, and his own unconscious racism. His reference to "the child-minded Indian" echoes contemporary racial discourse which held that white Americans bore a responsibility as benevolent fathers to "inferior," child-like races, just as minstrel shows and plantation stories advanced this ideology in relation to African Americans. His form derives from classic western rhetoric, and his narration tells a fairly black and white moral story through cause and effect: Gambling and alcoholism, introduced by whites, lead to the suffering of Kootenai families, especially women and children. Of course, McWhorter isn't necessarily wrong in this assertion, but the way in which he makes his argument contrasts greatly with Mourning Dove's more subtle prose, which relies on Okanogan oral traditions and the stories of Chip-chap-tiqulk, animal people.

The Stemteema's Stories

Unlike McWhorter's rhetoric, the Stemteema's oral storytelling tradition—in which the speaker and listener play active roles in creating meaning—indicates not only another means of advancing an argument but also a different relationship with language. Writing about McWhorter's obsession with footnotes and with demonstrating the veracity of tales to which Mourning Dove refers, Martha Viehmann has shown that the recording of facts is the most important element in his writing. While the storytelling tradition does not necessarily draw on "facts" as such, it imparts lessons and reality through different means. For, as Leslie Marmon Silko argues, being a storyteller and growing up in a storytelling culture is "a whole way of seeing yourself, the people

around you, your life, the place of your life in the bigger context, not just in terms of nature and location, but in terms of what has gone on before, what's happened to other people" (Barnes 71). A repository of traditional storytelling and wisdom, the Stemteema fully intends to help Cogewea see her relationship with Densmore in the context of preceding relationships between Okanogan women and white men by telling three stories, all of which prove instructive for Cogewea.

Her first story, which relates the respectful ways of the people in their first encounter with whites, significantly coincides with Spirit's Days, a ritual immediately following the first snow. For fourteen days, the Okanogan people "danced in worship to the Spirit, to continue His favors to the tribe; that the trees, the grass and herbs be perpetual; that the deer and all game be plentiful the coming season and that the red salmon again swarm up the Swanitkqah" (123). Her story tells of a medicine man who dies during one such Spirit's Days celebration and has a vision of "a pale-faced nation moving from the sunrise; as many as the trees of the forest. My guide said to me: 'They are coming to take your hunting grounds from you'" (125). The medicine man sees the first white man come in his black robes, intending to help the people, followed by "pale faces fighting among themselves for the possession of our lands" (126). Finally, the Great Spirit tells the man to go back and warn his people of the white man's arrival and tell them to listen to the man in black robes and learn his ways so that they may survive. The Stemteema explains the people's confusion when the man in black robes arrived many years later and they worshipped him as though he were the good White Spirit himself and not a priest who claims to represent that

spirit. The Stemteema's message to Cogewea is clear: don't worship the white man as a god. While he may bring fancy houses and new practices, these ways have regularly been destructive to the Okanogan people.

In her second tale, "The Story of Green-Blanket Feet," the Stemteema relates the experiences of her best friend upon falling in love with a "shoyahpee" at a spring in the woods, a location similar to where Densmore repeatedly expresses his love for Cogewea. The white man with whom Green Blanket Feet falls in love speaks "with a soft voice, but the tongue was strange" (166). After marrying Green Blanket Feet and having two children with her, the man's soft voice becomes increasingly loud and crass, and he tells her that he will return to his people and take the children with him. If Green Blanket Feet wants to be with her children, she will never be able to see her people again. The plot of Stemteema's tale emphasizes Green Blanket Feet's long and arduous journey to return to her people with the help of her loyal dog, Halish, and is instructive on many levels. Most obviously, it warns of what will happen to Cogewea should she follow Densmore back east; he will cast her off as soon as he tires of her company and she will lose all that she has and experience pain, loss, and suffering.

On another level, some of the events in this story have already occurred for Cogewea. She has already made a long journey away from her home and her people and faced the treachery and allure of whites—that journey took her to Carlisle school—and the dramatic experience of having one's children taken away reinforces this reading. While Cogewea claims to have wanted to go to Carlisle to

satisfy her curiosity, most residential school students were removed by coercion or outright physical force,[3] and the pathos of the scene in which Green Blanket Feet loses her eldest child invites comparisons to such abductions, as she claims, "'Oh! my little child! Life from my own being! do not forget your Indian mother'" (169). Significantly, Halish, a "half wild[…]wolf breed dog" guides Green Blanket Feet back to her people. The name "Halish" bears a close resemblance to the language group spoken by the Okanogan people, Salishan, sometimes referred to as Salish and, therefore, symbolizes the role that one's language plays in recovering one's identity and returning to one's people. Speaking one's language takes on added importance when we consider the ban on Native languages as one means of residential schools' violent program of assimilation.

The Stemteema tells her third and final story, "The Second Coming of the Shoyahpee," to Jim, not Cogewea, because she recognizes that Cogewea's relationship with Densmore has progressed too far for her to recognize the harm about to come to her. Told to the Stemteema by her father, it again relates the tale of an Okanogan woman wooed and deceived by a white man, but it also adds to the other tales by showing the larger context of these seemingly isolated relationships. Like the first coming of the shoyahpee, it opens as "the snow was just covering the earth" (218)—a reference to the blanketing of Okanogan territory by whites—but unlike the previous visit from the Black Robes, these newcomers "built a lodge of logs and covered it with moss and dirt" (219), a clear indication of permanent white settlement on Okanogan land. Seeking a vision for

advice on how to help his sister in her relationship with the white man, the Stemteema's father sees "a broad trail yet unmade; creeping to us from the land of the morning sun" (223). This trail signifies the opening of the northwest to white settlers, and along with the white men's permanent dwelling and the blanketing of snow, contributes to the subtext of this final tale: white men keep coming and coming. Despite the Okanogan's peaceful overtures—the Stemteema's father smokes the peace pipe with these men and offers them his sister as a showing of goodwill—whites bring only destruction and pain. By drawing Jim into her final story, the Stemteema attempts to pull assistance from the community to help bring Cogewea back into the circle before it is too late.

All of the Stemteema's stories relate fairly straightforward tales of duplicitous white men taking advantage of Okanogan women, but they also caution against worshipping the commodities that they bring with them; they teach that, although it may require a long journey, tradition and Okanogan spirituality can provide a solid foundation to compensate for fragmented identity; and they bring into stark relief the history of white exploitation. As oral tales passed down, they are adapted to present situations, and with each retelling, they draw the listener into the tale. The Stemteema begins each story with an appeal for its continuance by saying things like, "for me the sunset of the last evening is approaching and I must not carry with me this history" (122) and "the story I am telling is true and I want you to keep it after I am gone" (165). Through her stories, she brings into the text the power of traditional culture, to which Allen

refers, "to embody, articulate and share reality, to bring the isolated, private self into harmony and balance with this reality" (56).

Chip-chap-tiqulk

Just as the Stemteema uses the oral tradition to steer Cogewea onto the right path, Mourning Dove draws from traditional Okanogan stories to develop her narrative. People generally refer to this novel as a melodramatic Western, which is true to some extent, but while Mourning Dove uses this genre to perform what Houston Baker, Jr., calls "mastery of form," she also enacts a "deformation of mastery" through the use of Coyote Stories, which reinforce the novel's basic plot and contrast with the conventions of a Western novel and McWhorter's political rhetoric. The novel's references to chip-chap-tiqulk, animal people, convey important lessons about the Okanogan people and their relationship to the natural world.

One such story is that of Swa-lah-kin, Frog Woman. When Densmore senselessly turns a small toad on its back, Cogewea admonishes him and tells him the story of Swa-lah-kin:

> It is in connection with the sun; that if you turn the frog thus, she will look up at the sun and flirt with him as in the beginning. He hates her so badly that he will wrinkle his brow and a tempest gathers which wets the earth. This forces her odious flippancy to find shelter out of his sight. (159-60)

Densmore and the modern western culture that he represents stand diametrically opposed to Native beliefs about the natural world, as is evident in this lesson that

teaches respect for living things and emphasizes that one's actions always have consequences. Significantly, the story of The Frog Woman comes after Cogewea has already scolded Densmore for taking more fish from the stream than they need. His careless act does indeed cause a dramatic change in the weather, a shift that proves timely as it aids Cogewea in escaping one of Densmore's uninvited embraces and comes at a key moment in the narrative when Cogewea is clearly beginning to give in to Densmore's overtures of love. As the storm clouds gather, Cogewea admonishes Densmore for angering the Sun-god: "'He bends his shaggy brow over the portals of the West-wind and hurls his anger along the sky! He breathes! and the air is thick with anguish! It is the Swa-lah-kin! You did this!'" (163). The tempest sends Cogewea and Densmore scrambling for shelter, and finally leads them into the dry environs of the Stemteema's tepee for her telling of Green Blanket Foot's story.

As others have noted, that Mourning Dove nicknames Cogewea "Chipmunk" aligns the latter with the Okanogan tale about Snee´-nah, Owl Woman, a tale Mourning Dove recounts in her collection of Okanogan stories, *Coyote Stories* (1993) and which resonates with *Cogewea's* plot. In "Chipmunk and Owl Woman," Chipmunk refuses to let the prowling Owl Woman (who kidnaps children, stows them in a pack on her back, and eventually eats them) keep her from eating berries from her favorite bush. Chipmunk underestimates Owl Woman's deceit and leaves the bush after Owl Woman promises to close her eyes and allow Chipmunk to climb down from the bush and run home. After Owl Woman claws at her back, creating the three white stripes that chipmunks bear to

this day, Chipmunk narrowly escapes and returns to the safety of her grandmother's lodge, but Owl Woman proves persistent and continues to hunt her. Eventually, after some interaction with Tattler, the Meadow Lark, Owl Woman discovers Chipmunk's hiding place, tears out her heart, and eats it. Finally, Chipmunk's grandmother revives Chipmunk by placing a berry in her chest where her heart used to be, and Coyote tracks down Owl Woman, tricks her, and kills her by pushing her into the fire.

The Stemteema tells Cogewea Owl Woman stories to warn her of the dangers of the natural environment in which they live but, because Cogewea, like Chipmunk, possesses an inquisitive streak and often seeks out the things she desires without considering the consequences, "the repeated warnings that Sne-nah would catch her, had no effect" (*Cogewea* 16). As storyteller and repository of traditional Okanogan ways, the Stemteema denounces the destructive forces of white culture and often cautions Cogewea against straying too far from home, both figuratively and literally. Densmore, like Owl Woman, tirelessly pursues Cogewea and is unwilling to take no for an answer as he repeatedly asks for her hand in marriage and ignores her refusals. His intentions are similar to Owl Woman in that he wants to devour Cogewea—he sees her as a commodity who can fulfill his hunger for wealth—and he figuratively eats Cogewea's heart by deceitfully arousing her affection and casting her away when he finds out that she doesn't possess the riches of which he dreams. Finally, the Stemteema, like Chipmunk's grandmother, repeatedly protects Cogewea from harm and passes on the necessary wisdom to live on after a traumatic event.

Cogewea's experiences on Buffalo Butte, a space where she often goes to think and to orient herself with her environment and her history, similarly draw upon traditional Okanogan tales and traditions as a means of educating her. She first goes to Buffalo Butte immediately after the chapter "At the Teepee Fireside," where we see the Stemteema warning Cogewea against her involvement with Densmore. In this scene, Cogewea looks out over the plains and laments the absence of the buffalo:

> A vision of the dim misty past rose up before her. The stately buffalo roved in the distance, while the timid antelope stood sentinel on the neighboring heights. An Indian village on the move, wound its way like a great mottled serpent over the crest of the highest ridge. It reached the brow, where each separate horse and rider showed in sharp silhouette against the horizon, then vanished over the crest. (109)

Her vision marks Buffalo Butte as a sacred site in which she sees clearly the injustices to which Densmore is inextricably tied. The buffalos' absence from the Flathead Valley is tied to the same hunting and trapping practices that Mourning Dove criticizes in her autobiography; whereas traditional Okanogan ways emphasize balance and a respect for the animal world, white settlers and trappers do not. However, Cogewea does not heed this first vision on Buffalo Butte, nor does she listen to Jim's reiteration of that vision when he reminds her that Densmore is an extension of the white men who have come before him, the same men responsible for extinguishing the buffalo herds.

In subsequent trips to Buffalo Butte, the text alludes to a traditional Okanogan story, "Coyote and the Buffalo," by introducing a buffalo skull which Cogewea found during the last buffalo roundup. Cogewea eloquently describes to Densmore that, due to increased settlement and disappearing grazing lands, the owner of the buffalo sold them to the Canadian government, and she explains, "to the Indian, they were the last link connecting him with the past, and when one of the animals burst through the car, falling to the tracks and breaking its neck, I saw some of the older people shedding silent tears" (148). Insensitive to the spiritual nature of the roundup for Okanogan elders, Densmore responds with typical Enlightenment rhetoric about progress: "I suppose that the animals were regarded as unprofitable, compared with other possibilities; and as standing in the way of the progressive development of the country" (148). These two diametrically opposed perspectives—the elders' mythos and Densmore's logos—emphasize the gulf separating Cogewea and Densmore philosophically. Later, Densmore gives her an ultimatum to choose between him and tradition when he asks, "why don't you love someone human, instead of that grizzled buffalo skull?" (149).

Adding to the buffalo skull's importance, "Coyote and the Buffalo" advocates for respect in dealing with the animal world as Coyote's mistreatment and neglect of a buffalo skull has dramatic effects on the Okanogan people by preventing buffalo from roaming in Swah-netk´-qhu country. Coyote had always been afraid of Buffalo Bull, so when he found a buffalo skull on the ground, "He picked up the skull and threw it into the air; he kicked it and spat on it; he threw dust in the eye-sockets. He did these things many times, until he grew tired"

(*Coyote Stories* 64). These disrespectful actions cause Buffalo Bull to attempt revenge against Coyote, but Coyote's cunning saves his life when he appeases Buffalo Bull by fashioning horns for him out of a stump of pitchwood. Pleased with his new horns, Buffalo Bull gives Coyote a young cow that will provide him with fresh meat as long as he never kills the cow, but eats only what he needs and heals the cow's wounds by rubbing them with ash. Always insatiable and rarely able to restrain himself, Coyote ignores Buffalo Bull's advice and takes more than he needs, eventually falling victim to an old woman who tricks him and steals all that is left of the buffalo cow—its bones. Due to Coyote's ignorance and wrongful treatment, the buffalo never roam in Okanogan country, and so the people have to journey to the plains to hunt this vital resource.

The traditional stories of Frog Woman, Owl Woman, and Buffalo Bull offer insight into the vastly different worldviews of the Okanogan people and white Americans, inflecting this modernist text with a complex, multifaceted, and contradictory viewpoint. Cogewea, forced to make a choice between the Stemteema and Densmore, falls in the middle of these cultures as loss of tribal lands and game has forced Cogewea's people into farming and ranching, the Dawes Act has secured them as subjects of the United States, and residential schooling has caused a crisis of identity. A simple return to the past is not possible; fractures can heal, but scars remain. As I will now show, two key ritualistic moments at the end of the text offer a resolution of sorts, but can find no concrete answers for assuaging the contradictions embodied in Cogewea as a

figure for the experiences of the Okanogan people in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries.

The ritual of the sweat lodge provides the first means for Cogewea to recognize Densmore's disingenuousness and the value inherent in return to Okanogan ways. Troubled by her inability to get through to Cogewea with her stories, the Stemteema enlists Jim—whose involvement in this project again demonstrates his importance in aiding Cogewea's return to her people—and her children to build a sweat lodge so that she might commune with the Great Spirit. Explaining the importance of rituals for addressing the fragmentation experienced by characters in American Indian fiction, Allen writes,

> American Indian novelists use cultural conflict as a major theme, but their work shows an increasing tendency to bind that theme to its analogues in whatever tribal oral tradition they write from. So while the protagonists in Native American novels are in some sense bicultural and must deal with the effects of colonization and an attendant sense of loss of self, each is also a participant in a ritual tradition that gives their individual lives shape and significance. (79)

For Cogewea, the ritual tradition of the sweat lodge begins to give her future life shape and offers answers. As Mary rolls three heated stones into the sweat lodge, one of them explodes when it makes contact with the air, an event that for the Okanogan people signals "a precursor of misfortune, loss in a gambling game or other adventure" (241). On the other hand, a stone rolled into the sweat lodge

intact signals a good omen, so Jim seizes upon this moment to make an unuttered wish (no doubt a plea for Cogewea) and successfully rolls his stone into the sweat lodge. Just as his earlier invitation to hear a story from the Stemteema symbolizes his acceptance into the family, his involvement in the ritual—where he significantly experiences a bonding moment with Mary—reinforces that return to community. Demonstrating that his involvement at the sweat lodge makes him acutely aware of his prior separation from his Okanogan ancestry, Jim exclaims, "Hadn't thought of no sweat house for years till today. Maybe been tryin' too hard to be Shoyahpee, dam' 'em!" (242). While Jim experiences an epiphany here, Cogewea is more resistant.

After Jim leaves, Cogewea quietly steals upon the scene, suggesting her strangeness and hesitance to involve herself with a ritual that to her seems foreign. As she nears the lodge, she realizes that the Stemteema is making "a plea to the Great Spirit—through the Mountain Herb—to change the heart of the Indian maiden, then being lured to the shadowy trail of sorrow by the deceiving Shoyahpee" (244). Touched by the Stemteema's concern, Cogewea takes the last stone from the fire and begins to roll it toward the sweat lodge only to see it explode within a foot of its destination as "A spirit voice[…]seemed to whisper just at her side: 'Beware! Beware!'" (244). Although the sweat lodge has granted the Stemteema's wishes for aid in warning Cogewea of the danger that awaits her, she does not heed the spirit voice. Instead, she convinces herself that the old tradition is nothing but a superstition and meets Densmore to follow through on their plans to run away and marry.

However, in the final chapter, "A Voice from a Buffalo Skull" Cogewea recognizes the power bestowed by listening to the old stories and basing one's actions upon traditional wisdom. After Cogewea and Densmore run away, he finds out that he overestimated her wealth—she has only three thousand dollars in the bank from the sale of her father's allotment—whereupon he predictably robs and beats her, and ties her to a tree. Jim, drawn back into the community through the Stemteema's efforts, rescues Cogewea and takes her back to her people. Two years later, in her familiar perch at Buffalo Butte, as Cogewea hears Jim approaching on horseback, the buffalo skull at her feet speaks to her, proclaiming, "*The Man! The Man! The Man*!" (282). As the resolution to the melodramatic love story, the buffalo skull's voice suggests that Cogewea should accept Jim's overtures of love and forget the yearnings that made her fall prey to Densmore's treachery. However, heeding the voice from the buffalo skull—a voice similar to the one she ignored at the sweat lodge—carries more than romantic significance. It functions as a resolution to Cogewea's deeper conflict, that of assimilating to whiteness. In this respect, the voice of the buffalo represents the voice of the Stemteema and of Okanogan tradition generally. The text makes clear that by listening to the skull, Cogewea will avoid the unthinking disrespect that Coyote shows Buffalo Bull and the voracious consumption that characterizes white culture. In the same way that Jim began to realize his disconnect from the Okanogan community at the sweat lodge, her recovery from Densmore's emotional and physical abuse depends on reconnecting with traditional ways. A union between Jim and Cogewea offers a fragile solution to their predicament of

being forcibly caught in a contradicting cultural context as the two, presumably, will create a modern Indian way of life based in tradition but lived in the colonized present.

This resolution shows the dimensions that *Cogewea* can add to our understanding of the modernist moment in America and the texts that represent it. While the anxieties and contradictions so prominent in *Cogewea* are created by its unique situation within the context of colonialism—characterized by a changing mode of production, policed interpellation in boarding schools, and an inevitable cultural and linguistic adaptation—the overarching context of imperialism and its attendant cultural anxiety exist in their own ways beneath all modernist texts. As I will show in my reading of Cather's *The Professor's House,* for example, the "taming" of the frontier and the forced removal of indigenous people factors largely in the white modernist imagination. In contrast, *Cogewea* contends with the same general historical factors that fuel Godfrey St. Peter's malaise but does so from the vantage point of Native people whose stories need to be heard as alternatives to Cather's imaginary, romanticized Indians. To provide such a forum in the realm of dominant culture, *Cogewea* appropriates the Western novel form, complicates it with many layers and competing voices, and offers a decidedly countercultural resolution to imagine a positive future for its protagonist and, by extension, all American Indians caught between two worlds. Finally, while alienation and contradictions inherently exist in western Enlightenment traditions and the system of capitalism in which those traditions emerged, *Cogewea* exists on the margins of that social system—not separate from

it, yet not completely incorporated either. Accordingly, the novel demands that we understand it as a modernist expression within its own cultural context and, therefore, one that requires an interpretive lens informed by Okanogan life ways and worldview.

Notes

1. In Chapter XIII of *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, Gossett discusses, for example, the idea that Northern European blood is superior to all others, rhetoric advanced by expansionists like Professor Franklin Giddings of Columbia University. Quoting Giddings and explaining his thinking, Gossett writes, "the American was superior because he was 'at bottom a Saxon-Norman.' In his veins coursed 'the blood of the old untamable pirates'" (313).
2. To clarify, Humishuma is Mourning Dove's name in Salishan, the language spoken by the Okanogan people.
3. See Churchill's case in the section, "Forcing the Transfer of Children," *Kill the Indian, Save the Man* pages 16-19.

Chapter Two:
Re-Sounding the *Bildungsroman* in Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter*

> Double consciousness defines a psychological sense experienced by African Americans whereby they possess a national identity, "an American," within a nation that despises their racial identity, "a Negro." It also refers to the ability of black Americans to see themselves only through the eyes of white Americans, to measure their intelligence, beauty, and sense of self-worth by standards set by others.
>
> --W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

> I suggest that the analysis of discursive strategies that I designate "the mastery of form" and "the deformation of mastery" produces more accurate and culturally enriching interpretations of *sound* and *soundings* of Afro-American modernism than do traditional methods. Out of personal reflection, then, comes a set of formulations on expressive modernism and the meaning of speaking (or *sounding*) "modern" in Afro-America.
>
> --Houston Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*

Compared with Mourning Dove and Winnifred Eaton, the work of Langston Hughes—and especially his poetry—has received a fair amount of attention from literary critics and educators; yet his first novel, *Not Without Laughter* (1930), until recently has not inspired sustained critical discussion, showing up in many articles, if it shows up at all, as a tangential reference, not a centerpiece.[1] However, the publication in 2007 of *Montage of a Dream: The Art and Life of Langston Hughes* signaled the emergence of new conversations about the novel's importance in the Harlem Renaissance *oeuvre*. Joining those

conversations, I will argue that it is important to talk about *Not Without Laughter* in a discussion of American modernism, because, like Mourning Dove, Hughes chooses to appropriate an established, Western literary form—in this case the *Bildungsroman*—and alter it to suit his uniquely felt, lived experiences, thus turning a traditionally realist exploration of the coming of age of a white, bourgeois subject into a modernist expression of a young black man's formation. Using pieces of his past as a child growing up in Kansas in order to cater to the tastes of his readers, including his benefactor, Charlotte Mason, and to achieve an emotional connection that is vital for reaching his audience, Hughes embeds within the narrative a condemnation of racism and insists on the importance of self-representation.

Specifically, I argue in this chapter that Hughes revises and disrupts the narrative form of the *Bildungsroman* with black sounds that give voice to the experiential legacy of slavery and condemn the racism of the Jim Crow South. I begin by defining the *Bildungsroman* and outlining some of the challenges and rewritings it has undergone since its emergence in the eighteenth-century before showing the ways in which the contexts of double consciousness, primitivism, and the literary marketplace influence Hughes' aesthetic philosophy and demand his reworking of the genre. Then, in the second half of the chapter, I conduct a close reading of *Not Without Laughter* to demonstrate the ways in which Hughes, through the use of black vernacular, music, and storytelling, alters the *Bildungsroman* to tell a coming-of-age story quite different from conventional

versions, ultimately using a cherished form of western cultural tradition to challenge that system.

The customary *Bildungsroman* is concerned with the socialization of the white, bourgeois, male subject, the reconciliation of individual needs and desires with the imperatives of existing as a social being. As Bakhtin notes, the *Bildungsroman* is the narrative of "man in the process of becoming" (19). For Marc Redfield, "[it] narrates the acculturation of a self—the integration of a particular 'I' into the general subjectivity of a community, and thus, finally, into the universal subjectivity of humanity" (38). Although its origins in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-96), in which the protagonist becomes disillusioned with the demands of his bourgeois existence and seeks personal fulfillment, suggest that the genre is more aligned with realism than modernism, the *Bildungsroman* consists of a very adaptable, fluid form that allows for the telling of subject formation in many different ways. *David Copperfield* (1850), for instance, conveys a very different story of becoming than does James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917). In fact, Franco Moretti has described the *Bildungsroman* as "the 'symbolic form' of modernity" (5) because of its emphasis on mobility, introspection, and subject formation.

Hughes' rewriting of an individual's socialization from the perspective of Sandy, *Not Without Laughter's* protagonist, follows a long tradition of revisions to the *Bildungsroman* by white women and people of color. For example, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) concerns the difficulties faced by a young

woman from the servant class who wishes to find individual satisfaction with limited means and mobility. Slave narratives carry on this sort of rethinking from the perspective of black people who exist as the private property of others and who are not recognized by law as sovereign subjects. Consequently, in the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), whose condition for circulation required an affirmative preface by a white man, William Loyd Garrison, the path to self-knowledge must be undertaken through clandestine learning and defiance of the master. Like Brontë and Douglass, Hughes adapts the *Bildungsroman* to express his own experiences, in this case those of an African American child growing up in the Jim Crow South. His rewriting demonstrates the dialectical relationship between the Western novelistic form and writers from outside the dominant culture, a dynamic of which Mary Layoun writes in *Travels of a Genre: The Modern Novel and Ideology* (1990): "If the form of the novel was simultaneously a new opening and a containment or closure, if the novel hegemonizes or imperializes, it did not and does not do so without resistances and infiltrations of various sorts" (11). In other words, writers under the boot heel of empire necessarily assimilate to some degree when they adopt a Western form, because speaking in the master's tongue requires sacrifices, as we have seen dramatically play out in Mourning Dove's working relationship with McWhorter. However, in Hughes' hands, the *Bildungsroman* becomes a subversive repository for his experienced history as a black American in the early twentieth-century, performing the sort of "resistances and infiltrations" of which Layoun speaks.

In the fields of modernist and postcolonial studies, critics have recently done important work exploring various adaptations of the *Bildungsroman* by writers from other than white, bourgeois, European traditions, a rethinking that informs my reading of *Not Without Laughter*. In one such study, "The Uneven Development of the *Bildungsroman*: D'Arcy McNickle and Native American Modernity" (2011), Enrique Lima "proposes a new way of understanding how novelistic genres develop in spaces at a remove from the central zones of the modern system that gave birth to them" (293) by exploring the ways in which economics and colonialism affect an American Indian's experience of individualism and socialization. Similarly, Ogaga Okuyade, arguing that "African and Caribbean women writers continue to subvert the traditional markers of the *Bildungsroman* in its being white, male and bourgeois," demonstrates that the form of the *Bildungsroman* even now continues to grow and adapt in order to express disparate subjective experiences. My reading of *Not Without Laughter* enters into this conversation about the ways in which a writer can infiltrate and stretch the genre to represent varying experiences of subject formation that contrast and often contradict the dominant, Western European narratives of becoming. It will help first to foreground some of the predominant socio-cultural currents contemporary to the novel and to discuss the ways in which these phenomena influenced Hughes' artistic project.

Double Consciousness, Primitivism, and the Literary Marketplace

Not Without Laughter, and Hughes' aesthetic generally, are greatly concerned with self-representation as a means of combating the contradictions

that obtain within a developing subjectivity in a society hostile to that subject, a struggle that W.E.B. Du Bois' ideas of double consciousness and the Veil illuminate. In fact, Du Bois' impact on the novel's protagonist is blatant when, reading issues of the literary journal *Crisis* at his Aunt Tempy's house, Sandy comes across Du Bois' writing for the first time and feels an instant connection: "in every issue he found, too, stirring and beautifully written editorials about the frustrated longings of the black race, and the hidden beauties in the Negro soul" (243). Clearly affected by Du Bois' writing, Sandy expresses admiration and an understanding of the issues Du Bois confronts, having himself experienced the psychological damage of double consciousness, whereby black people see themselves from the perspective of whites and develop a conflicted, double self. As DuBois puts it, "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (9). In Du Bois' estimation, this doubling forms a contradiction that cannot be reconciled. Rather than allowing for the dialectical creation of a new being, a synthesis, a black American, the doubling keeps the signifiers "black" and "American" separate and incompatible. The reality of seeing oneself through another's eyes does not allow for ownership of that self and effectively perpetuates the system of slavery, psychologically, if not physically.

For Sandy, the threat of seeing himself through the eyes of others is immanent in the racist, Jim Crow environment in which he grows up. Like Du Bois who, as a schoolboy, participates in a visiting card exchange with the

members of his New England school only to experience rebuke from a white girl, Sandy's skin color marks him as a second-class citizen and mars his coming-of-age, as in the Children's Day scene where the gate attendant prevents his and Willie-Mae's entrance to the fair, claiming, "sorry, this party's for white folks" (197). He is encouraged to succumb to the stereotype of the stupid black boy when he is forced to sit in the back row at school or that of the blissfully ignorant minstrel while under the gaze of the white man in the hotel who demands that Sandy perform a song and dance because, "Down where I live, folks, all our niggers can dance!" (215). Such situations are common in Sandy's life and evoke from him similar reactions as they do from Du Bois who, recalling the effects of the visiting card incident, introduces his idea of the Veil:

> Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wondering shadows. (8)

The Veil separates and excludes, preventing Du Bois from feeling part of the national culture and restraining him through institutionalized racism. He sees his young peers responding to their imprisonment in different ways: while it spurs him on to succeed, expand his mind, and prove that he can accomplish what he wishes, it causes others to live in "silent hatred of the pale world about them and [a] mocking distrust of everything white" (8), a response embodied by Sandy's

sister Harriet, and one which Sandy himself sometimes feels. For Houston Baker, Jr., "The Veil signifies a barrier of American racial segregation that keeps Afro-Americans always behind a color line—disoriented—prey to dividing aims, dire economic circumstances, haphazard educational opportunities, and frustrated intellectual ambitions" (57). Disorientation does indeed capture the feeling of double consciousness as Du Bois explains it, as the constant doubling brings on an almost vertiginous effect, a dizzying sensation.

Ironically, although Sandy's Aunt Tempy's bookshelves are filled with Charles Chesnutt's novels, Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poetry, and literary journals like *Crisis*, she perhaps more than anyone else in the novel is plagued by the inability to see herself through her own prism. Instead, she is consumed by the need for white people to look favorably upon her, an obsession that rules her life. Taking Sandy shopping for clothes, she tells him, "I want white people to know that Negroes have a little taste; that's why I always trade at good shops…. And if you're going to live with me, you'll have to learn to do things right, too" (235). Throughout the novel, Sandy sees Tempy as a cold, unfamiliar person who has little influence on him, and until he encounters Du Bois' work on her bookshelf, he resents the textual representations with which she presents him. At Christmas, she stops by Hager's house out of obligation and gives Sandy a shiny, big collection of *Andersen's Fairy Tales*, a clearly expensive, showy gift which "made the ten-cent-store books that Hager had bought him appear cheap and thin" (159). In a gesture of defiance Sandy throws the book beneath the stove, indicating his refusal to accept instruction from a European collection of fairy

tales whose purpose is to teach children common sense and to socialize them. Evidently, Sandy resents this imposition and, like Hughes himself, he searches for an empowering means of African American expression, which he eventually finds not only in Du Bois' work but also in the blues and in storytelling, as I will suggest below. Conversely, Tempy's choice of texts emphasizes her double consciousness and internalized racism. She would have Sandy assimilate to whiteness by taking his instruction from European standards, leading one to believe that she has not cracked the spines of the texts on her bookshelf and that they are merely there for show. She is indeed imprisoned like Dunbar's caged bird, yet she does not beat her wings against the bars until exhaustion overtakes her; instead, she seems comfortable in her prison and willing to make the best of it.

To better understand Hughes' own double consciousness—his struggles with seeing himself through a white lens and figuring out how to re-envision himself and represent that vision to others—one must examine his involvement with the prevalent 1920s discourse of primitivism. As a white fantasy that works to compensate for alienation and dehumanization brought on by the feeling that the "civilized" cultures of Europe and America had corrupted the "natural" state of humanity, primitivism finds in those races "less civilized" than white Europeans and Americans a counterpoint, a form of being closer to human "origins." David Chinitz explains the historical circumstances of primitivism as follows:

> If postwar disillusionment judged the majority culture mannered, neurotic, and repressive, Americans had an easily accessible alternative. The need for such an Other produced a discourse in which black Americans figured as barely civilized exiles from the jungle, with—so the clichés ran—tom-toms beating in their blood and dark laughter in their souls. The African American became a model of "natural" human behavior to contrast with the falsified, constrained and impotent modes of the "civilized." (61)

As Chinitz points out, blackness, or, to be more precise, a certain essentialist definition of blackness, suddenly became *en vogue* as a remedy for the hollowness of the dominant white culture, resulting from the many factors that determine modernism's break from the past, as discussed in Chapter One. White consumers keenly felt a loss of belief in a teleology that claimed that the progress of Western civilization moved increasingly toward enlightenment. Like Walter Benjamin's angel of history looking over its shoulder at the mounting destruction caused by imperialism in the name of "progress,"[2] Western civilization sought a remove from such chaos and a return to "simpler" times.

One clear problem that critics have had with the influence of primitivism on Hughes' aesthetic is its suggestion that he does not totally deny the existence of an essential blackness shared by every member of the African diaspora, and this obviously presents an issue in today's critical climate, in which we commonly accept that race is socially constructed. As Tzvetan Todorov succinctly puts it, "'races' do not exist" (371). That is, while humans have differing physical

characteristics used to group them into scientific categories, the signifier "race" carries with it the suggestion of essential differences beyond skin color or bone structure. Further, while the ideological invention of "race" leads to the very real consequences of *racism*, the search for African authenticity and a quintessentially black voice denies the diversity of black people and ignores the effects of individual experience despite African ancestry. Yet those who maintain that Hughes' pursuit of authenticity only leads to essentializing black people would do well to consider his work in its historical context, for, as John Edgar Tidwell and Cheryl Ragar argue, "the literary struggle for the humanity of African Americans necessitated, in the view of Hughes and others, authentic representation" (3) as a counter to demeaning, racist stereotypes. At a time when the minstrel tradition and popular films like D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) depicted black people as inherently childlike and unable to temper their basest impulses, offering a different, positive representation of blackness, even if at times essentialist, provided a rhetorical strategy that allowed writers like Hughes to take the first step toward asserting black humanity.

For the black artists of the Harlem Renaissance, the sudden popularity of blackness offered a market for their art, but also the danger of molding that art to appease the desires of the consuming white public. Because in a consumer-driven capitalist society prevailing discourses of race and the rights of self-representation cannot exist separately from economics, Hughes, like Mourning Dove and Winnifred Eaton, had to demonstrate a keen understanding of the culture industry if he hoped to publish his work. As Chip Rhodes has argued, "the mass cultural

imperative to produce consumer desire dovetailed nicely with what David Levering Lewis has called the 'vogue of the Negro,' the white fetishization of blacks as 'primitives' that emphasized their capacity and appetite for pleasure" (171). Hughes capitalized on that desire to gain access to the literary marketplace and a readership to which he could direct his counter hegemonic representations of black people. Addressing the issue of whether Hughes' work is overly determined by primitivist discourse, Chinitz comes to the conclusion that he was neither completely swept away by nor immune to its effects and emphasizes that, as an essential element of racial ideology circulating in the 1920s, to avoid it altogether would have been impossible. As Althusser suggests, there is no *outside* of ideology—although artists like Hughes have the ability to expose ideology's inconsistencies from within—nor, to bring the discussion back to Du Bois, is it possible for a black man to live outside of the Veil. Hence, from within the Veil, Hughes interacts with primitivist discourse, thinks through it, and at times uses it to his advantage as a rhetorical strategy. Ultimately, his use of primitivism allows him to write with fewer financial constraints, thanks in part to his relationship to his benefactor, Charlotte Mason.

One cannot overlook the frequently discussed influence of Mason as it affected Hughes' relationship to primitivist ideology, his genre choices, and the political implications of his work. While Mason seems not to have had as dominant a role as McWhorter did in *Cogewea*, she provided him with an income so that he could focus on his writing and in turn expected to review drafts and offer input. Hughes recounts Mason's primitivist bent in *The Big Sea*:

> Concerning Negroes, she felt that they were America's great link with the primitive, and that they had something very precious to give to the Western World. She felt that there was mystery and mysticism and spontaneous harmony in their souls, but that many of them had let the white world pollute and contaminate that mystery and harmony, and make of it something cheap and ugly, commercial and, as she said, "white." She felt that we had a deep well of the spirit within us and that we should keep it pure and deep. (316)

Mason also preferred that black artists not have a political voice but speak from the position of the supposedly apolitical primitive, and this imperative clearly influenced the content of *Not Without Laughter*. Speaking of Mason's feelings about his increasingly politicized writing, Hughes mentions in *The Big Sea* that she disliked his poem "Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria" (1931), which juxtaposes the increasing number of homeless people on the streets of Manhattan and the dizzying wealth exhibited by the city's newest luxury hotel. John Shields has shown "the degree to which his patron's literary censorship forced Hughes to suppress his increasingly strong left-wing political notions in the novel" (601). Comparing the published version with early drafts, Shields finds that even minor editing of the initial manuscript sought "to avoid direct references to economic conditions" (606). In the interest of having Mason's continued support and the corresponding privilege of writing without financial burdens, Hughes out of necessity tailored his writing to her wishes, and this likely influenced his decision

to compose *Not Without Laughter* as a *Bildungsroman* to show the potential corruption of a "natural," "primitive" African-American boy, a narrative of which Mason would approve in a literary form that she could understand.

Struggling with double consciousness and the need for self-representation, with the inescapable racial ideology of the time and the pressure to create apolitical art, and with the necessity of finding economic support and a market for his work, Hughes sought a form that would express the experiences of common black people while also appeasing those readers who wanted a glimpse of the exotic primitive. Since the *Bildungsroman* provided a means of telling a story of socialization from a perspective outside the mainstream, Hughes exploited that genre to accomplish the resistances and infiltrations of which Layoun speaks by integrating into *Not Without Laughter* a cacophony of black sounds—vernacular speech, blues music, and stories shared in the communal spaces of Hager's front porch and Cudge Windsor's pool hall. Through these noisy interventions, Hughes expresses a coming of age story rooted in the history of slavery and the Jim Crow South, while also managing to shatter stereotypes and essentialist views of black people by acknowledging a wide range of difference and a disparate array of voices.

As a member of the vanguard of young artists that formed the Harlem Renaissance and, within that community, as one who contemplated and argued about how best to represent the experiences of black Americans, Hughes very consciously developed an aesthetic theory informed by his colleagues but also uniquely his own. In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926) Hughes

laments that many black artists catered to white standards and ideals, neglecting the vast material that comes from their own cultural traditions. By not lauding the civility of the talented tenth and in hope of reclaiming a vibrant culture that stood in opposition to the isolating Veil imposed by whites, Hughes wanted to celebrate "the low-down folks, the so-called common element" whose "joy runs, bang! into ecstasy" (693). Rather than write a *Crisis,* NAACP-inspired tract about injustice and racism, Hughes' aesthetic is more in line with the journal *Opportunity,* which advanced Charles S. Johnson's position that art ought to express a unique individual experience. As George Hutchinson puts it in *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (1995), "the aesthetic work would not be burdened with 'propaganda' of the 'best foot forward' sort but instead attempt to exemplify in its very form the cultural meanings (that is, the 'experience,' in pragmatist terms) of a people" (176). While *Not Without Laughter* clearly exposes the economic inequalities of a racist society, as I will turn to shortly, it does so through the eyes of a young boy torn between all of the forces that determine his subjectivity, and many of the people who influence him do not speak standardized English or censor improprieties. This emphasis on individual subjectivity and its ideational alliance with pragmatism, a philosophy commonly associated with the beginnings of American modernism, contributes to *Not Without Laughter's* unique take on what the terms "American" and "modernism" signify, depending on from whose vantage point we investigate.

While *Not Without Laughter* is about individual experience and subject formation, it does not neglect the economic side of that experience. Indeed, all of

the major characters in the novel struggle daily with making a living through their labor, even if the narrator rarely intrudes to interpret that work for us or point explicitly to the power structures that keep the people in Sandy's immediate family poor. The novel is more concerned with showing how the individual bears the stamp of these structures, but this makes the conditions of poverty and racism no less obvious. The combination of intense subjectivity, material historicism, and the emphasis on common people has led Robert Young to contend that Hughes' aesthetic explodes the either/or distinctions between modernism and realism as defined in the Frankfurt school debates that I discuss in Chapter One. Young's compelling argument is worth quoting at length:

> Hughes would avoid the (Brechtian) charge of an ahistorical and formalist notion of realism. Along with the historicization of race, Hughes appropriated vernacular forms, like jazz, which gave him an analytic basis from which to theorize new poetic forms—forms that are historical, modernist, and aligned to a politically progressive project. Hughes's poetics points to the objective reality of African American racial oppression and economic exploitation. Hence, Hughes would escape the Lukácsian charge of "decadent formalism." For Hughes, the forms are derived from the proletariat, reflect the experiences of the proletariat, and position the proletariat as agents of change. The poetic forms reproduce cultural aesthetics and, in doing so, render the form accessible, thereby providing the presupposition for understanding

> the social and inaugurating new subjectivities, In the project of rendering reality in a form men and women can master, as Brecht once put it, Hughes's red poetics provides a compelling example. (137)

As he explains here, Young sees Hughes as not only a writer of poetry and prose, but as a theorist who seeks to find a balance between innovative and accessible forms by reconfiguring the sounds and rhythms of the masses into his poetics, with the final purpose of influencing readers to see the racist, class-determined structures of American society. Hughes, then, invents forms that are new, are rooted in his modernist moment, and that show the complex array of ideological forces that make up one's subjectivity. But he also acknowledges the existence of the Real, in the Althusserian sense, which is always rooted in the mode of production.

The Economics of Stanton

As narratives about an individual's identity formation, *Bildungsroman* have traditionally been very concerned with the protagonist's career path as a means of finding personal fulfillment within the community, but this pursuit appears quite different for an individual with severely limited opportunities. Sandy's family, like most of the black community in Stanton, is composed of washer women, domestic servants, and men who cobble together a living by whatever means they can find. While much of the conflict in *Cogewea* comes from the Okanogan people's transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture, the economic structure for most African Americans in Stanton has likely changed

little from the conditions of slavery, as we see, for example, in the fact that most of the black women in the novel provide the same services for white families that a house slave would have supplied. Helping his mother in the white people's kitchen where she works, Sandy sees Mrs. Rice, her employer, castigate Annjee over little details from the dinner service while Sandy "stood near the sink with a burning face and eyes that had suddenly filled with angry tears. He couldn't help it—hearing his sweating mother reprimanded by this tall white woman in the flowered dress" (77). When Annjee and Sandy leave "out the back door, around the *big house* to the street" (77, my italics), it is clear that little has changed since the Emancipation Proclamation and that Annjee and most of the other black women of Stanton still serve in a kind of neoslavery in the "big house." Meanwhile, their husbands and fathers are largely absent.

Though Jimboy has not literally been sent down the river, as might have occurred in 1850, the economics of Stanton, still controlled by white money and power, prevent him and other young black men from being with their families due to the lack of worthwhile employment opportunities, which contributes to Jimboy's perpetual absence and to the restlessness that pervades his character. Responding to Hager's complaining about Jimboy's laziness and inability to hold down a job, Annjee muses, "what was there in Stanton anyhow for a young colored fellow to do except dig sewer ditches for a few cents an hour or maybe porter around a store for seven dollars a week. Colored men couldn't get many jobs in Stanton, and foreigners were coming in, taking away what little work they did have" (45). Despite Annjee showing that she is affected by attempts to pit

black workers against those of immigrants—a point I discuss in relation to Chinese laborers in Chapter Five—she does advance a sensible argument. Most young black men in the novel have migrated to industrial cities where they might find work, leading Sister Whiteside to lament, "I gets right lonesome since all ma young-ones is gone. […] Chillen an' grandchillen all in Chicago an' St. Louis an' Wichita, an' nary chick nor child left with me in de house" (35). By the end of the novel, Annjee and Sandy have joined the many young people who have left Stanton in search of better times, partly because by this time Sandy has also experienced the demeaning nature of work for a young black man in a Jim Crow society.

As a hotel clerk, Sandy gets a harsh education about the nature of working in a service industry for white folks, his most blatant lesson coming one night when a group of intoxicated white men have gathered in the lobby and one asks Sandy to shine his shoes. Telling lewd and racist jokes, the men cause Sandy to feel sick to his stomach, and finally the Southerner doing most of the talking focuses his attention on Sandy and demands that he entertain the men by doing a dance. "Now, a nigger his size down South," he says, "would no more think o' not dancin' if a white man asked him than he would think o' flyin'. This boy's jest tryin' to be smart, that's all" (215). After taking the abuse for a while, his face burning in the same way as when he saw his mother reprimanded by Mrs. Rice, Sandy decides that waiting for his pay is not worth the humiliation and turns to go, but the Southerner, determined to gain control of an impetuous "darky," grabs his arm to detain him. Sandy's final actions in the melee are telling:

> Sandy turned, raised his boot-black box furiously above his head and flung it with all his strength at the group of laughing white men in which the drunken Southerner was standing. From one end of the whizzing box a stream of polish-bottles, brushes, and cans fell clattering across the lobby while Sandy disappeared through the door, running as fast as his legs could carry him in the falling snow.
>
> "Hey! You black bastard!" Joe Willis yelled from the hotel entrance, but his voice was blown away in the darkness. As Sandy ran, he felt the snow-flakes falling in his face. (215-16)

The alliteration of "boot-black box" draws attention to the plays on black and white throughout the passage. Rather than bow out submissively, an act that the Southerner would surely expect, Sandy throws his box both to emphatically state his refusal to continue working in such a demeaning environment and to assert the power of his blackness. Just as Hughes chooses to incorporate elements of black sound in order to subvert white power, as I will show in the next section, Sandy's act demonstrates his refusal to perform the "dancing coon" role that the Southerner demands. As Sandy runs out into the snow beginning to blanket the ground—a symbol of whiteness—the yells of his employer, whose appellation "bastard" digs at Sandy because of his often absent father, "was blown away in the darkness." While Sandy cannot change the ubiquitous white power surrounding him, his own personal confidence allows him to resist.

Dialect, the Blues, and Storytelling as Modernist Black Sounds

When looking at the array of black sounds in *Not Without Laughter*, one must begin with the most obvious, the use of black dialect and vernacular speech. While many Harlem Renaissance texts (Walter White's *The Fire in the Flint* [1924] and Jessie Fauset's *There is Confusion* [1924], for example) present a middle-class, refined black culture meant to counter the commonly held belief that African Americans lack intelligence, *Not Without Laughter* embraces the everyday language of the working class black people of Stanton. Interestingly, while Raymond Williams and others suggest that an increased commingling in the early twentieth-century of immigrant languages contributes to the defamiliarization of language,[3] a development that figures prominently in modernist literature, Hughes asserts the power of a signifying system learned within the community, as opposed to the alienating, double consciousness-inducing language of the dominant culture. People naturally learn native, vernacular speech through interactions in the family and the community, whereas a boy like Sandy would acquire "proper" English—the master's tongue—in school, effectively as a second language. From Sandy's perspective, polished English is also the domain of assimilationists like his Aunt Tempy, who constantly berates Sandy for his ungrammatical speech. By using the vernacular, Hughes makes the point that this language is not a source of embarrassment, but of power, a means of performing what Baker calls a "deformation of mastery." The use of blues music and traditional storytelling, in particular, dialogically capture the effects of racism on the young and old characters occupying the novel

and develop a complex understanding of the ways in which these different ways of telling contribute to Sandy's formation.

Du Bois and others who played a part in the Harlem Renaissance repeatedly demonstrate the subversive possibilities of black music. *The Souls of Black Folk,* for instance, begins each chapter with an excerpt of a text written in the Western tradition—James Russell Lowell's "The Present Crisis," Byron's *Child Harold's Pilgrimage, The Bible*—immediately followed by a fragment of a musical score from an African American spiritual, an act that Houston Baker, Jr., describes as the erasure of "Prospero's *parole*" by "the spiritual *langue* of Caliban's singing" (60). *Souls* concludes with a full chapter about sorrow songs, which "tell in word and music of trouble and exile, of strife and hiding" (182). By placing this chapter at the end of the text, Du Bois gives sorrow songs the final word, just as the ordering of epigraphs allows the sounds of black music to resonate as each chapter begins. In a book that lays out the psychological struggle of black people living with racism, the last chapter offers the possibility that "America shall rend the Veil and the prisoned shall go free" (187) before finally ending with the image and sounds of black children singing "Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveler." The reverberations of song clearly establish a resolution to the problem of seeing oneself through a white lens, a resolution that Hughes embraces by filling *Not Without Laughter* with similar sounds. Echoing Du Bois' hope that black music might help rend the Veil, Hughes writes of the disruptive possibilities of black music in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain": "But jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in

America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile" (694). While such a statement exposes Hughes' primitivist view of "the Negro soul," it also recognizes that black sound contains the power to counteract weariness and oppression while also offering a means of self-expression.

More recently, Mike Chasar has expertly shown in his study, "The Sounds of Black Laughter and the Harlem Renaissance: Claude McKay, Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes" (2008), the effect that Hughes' black sound can have in tumbling the white power structure. Chasar "attends to the organic or bodily acoustics of African American laughter—specifically, in the sonic landscape of the United States in the first three decades of the twentieth century" (58). While he primarily focuses on Hughes' poetry, Chasar also gives a brief overview of the ways in which laughter and other black noise "challenge the acoustics of white power and serve as a weapon in the struggle for political and social justice" (70) in *Not Without Laughter*. For him, the storm that opens the novel with tremendous force signifies the novel's acoustic power and suggests that the story will be filled with such sounds. Hence, whereas Elizabeth Schultz sees the storm as a rhetorical strategy by which Hughes "captivate[s] readers of all classes and races in a sympathetic response" (1179), Chasar emphasizes the storm's power as a herald of subversive noise. In keeping with Du Bois' insistence that uniquely black American forms have the final say in representing black people's experiences and Chasar's analysis of the power of black noise, I will suggest that

Hughes' use of blues music asserts the power of tradition to combat the psychological effects of racism and white power.

Jimboy's and Harriet's blues often lament lost love and the dissolution of community, consequences of the limited options of black laborers in the present and the long history of black families broken apart by slavery. With the power structures behind the breakup of families rendered invisible (making the music less dangerous if heard by whites), blues songs express the emotional damage of personal and familial loss, as when Harriet sings, "I wonder where ma easy rider's gone?/ He done left me, put ma new gold watch in pawn" (62), a sentiment that touches Harriet deeply since a lover from the Clinton Hotel made such an experience real when he left without explanation. Rendering in song the migration of black men to northern industrial cities, Jimboy underscores the frequency of such separations:

> You say you goin' North.
>
> You say you goin' North.
>
> How 'bout yo'…lovin' gal?
>
> You say you goin' North.
>
> O, don't you leave me here.
>
> Babe, don't you leave me here.
>
> Dog-gone yo' comin' back!
>
> Said don't you leave me here. (64-5)

The ellipsis in the third line grammatically echoes the lack felt by the lonesome speaker dumbfounded and unsure why her lover would abandon her, and it also

breaks the rhythm of the verse, inserting a caesura that makes the loss more jarring. The song's speaker strongly resembles Anjee, whom we find throughout the novel waiting for Jimboy's infrequent letters and anticipated homecomings, which always temporarily restore Sonny's nuclear family and provide moments of communal merrymaking.

Jimboy's blues, while lyrically expressing the loneliness and rambling that result from years of slavery and oppression, also serve a communal purpose by uniting both the family and the neighborhood. As Jimboy strums and Harriet dances, music, word, and movement merge into a narrative of common experience, as seen in this song of imprisonment:

> Here I is in this mean old jail.
>
> Ain't got nobody to go my bail.
>
> Lonesome an' sad an' chain gang bound—
>
> Ever' friend I had's done turned me down. (66)

Hearing this tale of bondage, a common denominator in the black experience, neighbor Tom Johnson shouts from his porch, "That's sho it! Now, when I was in de Turner County Jail…" (66), his interjection interrupted by his wife's admonishment not to share such a story. Yet, while it is not acceptable to speak of such trials in public, at least for the older generation that tends to be more closed, the blues can communicate the experience without shame and provide an outlet for shared experience. The act of making music, indeed, proves a means by which to unite old and young, past and present, as it reminds Tom Johnson of "de

ole plantation times" (61) when slaves sang sorrow songs as a brief respite from their everyday brutal reality.

As repositories of the black experience under slavery and Jim Crow, the subversive nature of the blues both liberates and frightens people all too familiar with the ramifications of speaking openly with white folks near. Aunt Hager reminds Jimboy of this danger, exclaiming, "Put that guitar right up, less'n it's hymns you plans on playin'. An' I don't want too much o' them, 'larmin' de white neighbors" (59). But despite Hager's warning, Jimboy continues playing as the music "float[s] down the alley, over back fences and into kitchen-windows where nice white ladies sedately washed their supper dishes" (59). Here, black sound invades a white household, subjecting its inhabitants to a representation of black experience. Whereas Hager, Mrs. Johnson, and Uncle Dan's stories occupy private spaces, Jimboy and Harriet's music is a public phenomenon, shared with neighborhood friends but also falling on the ears of possibly hostile whites. This audacity and public display, not the words or rhythms, seem most alarming to Hager who, having grown up a slave, is fearful of its impact.

Not content to have her music contained in Hager's backyard and immediate neighborhood, Harriet takes her blues further into the public sphere where her mastery of performance and ability to speak through what Baker calls the "minstrel mask" enable her to escape Stanton and ultimately help fund Sandy's education. To make this leap, however, she first must pass through the humiliating position of a young black woman trying to make her way, as we see during her public performance in the Stanton carnival's minstrel show. Peeking

into the minstrel tent to catch a rehearsal, Sandy and his friend Earl see "a big white man in a checkered vest […] watching a slim black girl, with skirts held high and head thrown back, prancing in a mad circle of crazy steps" (113). While Harriet dances under the surveillance of this carnival manager, her friend Maudel languidly resists unwanted advances from another white carny, a scene which foreshadows Harriet's eventual descent to prostitution later in the story and foregrounds the difficulty of a black artist seeking success in the white-owned entertainment industry, an issue with which Hughes was keenly aware given his dependence upon Mason and his adept maneuvering within primitivist ideology.

If the minstrel show on one level illustrates the demeaning position of black performers in an environment that mocks them, these players, like Hughes, also use the stage to their advantage. Overtly racist scenes dominate the shows, such as "two black bucks shooting gigantic dice on a street-corner" and "Sambo and Rastus […] with long wooden razors […] argu[ing] and shooting dice" (116). But for Sandy the most compelling moment of the night comes from the banjo player who performs at the end of the show, picking the blues and singing, "Ah' Ah can't be satisfied/ 'Cause all Ah love has/ Done laid down and died" (117). Just as Jimboy's music floats through white folks' windows, the blues at the end of the minstrel show inflect a racist spectacle with a black artist's interpretation of what has just occurred. For Sandy, the song "seemed like the saddest music in the world—but the white people around him laughed" (117). White laughter resonates at the carnival and indicates that the spectators do not have the interpretive tools to hear or understand the performance, but for Sandy the

meaning is clear: the singer expresses the humiliation and figurative death of the actors participating. All of these musical experiences—hearing the contrasting black and white responses to minstrelsy, observing Jimboy's backyard performances with the community taking part, feeling the expressions of familial loss—contribute to Sandy's coming of age. They tell and *sound* a narrative that counters the mainstream, white bourgeois representation of subject formation by insisting on very specifically black lived experiences as the formative ones for Sandy.

Whereas the blues voice the experiences of the young characters in the novel, storytelling conveys the history of the antebellum South and the ways in which that past remains alive within its elderly characters, and this representation also contributes to Sandy's formation. In the chapter "White Folks," Sister Johnson's story recounts the circumstances that drove her from Mississippi following white resentment over black people beginning to prosper in their little enclave which whites called "Crowville." The situation comes to a peak when a white man pulls a black man, John Lowdon, from his new car and beats him, claiming, "a nigger ain't got no business wid a automobile nohow" (84). After Lowdon defends himself by shooting his attacker three times, the white people's reprisal comes swiftly, as Sister Johnson recalls:

> Den fer help! An' de fiah light up de whole country clean back to de woods! You could smell fiah, an' you could see it red, an' taste de smoke, an' feel it stingin' yo' eyes. An' you could hear de bo'ads a-fallin' an' de glass a-poppin', an' po' animals roastin' an'

> fryin' an' a-tearin' at dey halters. An' one cow run out, fiah all ovah, wid her milk streamin' down. An' de smoke roll up, de cotton-fields were red…an' dey ain't been no mo' Crowville after dat night. No, sir! De white folks ain't left nothin' fer de niggers, not nary bo'ad standin' one 'bove another, not even a dog-house. (85)

Sister Johnson's narrative makes overt the sheer terror and violence that led to migrations of black people from the South to any place that hinted at a better future—whether the North or the plains of Kansas—and its vivid description of Crowville burning makes it present for her listeners. One of the most telling images is of the terrified cow running to escape the fire with milk leaking from her udders, a description that brings to mind the long practice of slave women nursing their masters' children alongside their own, as did Hager. With an unchecked white mob terrorizing a community whose name signifies on the perpetuation of slavery under Jim Crow, Sister Johnson's story represents the same sort of experience that leads Jimboy and Harriet to sing of restless longing and lost community.

In Cudge Windsor's pool hall, the only place for black men to congregate in the evenings since the YMCA allows only whites, Uncle Dan, echoing Sister Johnson's equation of black slaves with animals, tells a tale that is humorously appropriate for its setting while subtly relating the sexual violence done to slaves in order to benefit their masters. Because Dan's owners possessed little money, they decided that they could capitalize on his sexual prowess to breed a large

stock of slaves. Dan recalls proudly, "Dey called me de stud nigger! Yes, dey did! On 'count o' de kind o' slavery-time work I was doin'—I were breedin' babies fo' to sell!" (250). While Uncle Dan makes light of the fact that his masters breed him like an animal and claim ownership of his progeny, his next story demonstrates his refusal to submit to control. Dan and another slave steal their master's best horse to attend a dance at a neighboring plantation which is owned by a "bitter enemy" (251) of their master's. Here, Dan is taking ownership of his body and his relationships by not only stealing one of his master's animals, but also socializing with women of his own choosing. After the dance, Dan and his friend find the stolen horse dead, drag it back to its stable, and pretend not to know anything about it, an act of rebellion that effectively shows his master that he is not a "buck" and that he will not be treated like an animal.

More than anyone, though, Aunt Hager's teachings affect Sandy's coming of age and often contradict those of Sister Johnson, Uncle Dan, and Sandy's own lived experience of racism and poverty. While Hager's religiosity has little bearing on Sandy's development, her position as a repository of tradition does. As they sit together in the kitchen or on the porch, she recounts "slavery-time stories, myths, folk-tales like the Rabbit and the Tar Baby; the war, Abe Lincoln, freedom; visions of the Lord; years of faith and labor, love and struggle[…]" (179). The tone of Hager's storytelling, which embraces Christian theology and the attendant mandate that one must love one's neighbor above oneself, differs greatly from Sister Johnson's tale of burning and violence. For Hager, race

makes no difference. There are good and bad people regardless of skin color, and she lays out this theory in the chapter "Nothing but Love":

> "These young ones what's comin' up now, they calls us ole fogies, an' handkerchief heads, an' white folks' niggers 'cause we don't get mad an' rar' up in arms like they does 'cause things is kinder hard, but, honey, when you gets old, you knows they ain't no sense in getting' mad an' sourin' yo' soul with hatin' peoples. White folks is white folks, an' colored folks is colored, an' neither one of 'em is bad as t'other make out. For mighty nigh seventy years I been knowin' both of 'em, an' I ain't never had no room in ma heart to hate neither white nor colored." (179)

Hager next relates her history as the daughter of a domestic slave who grew up in the big house and lived, according to her recollection, just as her friend Miss Jeanne, the master's daughter. When the Civil War came, Hager says, everyone on the plantation, slave and free, grieved over the exodus of men to follow Lee, a development that left her beholden to care for Miss Jeanne even after the war ended and everyone left the plantation. In the end, Miss Jeanne succumbed to the grief of losing her husband and fell from her balcony in the midst of a vision of his ghost, failing to leave a will that would reward Hager with the house that she should rightfully inherit for her loyalty. While the pathos of Hager's story is compelling, the outcome demonstrates the inequalities of Jim Crow: despite her loyalty and devotion to Miss Jeanne, Aunt Hager is betrayed by whites and struggles with poverty until her death. Additionally, one wonders of the untold

stories behind Hager's relationship with Miss Jeanne and with her master, especially since her name evokes comparisons to the biblical Hagar, a slave and concubine given to Abraham by his wife Sarah. Considering that the novel never mentions Harriet, Tempy, and Annjee's father(s), it seems probable that Hager, like Hagar, served as her master's concubine, a subject whose inclusion in the story Mrs. Mason surely would not have condoned.

The cacophony of voices speaking through dialect, the blues, and storytelling, each sharing its own version of growing up within a racist society, makes *Not Without Laughter* a polyvocal modernist text, asserting the kind of black sounds of which Baker and Chasar speak. As these sounds influence Sandy's coming of age, they create a dissonance that tells of the violence of slavery and its aftermath both through content and form, representing a wide array of ways in which people live that history and experience life behind the Veil. Aunt Tempy, who obsesses about proving to whites that black people are civilized, responds with internalized racism and double consciousness; Jimboy is forced to wander, always looking for a job; Harriet negotiates minstrelsy and seeks a stage for her art; Hager cherishes the memory of her mistress' friendship while continuing to slave for white women. These varied responses resemble a quilt or a montage, with patches of experience forming a larger whole to tell the story of a boy shaped by these memories, traditions, and economic structures. The novel's resolution, like those of *Cogewea* and *Cattle*, seeks wholeness—a sewing together of the quilt's panels—and finds this completion by reassembling the sense of familial community which has been fractured by racism and poverty.

Resolution through Community and Economic Self-Determinism:

Modernisms of all kinds express feelings of displacement, disorientation, and disconnection that spring from the dissolution of community. For people migrating from very tight-knit, family-oriented communities like the one in which Sandy grows up, and from which Hughes came, the loss of community can be traumatic. *Opportunity* sought to create an imaginative community among black artists to assuage feelings of isolation, a project that influences *Not Without Laughter's* resolution:

> A nationally circulated magazine, after all, is a powerful tool for creating a sense of shared life in a world where modernization, migration, and urbanization are shattering older forms of community maintenance (particularly face-to-face interaction) as well as providing opportunities for new types of community. *Opportunity's* relentless advocacy of a folk drama movement precisely exemplifies its communitarian thrust, invoking the folk past to create a 'community of memory' (in Royce's terms), to revitalize a community of expression and a 'community of hope' (Royce again) for a continentally scattered urban middle-class readership. (Hutchinson 180, author's emphasis)

For Harlem Renaissance writers uprooted from rural homes and transplanted in the modern city, *Opportunity* provided a community of ideas and memory, a space where writers could recreate the types of close-knit groups that formed their early experiences. As I have argued, *Not without Laughter's* use of folk idioms

and vernacular culture constructs memory in a similar way, ultimately working to restore a sense of community through a sharing of common histories, but emphasizing the ways in which these histories are differently felt.

The novel's resolution involves Sandy's Aunt Harriet, who has left Stanton to pursue her entertainment career and has come quite far since her minstrel show performance at the Stanton carnival. Sandy has not heard from her in quite some time when he comes across a juxtaposition of text in the newspaper:

> Sandy finished his drink and bought a copy of the *Chicago Defender*, the World's Greatest Negro Weekly, which was sold at the counter. Across the front in big red letters there was a headline: *Negro Boy Lynched*. There was also an account of a race riot in a Northern industrial city. On the theatrical page a picture of pretty Baby Alice Whitman, the tap-dancer, attracted his attention, and he read a few of the items there concerning colored shows; but as he was about to turn the page, a little article in the bottom corner made him pause and put the paper down on the counter.
>
> ACTRESS MAKES HIT
>
> St. Louis, Mo., Aug. 3: Harrietta Williams, sensational young blues-singer, has been packing the Booker Washington Theatre to the doors here this week. Jones and Jones are the headliners for the all-colored vaudeville bill, but the singing of Miss Williams

> has been the outstanding drawing card. She is being held over for a continued engagement, with Billy Sanderlee at the piano. (253)

These captions in some ways serve as a microcosm of the novel's form, as violence and racism encounter popular culture and African American art, world news stands next to the theater page, lynching and race riots exist beside tap-dancing and, finally, news of Harriet's triumphant rise as a blues singer and dancer offers hope. As a figure for the successful entertainer drawing from the traditions of black artists, Harriet provides a means to the kind of self-representation that has the potential to counter the psychologically damaging effects of double consciousness. Her final act in the novel works to restore the divisions in the family and realize Hager's ambition for Sandy.

When Sandy joins Annjee in Chicago after five years of absence from his mother, the family over which Hager presided as matriarch has finally dissolved and drifted apart, leaving Sandy, who finds that the economic realities for black people in Chicago differ little from those back in Stanton, in danger of working in the service industry for the rest of his monotonous life, catering to the wishes of whites. In the end, though, Harriet shows that her manipulation of a minstrel-like entertainment business offers the possibility of self-determination. Sandy and Annjee go to see Harriet perform at the Monogram Theater and, from the beginning, both Harriet and Hughes manipulate the minstrel mask and cater to their audience's desires. Hughes gives us a glimpse of the "typical Black Belt audience, laughing uproariously, stamping its feet to the music, kidding the actors, and joining in the performance, too. Rows of shiny black faces, gay white

teeth, bobbing heads" (291). The description clearly plays into white expectations of the lively black audience, easy in their demeanor, white teeth suggesting their primitive health. The description of Harriet's performance also uses primitivist language: "then, stepping out from among the blue curtains, Harriet entered in a dress of glowing orange, flame-like against the ebony of her skin, barbaric, yet beautiful as a jungle princess" (293). Harriet takes on the persona of an exotic jungle princess in the service of entertainment and expectations, seemingly continuing her manipulation that began in the Stanton minstrel show. Yet, when after the show she insists on funding Sandy's education to help him realize his potential and follow through on Hager's aspirations for him, we see the value of her ability to wear the minstrel mask.

As we have seen, Hughes' uniquely modernist expression of Sandy's subject formation involves a tension between performing to white tastes and finding an authentic voice, writing in a traditional form but making it his own, playing the primitive while showing the depth and diversity of black experience. Taking into consideration these critical negotiations within the literary marketplace and from behind the Veil, *Not Without Laughter* operates complexly and exploits the context of primitivism. Although Hughes' art is wrapped up in the disillusionment troubling white America in the early twentieth-century, it speaks from the position of the primitive outsider for a reason. The text recognizes the distrust of signification so central to modernism and accordingly insists on the necessity for black artists to represent their experiences in their own tongues and rhythms, using black sounds to counter the psychological damage of

seeing oneself only through hostile white eyes. Nearly 85 years after the novel was published, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which Hughes bought into primitivist ideology. It does seem that his art at times wants to embrace certain essential, yet positive, characteristics of blackness that have roots in a common African past, but the involvement of Charlotte Mason and Hughes' shrewd manipulation of her wishes make guesswork complicated. Unlike in *Cogewea,* where one can often discern Mourning Dove's and McWhorter's distinct voices, Mason's and Hughes' roles in *Not Without Laughter* prove more difficult to untangle. Regardless of the extent to which Hughes actually believed in the primitive nature of black people, his text makes clear that community and black culture have the ability to unsettle white power.

Notes

1. As an example of the scant attention given *Not Without Laughter*, an MLA database search for peer-reviewed articles gets six hits. By contrast, similar searches for Jean Toomer's *Cane* (sixty-three results) and Nella Larsen's *Passing* (fifty-three) demonstrate that *Not Without Laughter* has been undervalued compared to other Harlem Renaissance texts.
2. This famous image comes from Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" IX wherein Benjamin reads Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus" as a representation of history's false movement and accumulation of atrocities.
3. For example, see Williams' "Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism" in *Politics of Modernism*.

Chapter Four:
Frontier Mythology and the Search for White American Identity in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*

> The world broke in two in 1922, or therebouts.
>
> --Willa Cather

> Invoiced now
> it's official how our bones are valued
> that stretch out pointing to sunrise
> or are flexed into one last fetal bend,
> that are removed and tossed about,
> catalogued, numbered with black ink
> on newly-white foreheads
>
> --Wendy Rose, "Three Thousand Dollar Death Song"

In "Three Thousand Dollar Death Song," Wendy Rose addresses the lingering injustices done to American Indians by archeologists who excavate, catalogue, and commodify Indian artifacts and skeletal remains. The archeologist is driven by contradicting desires: the wish to know more about extinct and supposedly extinct cultures because of an affinity for and identification with them, and the impetus to degrade, simplify, and appropriate those cultures with the stamp of Western Enlightenment rationality. Not coincidentally, the birth of anthropology emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries with Franz Boas at the same time that an obsessive interest in ancient civilizations was fueled by the sort of malaise which led white Americans to embrace the discourse of primitivism, as I discuss in the previous chapter. For a nation increasingly alienated by the intensification of consumer culture, the spread of instrumental reason, and a feeling that people had diverged too far from

their origins, the study and appropriation of "exotic" civilizations which came before and the insistence that American identity might still find its roots in those civilizations offered reassurance. Rose's imagery at the end of the stanza above draws our attention to the dramatic black print on "newly white skulls," suggesting both the limited "black and white" perspective of Western science, and the ironic situation in which the bones of indigenous people conquered by white Europeans become an imaginary source of origins—*white America's* ancestors.

I have shown throughout this study that modernist works are defined by the contradictions that determine them, and I have demonstrated the ways in which ideological and repressive apparatuses have contributed to these texts' formal and thematic composition. For *Cogewea*, the abrupt change in the Okanogan way of life, the imposition of United States legislative control by way of the Dawes Act, and brainwashing in missionary schools contribute to the novel's sprawling inconsistencies. *Not Without Laughter* grapples with the psychological trauma of double consciousness and Jim Crow racism. In short, both texts attempt to work through the difficulties for people of color existing in the United States as subjects not fully allowed participation in the dominant culture but denied sovereignty. It is valuable to look at *The Professor's House* (1925) alongside these texts, because the novel grapples with the contradictions in white American identity and attempts to resolve them through a return to a mythic past. The fractures that drive Cather's novel sometimes overlap with those of the texts that I discuss elsewhere in this study, but derive from very different lived experiences than those of Hughes, Mourning Dove, and Eaton, especially

because, as a white woman, Cather had more authority within the dominant culture and did not have to fight for survival in the same way the others did.[1]

As I argue in this chapter, the increased settlement and proclaimed closure of the frontier had a profound effect on Cather, as did shifting immigration patterns that brought an increased Jewish population to the United States, adding to the predominately Christian European immigrants that factor largely in Cather's early novels, which embrace pluralism and envision a nation firmly rooted in the United States' pioneer past. Concerned with questions of how white America should tend to its "house" amidst the changing social conditions of modernity after the First World War, however, *The Professor's House* reveals a deep seated fear of miscegenation and falls back on America's violent imperialist past as a means to restore Western European dominance in the formation of American culture. These phenomena manifest in *The Professor's House* through protagonist Godfrey St. Peter's feelings of enclosure and disconnection with the modern world, creating a problematic that the text tries to resolve by envisioning a Native influence on American identity and the possibility of a utopian culture rooted in that indigenous past. Driven by the same contradictory impulses of an archeologist, Cather writes Tom Outland as a representation of her spiritual connection with the Native American dwellings at Mesa Verde, but in the end the text cannot fully integrate that experience with modern America's impulse to appropriate, commercialize, and ultimately cheapen that connection.

Cather as Modernist

Although Cather's work—and especially her novels written in the twenties—now occupy a more established place in the modernist canon than that of Mourning Dove, Hughes, and Eaton, critics have long debated whether she should be included in discussions of modernism. In the mid-twentieth-century, Alfred Kazin and Lionell Trilling argued that Cather's work was antithetical to modernism's radical critique of mainstream culture and that her novels actually sought an escape from modernity, a criticism whose political and social context Sharon O'Brien has detailed to demonstrate that Cather's decanonization in the 1930s and 1940s resulted in part from her threat to the new literary establishment. While Cather's most staunch supporter in the 1920s, H.L. Mencken, saw her as a young, rising talent, according to O'Brien, the young aspiring academics of the 30s and 40s considered her a threat, a sort of domineering, motherly figure. O'Brien writes, "In attacking Willa Cather, the leftist critics who came of age in the 1930s were thus engaged in a complex oedipal drama, seeking both to replace the older generation of male critics and to repudiate a powerful maternal literary figure by defining her as limited" (117). For critics of the 30s and 40s, Cather was old news and certainly not "modern" by their reckoning, a judgment based on her novels' concern with the rural spaces of the United States, especially the plains of Nebraska and deserts of the Southwest.

Changes in the academy following the 1960s reestablished Cather as an important writer as critics began to view her later novels as part of the modernist canon. As Anna Wilson has demonstrated, the impulse in the 1970s and 80s to expand the canon and reclaim previously neglected women writers has led to a

prolonged discussion of Cather's relationship to modernism, ultimately seeking "to revise her reputation, repositioning her as a feminist voice and as a lesbian writer, and to relocate her canonically alongside the male modernists who were now seen to have unjustly overshadowed her linguistic originality" (62). More recently, Janis P. Stout has insisted that it is nonsense to claim that Cather is somehow separate from the modern culture of her day, for she participated in it closely, both through "her enjoyment of the material goods that the burgeoning consumerism of the early twentieth century made available" and in the necessity that she work through "the commercial constraints and interests of the publishing industry" (2-3). To claim that Cather is somehow disconnected from modernist culture indeed seems a flawed accusation, and one that is based in the misogynistic responses originating in the 1930s. This kind of thinking contends that for a writer to interact with culture, she has to be with the "in" crowd, or the boys' club, and speak only of the positive aspects of modernity—the rush of excitement in the metropolis captured in *Manhattan Transfer* or *Gatsby*, the lure of Europe as a means of combatting American provincialism, the conspicuous consumption practiced by Jake in *The Sun Also Rises*. While Cather's writing was at many times reactionary, that in itself is part of the story of modernism. Just as Mourning Dove struggled against forced modernization by looking to Okanogan stories and traditional practice, and as Hughes channeled sounds that originated in slavery to assert the power of his blackness over a double-consciousness inducing white power structure, Cather turns to white America's imperializing past and to the indigenous cultures of the southwest in an attempt to

find a coherent narrative—yet finds only fracture. This conflicted engagement with changing American identity in the 1920s makes *The Professor's House* clearly a modernist text.

Frontier Ideology: Frederick Jackson Turner, Bill Cody, and Indian Tourism

Because the sources of fracture in Cather's case come from the exposed inconsistencies in long-held American myths central to white identity, it helps to offer some context that explains the ideology and historical conditions out of which *The Professor's House* emerged. Given her childhood on the Nebraska prairie, it is not surprising that the pivotal events on the frontier in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and especially Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 declaration that the frontier had closed, figure largely in Cather's novels. For Turner, who came of age in Portage, Wisconsin, in the years following the Civil War, the frontier represented American vitality and superiority. As Martin Ridge describes it,

> to live in Portage during the immediate post-Civil War years, for Turner, was to feel a part of the great surge of national energy that was subduing, taming, developing, exploiting, and making America. That powerful force was also Americanizing Wisconsin's immigrants. These people, especially the Germans who lived near Portage, were entering fully into American society and sharing both political power and economic opportunity. (76)

This type of frontier rhetoric—the great American energy developed in taming the land, the positive Americanization of European immigrants—is, of course, repeated often in white American mythology and had a profound effect on Cather's early novels, as I will turn to shortly.

Turner's thesis has offered the opportunity for much debate during the century since he wrote it, as historians question the validity of his claims. Was the American frontier really "closed"? And, if so, what did that mean? Recently, Lang, Popper, and Popper have shown that the closing of the frontier was more symbolic than factually based:

> The census never declared the frontier closed; Turner did. The agency deemphasized the frontier, statistically and conditionally. Turner closed it, culturally and absolutely. An obscure bureaucratic decision [by the Census Bureau to map the frontier differently] triggered his rhetorical trope. A land category became a historical metaphor; the census's geographic logic gave way to Turner's national symbolism. The transformation has affected—and has often driven—the study of the American West for more than a century. (292)

So, while the West was still sparsely populated and could be considered frontier based on population density statistics, Turner's idea factored very powerfully in the social imaginary. Certainly the history of conflict with the indigenous people of the western plains and its dramatic climax in the final decades of the nineteenth-century factored heavily in shaping the place of the frontier in the

national consciousness. Following the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, which "formally acknowledged every square inch of the Great Plains as being the sovereign territory" (Churchill 223) of Native people, the United States government waged all-out war on those people, culminating in the murder of Sitting Bull on December 15th and the massacre at Wounded Knee on December 29th, 1890. Corresponding with the end of the "Indian Wars," Turner's closure of the frontier was more ideological than demographic. His thesis contended that an American identity long based on bringing light to the dark places of the world suddenly had no "savages" left on American soil to convert or conquer, and the grand adventure of forging a nation out of the wilderness seemed a thing of the past.

In response to this dominant culture crisis, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show played a significant part in creating and perpetuating the frontier myth from 1883 until 1916. "Wild Bill" Cody capitalized on American nostalgia for the frontier experience by staging the primary struggle around which American identity was built: the beleaguered white male settler defending his home and family from dark savages. As Louis Warren has explained, for most of the years that the show ran, the climax involved a reenactment titled, "Attack on a Settler's Cabin by Hostile Indians. Repulse by Cowboys, under the Leadership of Buffalo Bill" (53). That this struggle plays out as a defense of white domestic space reinforces the threat that the dark other poses both to family and to American nationhood, in that caring for one's house runs parallel to defending the nation. Warren describes the symbolic nature of such attacks:

> Any display of a home under attack, such as the act that was the signature climax of the Wild West show for twenty-three years of its thirty-three year life, would tap into a set of profound cultural anxieties. For nineteenth-century audiences, a home, particularly a rural "settler's" home, was imbued with much symbolic meaning. Richard White has noted that the log cabin, by the 1890s, served as an icon of progressive history, the humble origins of a great nation. But exploring the gendered meanings of the symbol can take us further. The home itself was synonymous with the presence of a woman, particularly a wife. In that sense, the home conveyed notions of womanhood, domesticity, and family. When the mostly Oglala Indians rode down on the Settler's Cabin at the end of the Wild West show, they were attacking more than a building with some white people in it. In the minds of many in the audience, the piece resonated of an attack on whiteness, on family, and domesticity itself. (55)

Further, the symbolic act of Indians attacking a settler cabin, implicitly carries with it the suggestion of the rape of white women by dark “savage” men and, overall, an assault on the ideological bases of American society—the superiority of whiteness, the nuclear family, the purity of white womanhood—while the defense of the cabin by Buffalo Bill and his cowboys represents the lasting ability of white masculinity to protect those cornerstones of American identity.

While Turner's work was academic and Bill Cody's was popular entertainment, Richard White has pointed out that in many ways Cody's representation of the frontier experience more effectively captures the violent reality, in that "Turner's history was a story of free land, the essentially peaceful occupation of a largely empty continent, and the creation of a unique American identity. The Wild West told a story of violent conquest, of the wresting of the continent from the hands of the American Indian peoples who held it already" (47). Turner's glorification of the frontier experience emphasizes the taming of the land, not the extermination of those who had occupied that land for millennia, and in many ways Tom Outland's discovery of Blue Mesa reinforces Turner's absence of indigenous resistance: the Native people that once built and lived in the cliff city have long ago mysteriously vanished, just like the civilization after which the Blue Mesa is modeled—Mesa Verde. Conveniently, *The Professor's House* does not acknowledge the living First Nations still struggling for survival on the northern plains and elsewhere, allowing the exploration of Blue Mesa to avoid questions of conflict between American Indians and the United States Government and instead offer a sort of clean voyeurism into a "lost" civilization.

This type of uncomplicated association with North America's indigenous cultures is made possible partly by the tourism industry that sprang up in the early twentieth-century to satisfy white appetites for a mythic past, and we know that Cather herself participated in tours of the American Southwest, which provided the inspiration for *The Professor's House*, *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *Death Comes to the Archbishop* (1927).[2] Just as the Wild West Show offered

"real" American Indians for public consumption, tours of sacred native sites in the Southwest provided the chance to gaze upon ancient cliff dwellings like those at Mesa Verde on what Catherine Woidat has called "Indian detours." Richard Wetherill's discovery in 1888 of the dwellings at Mesa Verde provided a new sense of adventure for an American public dismayed by the thought that the shrinking frontier would bring an end to a past rooted in taming and conquering, and the tourism industry rapidly capitalized on the possibility of new adventures and discoveries in the Southwest. Of course, the opportunity for tourists to explore a Native past that is an imaginary component of American identity as a whole makes invisible the messy violent conflicts still very much in the minds of American citizens just a couple of decades removed from the massacre at Wounded Knee. Woidat adeptly points out that tourism in the Southwest "appeal[s] to white visitors because the empty dwellings allow them to escape their own country's history of conflict with Native Americans; here tourists can enjoy a fanciful escape from racial politics and imagine their own affinities with romanticized Indians" (29). These Indian detours offered confirmation of an idealized American history, concretizing ideologies of Manifest Destiny and an identity rooted in the land, while avoiding the real, violent conquest at the heart of that history.

In agreeing with Woidat's claims that Cather explores and writes about the indigenous presence in the Southwest as a means to fulfill a search for identity through questionable means, I do not mean to say that her attachment to the region is disingenuous. Like any writer, she is subject to the dominant ideology

of her time even as she tries through her art to carve out alternatives, just as primitivist discourse influenced Langston Hughes at the same time he tried to subvert it. Clearly, the American Southwest inspired in Cather a sense of awe and connection that she tries to harness in order to envision utopian possibilities. At the same time, it is paramount that we uncover the context that explains her longing for an alternative narrative of the American past. Elizabeth Ammons sees in Cather's *Song of the Lark* a lengthy exploration of the ways in which place can influence an artist's understanding of her craft. Ammons argues that the novel's protagonist, Thea's, descent into Panther Canyon "represents a return of the rigorously trained, professional, and therefore 'masculinized' western woman artist to the starting place of all human art, which Cather defines as primordial, female, and inseparable from the earth itself" (128). While Ammons acknowledges the problematic fact that all of the Indians in *Song of the Lark* are dead, she sees empowerment and focus in Thea's relationship to Panther Canyon and points out that when Cather again seeks resolution in the landscape of the Southwest in *The Professor's House*, the idealized landscape has been complicated by the type of commodification that Wendy Rose bemoans. I see Cather trying to establish something positive and empowering in Tom Outland's relationship with Blue Mesa, but I also believe that the history behind white American and European contact with such spaces causes Cather's narrative to break down.

Cather and the Importance of Place

Understanding the history of the frontier and Cather's connection to it is vital because, as critics have long emphasized, Cather's novels consistently focus on place as a primary determinant of identity formation. The focus on America's pioneer past certainly influenced Kazin's and Trilling's perceptions of Cather as an anti-modernist; for them, in an age of urbanization, to find American identity in the frontier seems to look backward instead of forward. However, there are countless examples of modernist writers using rural landscapes as a counter to the modern metropolis, from Hemingway's boyhood in Michigan to Jean Toomer's reveries of the sparsely populated South. For Cather, connection to the land offers a solid foundation for forging a sense of self. Showing that Cather's regionalism and modernism are not mutually exclusive, but that the two classifications can simultaneously exist and inform one another, Kelsey Squire reads *The Professor's House* alongside *The Great Gatsby* as "modern regionalist" texts, arguing that they "complicate traditional literary regionalism as they examine how urbanization, consumption, and exile impede the acquisition of place attachment" (46). Relying on Hamlin Garland's definition of regionalism in *Crumbling Idols* (1894), Squire argues that regionalism's emphasis on being rooted in the soil does not suggest an escape from modern issues but a direct response to them, and is, therefore, a vital piece of modernist expression. *The Professor's House*, she argues, is "'regional' because [Cather's] characters form intense attachments to particular places and use their awareness of place distinctiveness to construct regional and communal borders; 'modern' because the organic, spiritual meanings of places are complicated by twentieth-century

economics, consumerism, and cosmopolitanism"(49). What I see Squire saying here is that while places stay the same in terms of geography, the meanings assigned to them change, a fact that certainly affected the signification of the frontier in the early twentieth-century.

The evolution of Cather's work from the pioneer ideal in the novels *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Ántonia* (1918) to the indigenous mythologizing in *The Professor's House* captures the increasing fracture in American identity brought on by the history discussed above, as the very real violence represented in the Wild West Show and highlighted by the massacre at Wounded Knee comes up against the myth of taming empty land, a contradiction that overdetermines frontier ideology. To understand this trajectory that led to *The Professor's House*, it is useful to discuss briefly the idealization of pioneer life as portrayed in *O Pioneers!* as a contrast to the themes of enclosure and disconnection that emerge in the 1925 novel. As Melissa Ryan has argued, Cather's early pioneer novels express a strong connection between American identity and the wide open spaces of the western plains, a connection increasingly complicated for Cather and completely severed in the figure of Godfrey St. Peter in *The Professor's House*. Ryan rightly points out that "Cather needed the wide-open prairie to fully flex her romantic imagination" (275), yet the early twentieth-century saw those spaces progressively fluctuate in meaning. Cather herself, in 1923, lamented the changing nature of the frontier in an article published in *The Nation*:

> In Nebraska, as in so many other States, we must face the fact that the splendid story of the pioneers is finished, and that no new story

> worthy to take its place has yet begun. The generation that subdued the wild land and broke up the virgin prairie is passing, but it is still there, a group of rugged figures in the background which inspire respect, compel admiration. With these old men and women the attainment of material prosperity was a moral victory, because it was wrung from hard conditions, was the result of a struggle that tested character. (qtd. in Ryan 276)

Echoing Ridge's description of the frontier's significance for Turner, Cather's statement speaks of subduing "wild land" and the extent to which this struggle bestows character and morality on those engaged in it, characteristics which clearly form the basis for identity in *O Pioneers!*, yet are missing in *The Professor's House*.

In *O Pioneers!*, Alexandra Bergson's ties to the land originate in her father, John Bergson's, failed attempts to make an "impression upon the wild land he had come to tame" (13). While John's premature death prevents him from realizing his dream, Alexandra and others of her generation carry out his vision, as illustrated in the text's overview of the changed prairie sixteen years after his passing:

> The shaggy coat of the prairie, which they lifted to make him a bed, has vanished forever. From the Norwegian graveyard one looks out over a vast checker-board, marked off in squares of wheat and corn; light and dark, dark and light. Telephone wires hum along the white roads, which always run at right angles. From

> the graveyard gate one can count a dozen gayly painted farmhouses; the gilded weathervanes on the big red barns wink at each other across the green and brown and yellow fields. The light steel windmills tremble throughout their frames and tug at their moorings, as they vibrate in the wind that often blows from one week's end to another across that high, active, resolute stretch of country. (41)

While the telephone wires and painted houses clearly signal a modern presence, the labor involved in cordoning off land and getting it to produce contributes to Alexandra's identity; she is one of the "rugged figures" of which Cather speaks, a type whose extinction Cather saw as inevitable nearing the middle of the 1920s. The "empty" landscape populated mostly by the Pawnee, Omaha, or Lakota a half century before, is now an organized "checkerboard" that harnesses the land's wildness, even capturing the potential energy of the wind itself. Recently converted from prairie, the landscape described here bristles with vitality; from the humming wires to the personified, winking weathervanes to the trembling windmills, the description emphasizes action, while the opening details in *The Professor's House* suggest enervation, as we shall see.

In *O Pioneers!* identity is firmly rooted in the sort of organic community that Raymond Williams sees in rural, agrarian life, an identity fractured by the migration to metropolitan centers as labor becomes increasingly alienated and relationship to the land severed. The characters who have been removed from the land and community in *O Pioneers!* struggle to find their places. As a member of

the community, Alexandra's brother Emil is cast as an ideal pioneer, "a splendid figure of a boy, tall and straight as a young pine tree, with a handsome head, and stormy gray eyes, deeply set under a serious brow" (42). His natural connection to the land is emphasized by characteristics that mimic the landscape itself—his tree-like posture and "stormy" eyes—and yet, Alexandra expresses pride that she raised him as a young man with "a personality apart from the soil" (112), which proves disastrous. He attends the university in Lincoln and ultimately disrupts the idyllic community through his indiscretion with Marie, a young, married, Bohemian woman, an act that leads to his murder by Marie's husband. Carl Lindstrum returns to The Divide a changed man, "more self-conscious than a man of thirty-five is expected to be. He looked older than his years and not very strong" (61). But significantly, Carl, who also left the land, has regained some sense of himself by prospecting for gold in Alaska, a wilderness not yet tamed.

Enclosure and Separation from the Land in *The Professor's House*

Twelve years elapsed between the publication dates of *O Pioneers!* and *The Professor's House*, a span of time that is quite evident in the latter novel's sense of disconnection and loss. What exactly happened in those intervening years, which led Cather to exclaim that the world had split in two? One common answer to that question, of course, is that the shock of World War I exposed inconsistencies in an American and European ideology that was long rooted in the taming of the "dark" places in the world for the benefit of conqueror and conquered alike. The violent clash of imperialist European nations fighting over the spoils of Africa and Asia rendered such previous thinking questionable.

Cather was also likely responding to what Kim VanderLaan calls a "crass national materialism" (5) overcoming the nation in the 1920s. Finally, it seems that Cather's attitudes toward the frontier had changed by 1923 when she wrote in *The Nation* about the disappearing pioneer generations.

Reflecting all of those forces no doubt, Godfrey St. Peter's situation in *The Professor's House* emphasizes an alienating disconnect from the land, as he is closed off from the outdoors, is trapped in domestic spaces, and performs his research on European explorers from the confines of his attic study and a small workroom attached to a university lecture hall. From the opening line—"The moving was over and done"— the novel stresses the absence of vitality, in this case by utilizing the passive voice and consequently removing the subject to emphasize the professor's present unwillingness or inability to act. In a clear contrast to the vast outdoor vistas in *O Pioneers!*, where many of the original houses are literally built into the landscape, the professor's old house is "painted the colour of ashes—the front porch just too narrow for comfort" (3). The professor walks through "empty, echoing rooms" (3), a sign that his family has moved on while he cannot, and the very air in his attic work space is compromised by the noxious fumes of a gas heater, such that the window must be propped open to just the right amount that the burner on the stove will not blow out and suffocate him.

This theme of enclosure extends even to the novel's form, in which the domestic sections of the novel—"The Family" and "The Professor"—bracket the text's adventure tale, "Tom Outland's Story." Taking place mostly in domestic

spaces and telling of the professor's difficulty negotiating the social sphere and interpersonal relationships, especially as they relate to his Jewish son-in-law, Louis Marsellus, the framing sections act as containment of the liberating possibilities of Outland's tale, leaving the adventure with the potential to erase the professor's malaise walled-in, cordoned off. It survives only in the text of Outland's journal, just as the professor's revered Spanish explorers live on only in print. Tom provided the professor with "kind of a second youth" (234) at a time when his marriage and his research no longer provided the romance that they once did; the two traveled to the site of some of his explorers' adventures, following the trail of Fray Garces through New Mexico to create an experiential connection with the sense of adventure and discovery that drives St. Peter to write his histories. As Sarah Wilson has suggested, "Tom Outland's Story" provides an open window of sorts in a text whose framing narrative exists mostly in enclosed spaces.

The one significant outdoor space associated with the house, the professor's garden, provides a microcosm of the open space so celebrated in *O Pioneers!* and offers the only area where the professor feels connected. Significantly, his landlord, a "retired German farmer," assists the professor in designing and planting the garden, which is a perfect replica of a French garden, "a tidy half-acre of glistening gravel and glistening shrubs and bright flowers," whose perfectly manicured finish reflects the fact that "St. Peter had tended this bit of ground for over twenty years, and had got the upper hand of it" (6). Like Alexandra Bergson's taming of the wild Nebraska landscape, St. Peter's

persistence molds this garden that is more domesticated show piece than wild growth. The garden is "tidy," and the repetition of "glistening" suggests an almost artificial brightness, as if the gravel and the shrubs are too obsessively polished. While this space provides the setting for Tom's long dinner conversations alone with the professor, as well as the location for much of Tom's interactions with St. Peter's daughters, Rosamond and Kathleen, stucco walls encompass the space.

Even the one vast, uncontrollable natural force to which the professor is drawn, Lake Michigan, is often ironically framed by his office window as he looks at it from afar, effectively closing it off as well. A fixture in his life since childhood, the lake offers "the always possible escape from dullness" (20) and provides leisure and cleansing when the world becomes too much. In and of itself, the lake represents the opposite of enclosure: "It was like an open door that nobody could shut. The land and all its dreariness could never close in on you" (20). St. Peter's relationship to the lake is so intense that it is almost a necessary life force. When, as a child, his family briefly moved to the plains of Kansas, "St. Peter nearly died of it," and when he lives for a time as an exchange student in France, "that stretch of blue water was the one thing he was home-sick for" (21). Often it seems that the professor's connection to the lake is the only thing that keeps him going, his only lasting connection in a rootless existence. The lake is for him what the prairie is for Cather, in that his identity stems from it. Yet, like the prairie for Cather in 1925, it is also confined, boxed-in, shrunken, and diminished by the window frame through which he usually views it.

The Foreigner in the House

Given the limited outdoor spaces in the novel, much of the narrative emphasizes housekeeping, subject matter that comes as a response to the tensions Louis Marsellus brings to the St. Peters as an outsider encroaching on the family. George L. Mosse, one of many race theorists to write about the rampant anti-Semitism of the 1920s, explains in "The Jews: Myth and Counter Myth" (2000) that racial ideology of the time cast Jews as shiftless wanderers who were not easily assimilated like Northern and Western European immigrants. Mosse writes, "the legend of the wandering Jew re-enforced the view of the Jew as the eternal foreigner, who would never learn to speak the national language properly or strike roots in the soil" (196). In a novel obsessively concerned with establishing a rooted American identity, the image of the Jew as one inherently lacking these roots provides a useful foil for those with a purported legitimate claim to American-ness—the St. Peter family, with their French-Canadian and "American farmer" (presumably Germanic) origins; Tom Outland, whose background remain somewhat of a mystery, although we do know that his parents "were 'mover people' and both died when they were crossing southern Kansas in a prairie schooner" (98); and the Scottish son-in-law Scott McGregor, whose characterization emphasizes his Anglo-Saxon lineage. Scott is "a good-looking fellow, with sunburned blond hair, splendid teeth, attractive eyes that usually frowned a little unless he was laughing outright, a small, prettily cut mouth, restless at the corners" (59). Scott's light complexion and "perfect" facial features cast him as the ideal type of whiteness. All of these characters come

from the "old stock" of European immigrants and have easily assimilated to mainstream American values, an adaptation that, try as he might, Marsellus, "a rather mackerel-tinted man" (32), will never accomplish.

Antisemitism, of course, is a recurring issue in American modernism, emerging in troublesome characters like Jay Gatz and Hemingway's Robert Cohn. In *Our America* (1995), Walter Benn Michaels talks extensively about what he sees as American modernism's fantasy that "endogamy can supplant exogamy" (1). If *The Professor's House* is concerned with envisioning the best means by which to build and maintain the house/nation, it shows that keeping things "in the family," would prove ideal. To achieve that ideal, in Tom Outland's death Michaels sees the prohibition of incest, since Outland is described as an older brother to Kitty and Rosie, and in Louis' presence Michaels reads contamination. The presence of Louis, in fact, brings so much animosity and jealousy to the family that it destroys the once strong bond of the St. Peter family's two daughters, who figure as the cultural authorities of the new generation. Kitty tells her father, "'you know we were never jealous of each other at home. I was always proud of her good looks and good taste. It's not her clothes, it's a feeling she has inside her. When she comes toward me, I feel hate coming toward me, like a snake's hate!'" (70). While much of the discord between the sisters results from Rosamond's inheritance of Outland's patent, Marsellus' presence in the family proves perhaps more damaging to the relationship. By marrying a wandering Jew, Rosamond has effectively made herself an outsider, leading

Katherine to exclaim, "'she's become Louie. Indeed she's worse than Louie. He and all this money have ruined her'" (71).

While Louis endears himself to Mrs. St. Peter, it is often clear that he does not understand the carefully drawn boundaries of the predominantly Northern European, Protestant Midwest. In social situations, he often speaks of topics not necessarily appropriate, at one point causing the St. Peters' dinner guest, Sir Edgar Spilling, to exhibit "the nervousness of a modest man on hearing disclosures of a delicately personal nature" (32). At other times, Marsellus displays the vulgar tendency to flaunt his wealth, as when he shows Mrs. St. Peter an antique gold necklace in which he plans to have emeralds placed. Mrs. St. Peter complains, "'of course emeralds would be beautiful, Louie, but they seem a little out of scale—to belong to a different scheme of life than any you and Rosamond can live here. You aren't, after all, outrageously rich. When would she wear them?'" (62). The ultimate impropriety in Louis' case results when he develops Tom's ideas for the Outland engine and patents them, and, along with Rosamond, reaps the monetary rewards, playing the stereotypical part of the acquisitive Jewish entrepreneur.

Adding to Louis' demonization, and especially apropos to my argument here, is his cosmopolitanism, which is antithetical to the rooted-in-the-soil ideal to which Cather seeks a return in *The Professor's House*. Mosse notes that the wandering Jew stereotype, in this case as popularized by Viennese Orientalist Adolf Wahrmund, "explained their shiftlessness in commerce, and their rootless, cosmopolitan way of thought, as opposed to the rooted Aryan peasantry" (196).

Louis seems to have trouble standing still, having "quick, impetuous movements" (32) that suggest a person not comfortable in his own skin, and his movement throughout the novel frequently takes him to Chicago and abroad, further underscoring his cosmopolitanism. Louis' familial background is a bit of a mystery, as is that of Jay Gatz until the end of *The Great Gatsby*. We do know that he has a brother in China engaged in the silk trade, both of which (the distant location, the lucrative business) distance him from the St. Peters, but otherwise he lacks context, the ultimate outsider. Instead of possessing an established identity, Louis attempts to establish himself by building a "Norwegian manor house" (28) with Northern European trappings—a wrought-iron door with "just the right sort of hinge and latch" (29)—but always his house-building is too contrived and contrasts with the professor's comfortable, natural old home.

While the professor's attitude about Louie is somewhat ambiguous, his overriding feeling seems to be one of resistance and the desire to keep Louis at a distance, even if there is no outright hatred. Unable to understand his wife's fondness for their son-in-law, Godfrey "would have said that she would feel about Louie just as he did; would have cultivated him as a stranger in the town, because he was so unusual and exotic, but without in the least wishing to adopt anyone so foreign into the family circle" (64). Because a *tableau vivant* created by the professor using his two sons proves quite telling, the passage is worth quoting at length:

> Not long ago, when the students were giving an historical pageant to commemorate the deeds of an early French explorer among the

> Great Lakes, they asked St. Peter to do a picture for them, and he had arranged one which amused him very much, though it had nothing to do with the subject. He posed his two sons-in-law in a tapestry-hung tent, for a conference between Richard Plantagenet and the Saladin, before the walls of Jerusalem. Marsellus, in a green dressing-gown and turban, was seated at a table with a chart, his hands extended in reasonable, patient argument. The Plantagenet was standing, his plumed helmet in his hand, his square yellow head haughtily erect, his unthoughtful brows fiercely frowning, his lips curled and his fresh face full of arrogance. The tableau had received no special notice, and Mrs. St. Peter had said dryly that she was afraid nobody saw his little joke. But the professor liked his picture, and he thought it quite fair to both young men. (60)

Here, Louis takes his place as the object of the English quest to reclaim the holy land under the leadership of King Richard I, which underscores both Louis' absolute otherness and the fact that he stands in the way of Europeans taking back what is supposedly theirs. In the scope of *The Professor's House*, this image emphasizes that Louis has usurped valuable possessions—the Outland engine and Rosamond—that are not rightfully his, and while the professor claims publicly that Louis and Rosamond have done nothing wrong and that the Outland fortune is justly theirs, the resentment shows in this "little joke."

Playing Indian: The Appropriation of Blue Mesa

In contrast to Marsellus' unwanted presence in the St. Peter family, the text's problematic and contradictory utopian impulses attempt to establish Blue Mesa as a site in which to restore faith in the United States' imperialist history while also forging a link between mainstream, white American identity and an indigenous past. In a contradictory move, Godfrey's relationship with Tom valorizes both European conquerors and the indigenous presence that those conquerors sought to expel. Strangely, despite St. Peter's northern European heritage, he "was commonly said to look like a Spaniard," described as having "a tawny skin with gold lights in it, a hawk nose, and hawk-like eyes—brown and gold and green" (4). Not only does he study and write about the Spanish conquest of the Americas, St. Peter resembles those Spanish conquerors, leading Manuel Broncano to argue that "St. Peter's portrait stands in the novel as the physical representation of the Spanish stereotype" (391). Perhaps this is a source of his malaise: like the texts that he produces, Godfrey is the living embodiment of a dead past. As the world moves on around him, he feels an inability to participate in it, as if his vitality has expired and he is left teaching common, disinterested students and doing academic work that is no longer cutting edge.

Tom Outland offers the professor the opportunity to follow in the explorers' footsteps and reclaim some of the glory of an adventuring, conquering past, effectively giving St. Peter new life and a purpose in the present. In "Cather's Hispanic Epiphanies and *The Professor's House*" (2010), Manuel Broncano offers some valuable Spanish historical context to help understand the links between St. Peter and Tom's adventures and the Spanish explorers on whom

the professor bases his research. Broncano describes the attributes of the two explorers specifically mentioned in *The Professor's House,* Fray Marcos de Niza and Fray Garces, calling the former, "the embodiment of enthusiastic Spanish credulity, always eager to set out for new Dorados" and the latter "a Franciscan missionary and martyr killed by the Yuma Indians on the banks of the Colorado" (390). In their travels to the Southwest, St. Peter and Tom at times actually follow in the footsteps of these explorers, becoming, in effect, a new variation on conqueror and discoverer and renewing the sense of adventure lacking in St. Peter's academic life. Broncano's portrait of de Niza and Garces emphasizes their vitality and eagerness, as well as their ties to missionary work that purportedly seeks to assist and enlighten its subjects, traits that underscore the benevolent side of the imperial project that the text wishes to restore through the honesty and goodwill of Outland and Father Duchene.

The setting of the American Southwest, and Blue Mesa in particular, provides the object of Tom's and the professor's adventuring and a space to imagine new, utopian possibilities for America's future. As Sarah Wilson has shown, many artists and writers visited or settled in the southwest prior to World War One, and regional southwestern art became quite popular. Mabel Dodge Luhan, who had moved to the area and married a Pueblo man, invited American artists Ansel Adams, Mary Austin, Witter Bynner, Robinson Jeffers, D.H. Lawrence, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jean Toomer, and Cather herself, encouraging them to use the landscape and the indigenous people as inspiration (S. Wilson 581). Writing of Lawrence, Dodge Luhan expressed that she wished to "give him the

truth about America: the false, new, external America in the east, and the true, primordial, undiscovered America that was preserved, living, in the Indian bloodstream" (qtd. in Wilson 582). In this splitting of east and west, Dodge Luhan expresses the concern that the eastern United States has become corrupted and fundamentally distanced from truly American national ideals, its streets populated with Louis Marselluses, the foreign, unassimilable other. By contrast, Dodge Luhan establishes an imaginary blood relationship between true Americans and indigenous people, a relationship confirmed by Tom Outland in his exploration of Blue Mesa.

Although cast as modern adventurers descended from the likes of de Niza and Garces, and also as archaeologists exploring out of fascination and reverence, Tom and Duchene find in the people of Blue Mesa a culture that white Americans should emulate. Assessing the cliff city, Father Duchene imagines its past residents as follows:

> I am inclined to think that your tribe were a superior people. Perhaps they were not so when they first came upon this mesa, but in an orderly and secure life they developed considerably the arts of peace. There is evidence on every hand that they lived for something more than food and shelter. They had an appreciation of comfort, and went even further than that. Their life, compared to that of our roving Navajos, must have been quite complex. There is unquestionably a distinct feeling for design in what you call the Cliff City. Buildings are not grouped like that by pure

> accident, though convenience probably had much to do with it. Convenience often dictates very sound design. (197)

Quickly in his evaluation, Duchene establishes ownership for Tom, using the possessive to describe the tribe whose life history he will construct from the evidence before him. Rather than a community struggling to survive and concerned only with the vulgar details of everyday life, Duchene opines that this was a civilization concerned with aesthetics, a point that has led many Cather scholars to explore Blue Mesa as a symbol for the role of the artist in opposition to the market commercialism of the 1920s. Kim VanderLaan, for example, argues that Tom represents the uncorrupted artist who understands the value of objects outside of the consumer market and that the people of Blue Mesa present the possibility of an aesthetic life: "because these 'primitive' people accommodated their lives to a pristine natural setting, crafting utilitarian as well as aesthetic objects for use in their own preservation, they demonstrated a kind of artistry in Tom's mind which transcended art for its own sake" (11). Hence, in VanderLaan's estimation, Tom values the lessons built into the very walls of Blue Mesa, which, as a selfless character, he would not cheapen or commodify as a site. His reverence for the architectural beauty of the city is evident in his description of seeing it for the first time:

> Far up above me, a thousand feet or so, set in a great cavern in the face of the cliff, I saw a little city of stone, asleep. It was as still as sculpture—and something like that. It all hung together, seemed to have a kind of composition: pale little houses of stone nestling

> close to one another, perched on top of each other, with flat roofs, narrow windows, straight walls, and in the middle of the group, a round tower. (181)

Architecturally, the city is characterized by its balance and composition, the tower's curvature fitting perfectly with the straight, clean lines of the houses' windows and roofs. While the city seems cramped, like the professor's house, Outland emphasizes its aesthetically pleasing quality, as opposed to the focus on the utilitarian minutia of St. Peter's house—the dripping faucets, the creaking stairs. In contrast to the figuratively dead nature of the professor's house, this literally dead city, devoid of people for centuries, becomes alive in Outland's eyes, as he imagines it at one time "like a bee-hive" (181). The sense of awe that fills Tom clearly indicates that this place deeply affects him, just as the Nebraska prairie defines Alexandra Bergson and Panther Canyon offers a sanctuary for Thea.

But despite the seemingly genuine connection between Tom and Blue Mesa, his role in its discovery is complicated by the issue of ownership—again, the archaeologist's double bind. As Edward Said has shown, following Foucault, the production of knowledge itself creates ownership and power.[3] Upon discovering Blue Mesa, the history of its people becomes the history of America in general, and its artifacts the possessions of the people of the United States. Urging Tom to travel to the Smithsonian to present his findings, Father Duchene remarks, "it may be that you will have thrown light on some important points in the history of your country" (199). Furthermore, as Tom and Father Duchene

interpret the history of Blue Mesa, they write their own version of this ancient culture and invariably color their interpretation with their own culturally specific understanding. The mummified remains of an indigenous woman becomes "Eve," the mother, not only of the people of Blue Mesa, but of all Americans. Interpreting Eve's death, Father Duchene puts his stamp on her history:

> "I seem to smell," he said slyly, "a personal tragedy. Perhaps when the tribe went down to the summer camp, our lady was sick and would not go. Perhaps her husband thought it worthwhile to return unannounced from the farms some night, and found her in improper company. The young man may have escaped. In primitive society the husband is allowed to punish an unfaithful wife with death." (201)

Reading Eve's history through a Western patriarchal lens, Father Duchene interprets her death as a transgression worthy of a death sentence in a "primitive" culture, thus writing the story of the Blue Mesa people with few facts about their marital traditions or gender dynamics.

Just as the mesa's history comes under the ownership of Tom and Father Duchene—interpreted and recorded in Tom's log book—the site's artifacts and even bones also become the property and heritage of white America, to be studied. Father Duchene "measured the heads of the mummies and declared they had good skulls" (195), bringing to mind Wendy Rose's words with which I began this chapter as well as the popular practice of phrenology being used to determine a person's intelligence based on skull measurements. Further

emphasizing the basis of ownership and heritage, Father Duchene goes so far as to draw parallels between the artisan crafts of Blue Mesa and those of early Greek civilization when he claims, "'I have seen a collection of early pottery from the island of Crete. Many of the geometrical decorations on these jars are not only similar, but, if my memory is trustworthy, identical'" (197). So, here in the American Southwest, Tom, Roddy, and Father Duchene claim to have discovered the mother of Christian civilization, a collection of skeletons with skulls that make them worthy ancestors, and finally, a parallel between Ancient Greek and indigenous American cultures. Having nearly wiped out hostile Native people and cast them in spectacles that concretize the ability of white men to guard their homes, the fantasy of Tom Outland's "discovery" offers up an extinct indigenous past that establishes mainstream, white American ties to the land and erases the threat of real, existing American Indians. This imaginary inheritance leads Tom and company to envision the Blue Mesa as an example of how American civilization should build—aesthetic beauty ought to balance utility; self-improvement should be as important as survival and necessity; and finally, simplicity must supersede the complicated, bureaucratic nature of modern American life.

The final tragedy of Tom and Roddy's discovery of Blue Mesa further underscores the issue of ownership, as the two quarrel over to whom the artifacts and remains of the site belong, and also illustrates the empty American existence for which Blue Mesa provides an alternative. Before their falling out, Tom makes a trip to Washington D.C. to meet the director of the Smithsonian Institution and

inspire interest in Blue Mesa, a journey that emphasizes the hollowness of a modern bureaucratic society rushing around worried about all of the wrong things. Repeatedly, as Tom waits to meet with bureaucrats more concerned with a fancy lunch than with the meaning that Tom has ascribed to the Mesa and the artifacts he has brought with him, he encounters disinterest. Having procured a lunch meeting with the Director, Tom is bemused while his dining partner goes on about touring the Southwest with the Austrian Arch Duke and shows no enthusiasm for a newly discovered archeological site. Driving home the value of the pots that Tom reveres, a clerk in the Director's office asks if he can buy one of the artifacts for use as an ashtray. Telling the professor about all of these disappointments, Tom muses, "How it did use to depress me to see all the hundreds of clerks come pouring out of that big building at sunset! Their lives seemed to me so petty and slavish" (209). The hollowness of middle-class life in Washington contrasts with the depth of feeling that Tom feels on the Mesa, where he senses a connection, not only to the land, but to the former inhabitants.

When Roddy sells everything to a German collector for four thousand dollars, it only occurs to him that the transaction might upset Tom because of the sum, not that the concept of the sale itself will inspire Tom's indignation. While VanderLaan and many others read Tom's anger as an indication of his pure respect for the Mesa's former inhabitants, their architecture, and the place itself, it is important to note that Tom does claim ownership, even if he does not seek material gain. He exclaims to Roddy, "'I never thought of selling them, because they weren't mine to sell—nor yours! They belonged to boys like you and me,

that have no other ancestors to inherit from. You've gone and sold them to a country that's got plenty of relics of its own. You've gone and sold your country's secrets like Dreyfus'" (219). On one level, Tom's remarks about an inherited ancestry speak to his personal loss as an orphan and his belief that the Mesa's Eve somehow erases the loss of his biological mother. Looking deeper, though, it speaks to the modern rootlessness of a nation seeking to reestablish its identity after the doubt concerning its pioneer past. For Tom, the discovery of Blue Mesa and the traces of the people who once lived there provide the possibility of establishing origins and of defining the future, of connecting with the vitality of the Indian blood from which Dodge Luhan wanted American artists to draw inspiration. It is never a question of whether Tom and Roddy should claim ownership of the Mesa, only the purpose that ownership will serve.

Cather attempts in *The Professor's House* to represent the possibility of the United States rebuilding its identity through connection with the past indigenous cultures of the Southwest, a utopian impulse inspired by her own strongly felt connection to the landscape of the region. With her own admission that the pioneer generation was slowly disappearing from a frontier that had been thoroughly tamed, the still sparsely populated mesas and canyons, and the seemingly aesthetic-centered life of the people who built their homes among the cliffs, surely provided an alternative to an America consumed with materialism, cut off from the land, and run by bureaucrats. Blue Mesa, in many ways, contrasts with the domestic life of Godfrey St. Peter and offers a counter point to that hollow existence. By taking this indigenous culture as an imaginary

antecedent of the white American nation, the text attempts to solidify the professor's and Tom's "native" identity in contrast to the foreign corruption of the Louis Marselluses who usurp white American inventions and impregnate white daughters. Ultimately, though, the contradictions between the imaginary origins of white American identity, the real, violent history between white and Native people in the Americas, and the questioning of long-held frontier mythologies cause the narrative breaks down. As Wendy Rose reminds us, the impulse of archaeologist is to own, through categorization, if not outright financial transaction. Hence, even the most admirable characters in the novel, Tom Outland and Father Duchene, can understand the history of the Mesa only through their narrow interpretive lens, which obscures the utopian possibilities offered by the civilization that once lived there. At the end of the story, the professor nearly dies of asphyxiation in the impure air of his attic study and decides after the incident that he will accept the current state of his life, complete with Louis as a member of his family. Although St. Peter will work to publish Tom's field journal from Blue Mesa, Tom's utopian visions exist unrealized in a dead text.

Notes

1. Of course, as a woman and likely a closeted lesbian, she had to negotiate with the culture industry in her own way, a point that I discuss briefly in the next section.
2. See Cather's travel write up from January 31, 1916, in *The Denver Times*, wherein she describes her arrival in Mancos, Colorado, and her sense of wonder upon first seeing Mesa Verde.
3. Said writes extensively of the relationship between knowledge and power. For example, see Chapter One, "Knowing the Oriental," in *Orientalism*, where he writes, "knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control" (36).

Chapter Five:
Voice, Self-Fashioning, and the Critique of Imperialism in Winnifred Eaton's *Cattle*

> The immigration experiences and racial formations of Asians and Mexicans in twentieth-century America cannot be understood apart from [the] legacies of conquest and colonialism.
>
> --Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects* (2004)

> Not that I make a daily practice of war whooping, but there's sport in letting the full volume and force of one's lungs pour out across the utter silence of the prairie. If my voice carries to my neighbors—the nearest is five miles off—no doubt they take me for a coyote.
>
> --excerpt from Angella Loring's journal, *Cattle*

One-third of the way through Winnifred Eaton's *Cattle*, the first-person narrative of Angella Loring's journal interrupts the text's omniscient narrator and shifts the perspective for a time. As we see in the excerpt above, Angella celebrates the power of her voice to shatter the silence of the prairie and project a strange, half-familiar sound that her neighbors might mistake for the unsettling howls of a coyote, an animal that in various cultures represents a trickster, a thief, a shape-shifter, a wanderer, and a teacher of lessons.[1] Of course, from the perspective of cattle ranchers like the novel's antagonist Bull Langdon, coyotes are mostly a nuisance and a threat to the herd. Evoking both the literal and transcendent meaning of the animal as the only character given authority to shape the narrative, Angella in many ways represents Winnifred Eaton's own coyote voice in the midst of an otherwise neatly organized story of young love, jealous

violence, and settler endurance on the plains of Alberta, a fairly simple plot that has led most literary critics to overlook this novel as a dime-store Western. But looking at Angella's disruption suggests that the text seeks to accomplish the kind of vocalization or *sounding* of which I spoke in relation to Hughes' *Not Without Laughter*—that it serves as a means of disrupting and reshaping the dominant narrative and asserting an alternative point of view.

Like Mourning Dove and Langston Hughes, Winnifred Eaton's position as a person of color in the United States—she was the child of a Chinese mother and English father—brings with it a long history of subjection and contradiction. However, the ways in which she chooses to deal with her racial subject position differ dramatically from Mourning Dove and Hughes, for she chooses to voice her experiences through characters like Angella Loring, a dispossessed, English noblewoman, and the many heroines of her Japanese romances written under the penname Onoto Watanna. After achieving a modicum of fame with romance novels like *A Japanese Nightingale* (1901) and *The Heart of Hyacinth* (1903), which fed into the reading public's desire for Japonisme, Eaton made a sudden shift late in her career by adopting the Western form for her final two novels, *Cattle* (1924) and *His Royal Nibs* (1925), to engage mass nostalgia for tales of adventure on the western plains, a longing that I discuss in the previous chapter. Often criticized for her shifting authorial persona, Eaton shrugs off any responsibility to write for, or even about, her Chinese heritage and the racism perpetrated against Chinese immigrants in America, subjects taken up by her sister, Edith, also known as Sui Sin Far.

This does not mean, however, that Eaton's work is apolitical. I argue in this chapter that the historical context in which Eaton lived—characterized by Chinese exclusion and the United States' rapid expansion as a world power—prompts her to rewrite the Western novel by putting the emphasis on a community of outsiders banded around the central figure of Angela Loring and in opposition to the land-grabbing, domineering Bull Langdon. In doing so, Eaton transforms a usually masculine genre that celebrates the isolated, rugged individual and ultimately turns it on its head as a means of voicing a strong objection to United States imperialism. Furthermore, by eschewing the strictures of a racially based identity and championing the modernist ideal of self-invention, *Cattle* envisions the possibility of a community based in its common experience of subjection due to gender and class positions. *Cattle* makes clear that subjects under the yoke of voracious capitalism have a common bond, whether their ancestors are Chinese, American Indian, or Scottish. In this realization, the text works toward a reconciliation of the historical forces that shape it and its author.

Self-Invention, Authorial Persona, and Voice

In the last two decades, Asian American literary studies have undergone a transformation that has inspired scholars to take a closer look at Winnifred Eaton/Onoto Watanna's body of work.[2] While the Civil Rights Movement and subsequent expanding of the canon in the 1970s and 1980s sought to enact political work by identifying Asian American texts as either subversive or assimilationist based on whether or not they embrace their Asian heritage, the field increasingly views Asian Americans as part of a transnational diaspora not

necessarily beholden to any specific national identity. As Candace Chuh has argued, these changes suggest "that it is no longer clear—if it ever was—that the subject ('American') is a discretely bounded, discretely knowable entity merely modified by a specific adjective ('Asian')" (3). Instead, like other areas of literary criticism, Asian American studies increasingly recognize the immensely varied lived experiences that define American writers of Asian descent, and this has led to critical analysis of the field's foundations. For example, writing of the early Asian American literary anthology *Aiiieeeee!* (1974), Zhou Xiaojing draws attention to its problematic assumptions:

> In postulating a direct transmission between "yellow" sensibility and Asian American literature, the *Aiiieeeee!* editors assumed an unproblematic cause-and-effect relationship between ethnicity and literature. This expressive critical method, along with its assumptions of original, stable cultural traditions as the true sources of Asian American literature, suggests an ethnic essence that Asian American literature is presumed to express or reveal. (6-7)

This troublesome, presumed link between Asian American literature and its origins in Asia prompted scholars to embrace Sui Sin Far as a writer who stays truer to her "roots" than her identity-shifting sister. By contrast, recent revisions of these essentialist traditions allow new ways of seeing the chameleon-like Winnifred Eaton as an important member of diasporic Asian writers who complicate the notion of race as a fixed determinant of identity.[3]

Interestingly, Eaton's refusal to be hemmed in, both in life and in her writing, has prevented wide scale discussion of her work, even though this sort of fluidity and shirking of national traditions and responsibilities resembles the attitudes of many of Eaton's contemporary modernist writers. Social, cultural, and geographic mobility provides a constant theme in modernist works, and while privileged white male writers could take for granted their access to such mobility, for writers of color not all borders are as easy to cross. As scholars now note, craving mobility and freedom while recognizing her disadvantage as a working class, Eurasian woman, Eaton was deeply affected by her position as a second class citizen, and she managed to negotiate her way through the geographical and cultural landscapes of the United States and Canada by inventing a persona that would catch people's eye and make them take notice.[4]

Winnifred Eaton grew up in Montreal amidst the historical backdrop of anti-Chinese racism, which was not confined to the U.S. As Erika Lee argues, national policies of exclusion and state sanctioned violence "were not separate phenomena but rather resulted from a transnational anti-Asian racism—what I have called 'hemispheric Orientalism'—that flourished and moved across national boundaries" (538). In an increasingly global world in which European imperial powers struggled for dominance, geographical borders did not contain the racial ideology that marked Eaton as different from her peers in Montreal and caused her to feel ostracized from a young age.[5] In her biography of Eaton, Diana Birchall paints a picture of a young girl confused and dismayed by being set apart from those around her due to the fact that "no one else had a mother like [hers]—

for Grace Eaton may have been the first Chinese woman to reside in that city" (4). Moreover, growing up in a family of twelve children with working artists as parents, poverty also influenced Eaton's societal position and doubly branded her as a secondary citizen. With poverty and racism deeply affecting Eaton and the woman that she would become, she was pulled in different directions as to how she would fashion her identity. On one hand, she seems willing to have done anything necessary to participate in the realm of dominant culture, and yet, on the other hand, she created a trickster-like persona capable of disrupting that exclusive realm from the inside and critiquing its material conditions from a critical distance.

Indeed, feelings of exclusion and uniqueness did not cause Eaton to retreat into a shell and isolate herself; on the contrary, they compelled her to seek mobility and create a persona that has confused many of her critics. According to Birchall, "Winnifred Eaton began when very young to fashion an image for herself, a striking and glamorous image, very different from the plain, apple-cheeked Winnie Eaton of Montreal" (5). She went so far as to fabricate her age and alter her name from Lillie Winifred to Winnifred, and finally to construct the persona that would make her famous, Onoto Watanna. Yuko Matsukawa has argued that Watanna is a trickster who "crosses cultural lines to challenge what we perceive as the conventional boundaries of ethnicity and authenticity" (106) by playing into the desires of her reading audience. In Matsukawa's mind, "it is clear that mimicking the Other—being playful and maintaining a critical distance from what she meant to imitate—gave her the space to present overtly what the

popular imagination wanted at the turn of the century" (122). This shrewd adaptation within the culture industry—the ability to cater to the desires of publishers and readers while making important statements about race, gender, and imperialism—places her with Mourning Dove and Hughes as modernist authors who work within and subvert forms not traditionally considered modernist.

Amy Ling prefers to characterize Eaton as chameleon-like, and has argued that Eaton sought to differentiate herself from her sister Edith, who wrote explicitly about the psychological effects of Chinese exclusion, by masterfully playing the part of a coy, mysterious Japanese exotic. Instead of reading this façade as a retreat, Ling finds a certain power in Eaton's Japanese heroines, who she sees as "sturdy survivors, a far cry from the stereotype of the shy, deferential, totally self-negating Japanese female" (11). Ling characterizes Eaton's negotiations with the world of white publishers not as a cop-out or a means of hiding from embarrassing spectacle, but as a triumph in storytelling: "that Winnifred Eaton could put on ethnicity as a chameleon changes her color or spots not only testifies to her ingenuity, her daring and cleverness, but it serves to prove that we are indeed all the same under the skin" (13). For Ling, Eaton constructs her Onoto Watanna persona as an empowering, enabling means of projecting her voice and creating heroines able to overcome the effects of exclusion and racism, a liberating, not acquiescent, self-fashioning.

Although he approaches Winnifred and Edith Eaton's work from a very different theoretical perspective than Ling's, Tomo Hattori agrees that Winnifred's fluid, changing authorial identity enacts a freedom from the narrow

possibilities allowed her within the racial discourse of the early 20th century, and he takes issue, like Chuh and Xiaojing, with what he perceives as a confining lens in Asian American literary criticism. The championing of Edith's Chinese subject matter at the expense of Winnifred's chameleon-like persona, Hattori argues, reenacts what he calls "model minority discourse." He feels that while Edith "capitalize[d] on her culture in order to survive" (229), Winnifred's autobiographical novel *Me* "engages in a discourse that […] explains how Asians adapt to America […] and pushes this discourse beyond essentialist envelopes and into powerful and revealing disclosures of cultural subjectivity under capitalism" (238). Hattori seems to suggest that while critics often criticize Winnifred for assimilating to whiteness and pandering to a white audience's thirst for exotic orientalism, her willingness to adapt is common to much Asian American experience. While Edith writes about "cultural interpellation under capital" (239), Winnifred's experiences and choices mimic the same. Ultimately, I disagree with Hattori's conclusion that critique of the hegemonic structures of race in the United States merely reinforces current power imbalances and that assimilation is the most effective way to offset such inequality. However, I do agree that Winnifred Eaton's work tells a similar story to Edith's—albeit from a more conflicted vantage point—and often achieves in its formal structures the kind of "immanent meaning" that Adorno sees in experimental modernism.

Eaton used her status and experiences as a person of mixed race to create an array of voices that allow her to participate in the dominant culture and speak in a variety of contexts, a range exhibited in her late shift from Japanese romances

to westerns. Jean Lee Cole has written extensively about this in *The Literary Voices of Winnifred Eaton* (2002):

> Perhaps because of her unusual background as a mixed-race English speaker born and raised in French Canada, Eaton had an uncanny affinity for human speech. In the pages of her work we witness an almost overwhelming variety of voices: the pidgin English of Japanese geishas and half-breed Indians and the lilting brogues of Irish maids, the slang of Chicago working girls and Canadian cattle ranchers. (2)

The use and mastery of a variety of voices allows Eaton both to capture the heterogeneous character of the United States at the turn into the twentieth-century and to express many different points of view—an ability that, in its own way, mimics modernism's polyvocality. In fact, as a trickster who was adept at shifting personas and speaking in a multiplicity of tongues, Eaton worked her way up from being an ashamed young girl in Montreal to a popular novelist whose *A Japanese Nightingale* sold 200,000 copies (Birchall xv), an impressive feat at the time.

While her autobiographical novel has recently received increased attention from critics, most of Eaton's work is still neglected, in large part, ironically, because of her decision to write in popular forms which would capture the attention of white readers and lead to success. Ling and Hattori's estimations of Winnifred Eaton's subversive power are themselves minority positions, as one can see by the scant attention that she has received. Despite her prolific output as

a writer—Birchall credits her with publishing 15 novels, hundreds of stories and articles, and numerous screenplays—an MLA database search turns up only 25 critical articles, almost all of which focus on *Me*. Nevertheless, although critics have been slow in regarding Eaton as a worthwhile author, her understanding of the literary marketplace helped her to achieve popular success in her own day and even to attract the attention of contemporary literary critics, such as William Dean Howells.[6] As Rachel Ihara has argued, "Eaton's work does display a remarkable self-awareness concerning its place in the literary marketplace and its relationship to a tradition of Orientalist literature" (468). Looking at some of Eaton's early romantic novels, Ihara demonstrates Eaton's keen perception of and ability to appeal to the two audiences that would read her work: white male publishing executives and white women. For while Eaton's romantic plots often appeal to the sentimentalism of her female audience, she "depended on the gatekeepers of culture to serve as intermediaries, confirm her authenticity, and provide her with access to an audience" (470). But if this manipulation of editors and readers allowed Eaton to become extremely popular in her own day, her strategies for getting there have compromised her reception as a modernist author, a judgment that we need to rethink in light of my argument throughout this study that formal manifestations of modernism take many different shapes. As I will argue shortly in my reading of *Cattle*, a revised Western provided Eaton the appropriate vehicle through which to express her own uniquely felt experience of the modernist condition.

Imperialism, Immigration, and Exclusion

Eaton's shifting persona clearly responded to the explicit anti-Chinese sentiment at the turn of the century when, having largely subdued the Okanogan people and other indigenous tribes, the United States government looked overseas for new places to expand its markets and extract natural resources. In 1898 Congress voted to annex Hawaii, and late that year Spain surrendered to the United States possession of Guam and the Philippines, where Filipinos would revolt against outside rule in February 1899. Howard Zinn writes about the immense brutality of the United States' suppression of that uprising:

> American firepower was overwhelmingly superior to anything the Filipino rebels could put together. In the very first battle, Admiral Dewey steamed up the Pasig River and fired 500-pound shells into the Filipino trenches. Dead Filipinos were piled so high that the Americans used their bodies for breastworks. (316)

Speaking to the Senate in 1900, Albert Beveridge justified such military action, arguing, "The Philippines are ours forever…. And just beyond the Philippines are China's illimitable markets. We will not retreat from either" (qtd. in Zinn 313). Clearly, United States imperialistic interests in the islands of the South Pacific cannot be separated from its desire to access the markets, resources, and cheap labor power of China.

As inevitably happens during an invasion, dominant ideology in the United States tried to justify the attack on the Philippines by dehumanizing the people. Nerissa Balce calls it "the *erotics of the American Empire*, the discursive and material processes that created the sexual and racialized representations of the

Filipina colonial subject in American popular culture" (92, author's italics). Specifically, Balce demonstrates that the long history of colonialism repeatedly fetishizes the naked, "savage" female bodies of subjugated peoples, from Columbus' descriptions of unclothed Arawak women to the rape and sexual exploitation of black slaves. As Balce sees it, "in the American imperial imaginary, savage bodies were also docile bodies needing discipline and tutelage" (92). Similar ideologies arose in response to Chinese immigration, as Chinese people were tagged as unassimilable and immoral and many Chinese women in the United States found that brothels were the only workplaces open to them, a point to which I will return in my reading of *Cattle*, where Eaton often engages with the unwanted sexual advances and general violence that imperialism inflicts on female subjects.

The United States initially encouraged immigration from China at a time when the U.S. required expendable labor to achieve its goal of becoming an imperial power.[7] Ronald Takaki notes,

> In a plan sent to congress in 1848 shortly after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, policymaker Aaron H. Palmer predicted that San Francisco, connected by railroad to the Atlantic states, would become the 'great emporium of our commerce on the Pacific.' Chinese laborers, he proposed, should be imported to build the transcontinental railroad as well as bring the fertile lands of California under cultivation. (192)

Chinese immigrants came to fulfill that need for labor power, but they also soon experienced exclusion and outright racism, as when Congress enacted a foreign miner's tax in 1852 to discourage Chinese men from gold mining (Takaki 195) and many were forced to find work as laborers for the Central Pacific Railroad or as tenant farmers in California. Racial ideology reinforced legal restrictions, enacting the kind of discursive process that Edward Said speaks of in other contexts when he argues that Orientalism is a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). Just as Manifest Destiny explained away the conquest of North American indigenous populations, the marking of Chinese and other Asian people as unassimilable aliens supported their exploitation and cemented their status as impossibly foreign and antithetical to white America.

White capitalists used Chinese labor as leverage against white and black workers, sparking resentment, hatred, and what Marx called false consciousness. Railroad companies employed Chinese workers without offering the free room and board that white laborers received (Takaki 197); and angered by the overwhelming majority of Chinese agricultural laborers in California, whites resorted to riots and beatings:

> Their protests soon became violent as economic depression led to anti-Chinese riots by unemployed white workers throughout California. From Ukiah to the Napa Valley to Fresno to Redlands,

> Chinese were beaten and shot by white workers and often loaded onto trains and shipped out of town. (Takaki 201)

While white laborers in the West tried to suppress Chinese competition, plantation owners in the South used Chinese workers against African Americans. Surplus labor, after all, assures that workers have few footholds for demanding fair wages and working conditions, and the Chinese immigrants supplied such a surplus immediately following The Civil War.

In 1882, conversely, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act (renewed in 1892 and extended indefinitely in 1902) to prevent Chinese laborers from entering the country, because "in the opinion of the Government of the United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order of certain localities within the territory thereof" (*CEA* 1). However, the limiting of Chinese labor proved to be only one purpose of the Exclusion Act, as Congress voted to extend the law in 1888 to cover all people of Chinese heritage, essentially legalizing the racist idea that they were inferior and reinforcing "the dominant ideology that defined America as a racially homogeneous society and Americans as white" (Takaki 204). While the Dawes Act attempted to assimilate an indigenous population that could not easily be gotten rid of, the Chinese Exclusion Act simply banned from the country another "inferior" race.

These historical factors—the turn-of-the-century imperialist war in the Philippines, the mid nineteenth-century exploitation of Chinese immigrant labor and hypersexualization of Chinese women throughout that century, and the legislative control through the Exclusion Act—exist in the background of

Winnifred Eaton's life and writing, and need to influence, as I will show, our understanding of *Cattle's* cultural and political work. Moreover, the novel's attempts to resolve the contradictions created by those historical phenomena demand that we view *Cattle* as one manifestation of American modernism. First, however, it helps to examine how these historical conditions shape her fictional autobiography, *Me; A Book of Remembrance*, wherein one can see how racism and exclusion have shaped the chameleon-like ability of its narrator and Eaton's fictional counterpart Nora Ascough to negotiate her way through the worlds of journalism and literature. *Me* also anticipates some of the conflicts that lie at the heart of *Cattle*—dependence on male supporters and the importance of forging alternative communities—making it useful to look at this text as a bridge between Eaton's early romances and her final phase as a Western author.

Self-Torment and a Community of Women in *Me; A Book of Remembrance*

Despite all of the playfulness that Birchall, Matsukawa, and others attribute to Eaton's fashioning of a self-image, one senses in Nora Ascough a pronounced desperation, a need for acceptance, and a realization that her inferior status is an impediment to achieving her dreams, for *Me* recalls recurring episodes where Nora by necessity seeks the guidance and financial aid of wealthy men, a condition that brings to mind Hughes' reliance on Charlotte Mason and Mourning Dove's publishing relationship with McWhorter. Despite her aversion to Dr. Manning, for instance, a middle-aged member of a yachting excursion whom she meets in Jamaica, Nora finds herself writing to him for assistance when she fails to find a job in Boston. Later, she falls in love with Mr. Hamilton, another

wealthy middle-aged man whom she allows to buy her clothes and help pay for her apartment, despite her claims that she refuses to be a kept woman. Her reliance on such benefactors is the result of necessity. Dr. Manning helps Nora out when she needs to escape a nightmarish situation in Jamaica and then find work in the United States, while Mr. Hamilton presents a more complicated situation. She does not necessarily need his aid to survive, as she has a decent job as a stenographer in the Chicago meat packing industry, but to achieve her aspirations as a writer, she requires spare time to work on her fiction.

Offering context that explains Nora's lack of self-confidence and resulting reliance on male benefactors, *Me* often reveals an underlying self-loathing and sense of unworthiness. This first surfaces in Jamaica, where Nora's professed lack of experience with people of African descent belies her internalized racism as a person of color. While the text skirts any overt discussions of Nora's race—perhaps to protect Wattana's persona—as an autobiographical rendering, Nora's sense of racial identity mirrors the author's. As Nora's boat docks in Jamaica, she observes,

> A crowd seemed to be swarming on the wharves, awaiting our boat. As we came nearer, I was amazed to find that this crowd was made up almost entirely of negroes. We have few negroes in Canada, and I had seen only one in all my life. I remember an older sister had shown him to me in church—he was pure black—and told me he was the "Bogy man," and that he'd probably come around to see me that night. I was six. I never took my eyes once

> from his face during the service, and I have never forgotten that face. (12)

Her fear of the "Bogy man" comes to a peak as one of the Jamaican politicians whom she covers for her newspaper, *The Lantern*, proposes marriage and then thrusts himself upon her:

> Suddenly I felt myself seized in a pair of powerful arms. A face came against my own, and lips were pressed hard upon mine. I screamed like one gone mad. I fought for my freedom from his arms like a possessed person. Then blindly, with blood and fire before my eyes and burning in my heart, I fled from that terrible chamber. (32)

The clearly nightmarish quality of Burbank's assault, coupled with the reference to her childhood when her mother was the only Chinese adult in her community, brings to mind the effects of racial prejudice and exclusion, and emphasizes the traumatic effects for Nora of an encounter marked by racial difference. Burbank's iteration of love is not very different from Dr. Manning's unsolicited sexual overtures—Manning at one point even asks Nora what she would do if he were to take her into his arms by force—and yet the racial dimensions of her encounter with Burbank imbue them with horror, revealing Nora's internalized anti-black racism. I read this fear of difference as a product of Eaton's own feelings of unworthiness created by her position as a racialized subject; at this point in her life and her writing career, she is unable to recognize the

commonalities in her racist response to Burbank and those directed against her as a Chinese person in an era of exclusion and Sinophobia.

At other times in the text, Nora's feelings of inadequacy surface in more overt ways. On the trip from Canada to the Caribbean, she upbraids herself for the foolishness of bringing only thick, winter clothing and bemoans that she "presented a ridiculous and hideous spectacle" (8) to the other passengers, harkening back to the young Eaton's dismay at being singled out as a Chinese girl in Montreal. This theme of being a spectacle and wishing to avoid others' stares arises often in *Me*, and at times Nora internalizes the gaze, seeing herself through the eyes of others and wishing to hide from inspection: "Like everyone else, I was capable of staring wide-eyed at my own shortcomings only for a little while, and then, like everyone else, I charitably and hastily and in fear drew the curtains before me, and tried to hide myself behind them" (176). Here we see her in a sense joining a crowd of spectators assessing her own weaknesses and wishing to hide, a moment of DuBoisian double consciousness which brings into stark relief the effects of Eaton's historical determinants, as the context of exclusion and anti-Chinese racism come to influence the ways in which she views herself as inferior. Like the horror of Burbank's proposal and embrace, these moments show the ways in which she has internalized the discourses of imperialism.

Struggling to counter the effects of internalized racism and self-doubt, Nora works to forge unconventional alliances into a support network to compensate for her shame and her reliance on wealthy men. The first such relationship is with Lolly, who gives Nora a liberating outlet that contrasts with

the confining atmosphere of the Chicago YWCA, an environment that demands conformity and assimilation from its patrons. After being demeaned and forced to prove her worth as the sort of "nice girl" the YWCA seeks, Nora criticizes such institutions:

> All public institutions, I here assert, should have as their employees only people who are courteous, pleasant, and kind. One of the greatest hardships of poverty is to be obliged to face the autocratic martinets who seem to guard the doorways of all such organizations. There is something detestable and offensive in the frozen, impatient and often insulting manner of the women and men who occupy little positions of authority like this, and before whom poor working-girls—and, I suppose, men—must always go. (59)

Like the other institutions that deny access to a second class citizen like Nora, the YWCA represents an exclusive, repressive site. While Estelle Mooney, Nora's roommate, stands as a figure for the type of conforming young woman that is easily accepted, Lolly contrasts with that image by flouting convention, smoking cigarettes and failing to hide her affairs with men. By giving Nora an opportunity to go against societal expectations, her friendship with Lolly is a turning point in the text—a liberating moment when Nora begins to overcome her self-loathing and insecurities and to seek alternative communities that will foster her independence.

Carrying this newfound confidence, Nora finally finds comfort and community as a boarder in Mrs. Kingston's house, which becomes an unconventional space of enrichment and support where, unlike the YWCA, Mrs. Kingston and her close friend Mrs. Owens actually value Nora for her idiosyncrasies. Nora writes,

> Mrs. Kingston was really delighted to have me with her. She said she could have had any number of girls in her house before this, but that she had set her heart on having just me, because I was uncommon. She had a funny habit of dismissing people and things as "ordinary and commonplace." I was not that, it seems. (150)

Mrs. Kingston and Owens value Nora for her difference—her artistic impulses and wandering tendencies—whereas she (and, by extension, Eaton) has been taught to admire sameness. Additionally, they encourage Nora to strive for independence rather than rely on men for emotional and financial support. When Mrs. Owens first meets Roger Hamilton, Nora's somewhat mysterious benefactor who is later exposed as an adulterer, she "want[s] to know just why he should maintain rooms in the house, anyway, and just what he [is] 'after' me for" (152). Mrs. Owens fiercely looks after Nora's best interests and objects to the male intrusion upon this community of women.

As a bridge between Onoto Watanna's Japanese Romances and Winnifred Eaton's frontier novels, *Me* serves as an example of a writer in the process of transformation. Not only does Nora learn to accept her difference and rely less on the support of men, but she also gains confidence in her art as a means of self-

determination, as evidenced in the following passage after Nora finishes her novel:

> Then for a long time I sat by the fire and re-read my story, and it seemed to me I had created a treasure. Roger, who professed to know something about palmistry, had averred there was a gold-mine in my hand, and he said that it was he who was going to put it there; but when I read my story that night I had a prophetic feeling that my mine would be of my own creating. (177)

Having wrested control of her work from those who would try to influence her writing, Nora insists on ownership of her ideas and words. *Me* attempts to work out on paper the contradictions that cause Nora to abhor Burbank and distrust herself while embracing the patronizing assistance of white men, a problematic determined by the history of anti-Chinese racism in the United States, and one which *Cattle* takes the next step toward resolving. By the time that she wrote *Cattle* in the early 1920s, Eaton had long been a successful writer and seems to have worked through many of the conflicts plaguing Nora Ascough. She casts aside the Geisha mask that brought her fame and uses the popular form of the Western novel to critique the forces that create self-loathing, dependence on wealthy men, and social isolation in Nora.

Cattle as a Critique of Imperialism

From the first page, *Cattle* is situated within the context of imperialism, with the antagonist, Bull Langdon, standing as a figure for the history of what

Marx calls "primitive accumulation" in North America. Deceit and land-grabbing characterize the history of his ranch:

> The vast Bar Q, whose two hundred thousand rich acres of grain, hay and grazing lands stretched from the prairie into the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, where it spread over the finest pastures and the "Chinook"-swept south slopes, where the cattle grazed all winter long as in summer-time, its jealous fingers, like those of a miser who begrudges a pinch of his gold, reaching across into the Indian Reserve. (1)

The history of the Bar Q echoes America's violent encroachment upon Indian lands and the practice of relegating indigenous people to less desirable tracts. Among a series of smaller ranches, the literal size of Bull's massive holdings signifies his voraciousness and greed—or to use the text's language, his miserliness—that drive him to acquire land and cattle as if it is a game. The text shows that through such unscrupulous methods as rustling cattle and trading alcohol to government agents and native people, Bull expanded, and "the Bar Q herd grew in size and quality, and as it increased, Bull Langdon acquired life-long leases upon thousands of acres of Government land—Forest and Indian Reserve. Closing in upon discouraged and impoverished homesteaders and pioneers he bought what he could not steal" (3). Such passages examining the history of Bull and his accumulation of property clearly establish him as the antagonist of the novel, a larger than life representation of the ugliness of American empire as it dominates the rural spaces of western North America. Rather than creating a

singular protagonist at odds with Bull, however, the contrast and challenge to his power come in a communal protagonist, made up of a heterogeneous collection of outsiders that reflects the borderland exchanges so central to frontier modernisms, as I show in the first chapter.

In addition to establishing Bull's imperialist presence, the beginning of the novel quickly links the interests of Native people and poor white immigrants trying to scratch a living from the land, an alliance that suggests a commonality between all such groups, including the Chinese, who were disallowed the right of land ownership by the Alien Land Laws of 1913, 1920, and 1923 (Lowe 13). Lisa Lowe writes, "the allegory of immigration does not isolate a singular instance of one immigrant formation, but cuts across individualized racial formations and widens the possibility of thinking and practice across racial and national distinctions" (35). Reading the text through the lens of the new Asian American studies, Eaton's refusal to write not from the perspective of an Asian immigrant but, instead, from the collective experience of all immigrants who are excluded from the dominant culture gives the narrative a liberating perspective. Eaton, in choosing not to identify with Chinese culture, whether or not this betrays assimilationist tendencies, indicates a wider critique of racist and classist immigration policy and, in doing so, engages a crucial historical subtext of modernism from Cather's Louis Marsellus to *Gatsby's* Tom Buchanan.[8]

In *Cattle*, the banding together of various immigrant groups directly results from Bull's domination over them: while their different backgrounds would seem to preclude their forging any lasting alliance, having a common

enemy brings them together. The primary adversaries of Bull Langdon are Scottish immigrants, but the nearly invisible and voiceless native population—represented in the figure of Bull's "half-witted illegitimate son" (6) Jake, a person of mixed Metis and Anglo heritage— suggests the peripheral presence of other subjugated people. "Jake was a half-breed, whose infirmity was due to a blow Langdon had dealt him on the day when, as a boy, his mother having died on the Indian Reserve, he had come to the Bar Q and ingenuously claimed the Bull as his father" (6-7). In his confrontation with Bull, Jake quite literally has his voice taken away, as he subsequently can speak only gibberish. He occupies the margins of the text without having a clear place in the community, popping in now and again with little purpose other than to remind readers of Bull's violent disposition. At the same time, Jake's lack of voice underscores the text's insistence on the importance of vocalizing opposition to the forces that make him silent.

If the racial dimensions of the text are largely repressed (deliberately or not), existing on the periphery of the novel in characters devoid of power, this repression reveals the painful historical context of exclusion. In addition to Jake, the numerous references to a "Chinook" wind—"the warm wind which has its origin in the Japanese current" (13)—which often appears in the text as a means of melting the frozen, snow-covered ground clearly indicate that heterogeneous voices offer thawing counterpoints to the frigid, dehumanizing force of Bull Langdon. Although the one Chinese character—Chum Lee, a cook on the Bar Q

ranch—inhabits the text as a fairly flat, stereotypical "drug-weakened," superstitious Chinaman the narrator tells us that he feels imprisoned by whiteness:

> Chum Lee had no desire to die in the white man's land; he wanted to repose in peace under the sacred soil of his ancestors. He would have run away from the camp, but the barren country, with its vast blanket of snow, gave no hope of any refuge, and he feared Bull Langdon as though he were an evil spirit. (245)

Hemmed in by the snow, Chum Lee finds himself a powerless exile in an inhospitable country. Significantly, he appears in the text at a time when people across Alberta are finally emerging after an intense illness has taken many lives and when the countryside is under a deep January freeze, and his decision to leave this wasteland after dreaming of home hastens the novel's resolution, as I will show. Likewise, the African American character who makes a very brief appearance near the end of the novel is similarly one-dimensional, described as "the only darky in the camp, grinning from ear to ear, […] twanging a real banjo" (281). The racist characterization of this minstrel reveals the same prejudices that lead Nora to flee Jamaica after her encounter with Burbank in *Me*, but he is also aptly named "Jim Crow," which suggests Eaton's shrewd realization that this character, and all of the other minor outcasts who populate this fictional world, are products of the same exclusive, repressive apparatuses that determine her own place as a second class citizen. In this way, the novel is about the struggle against imperial domination, from the viewpoint of the oppressed, whether poor Scottish immigrant, Native person, or Chinese cook.

At the same time that the text works to establish commonality and partnership among its multiethnic characters, it also examines the history of violent sexual exploitation in North America, harkening back to Balce's analysis of the erotics of empire. On the level of plot, the main conflict in the novel revolves around Bull Langdon's desire for the simple-minded Nettie Day and his competition for her from rival Cyril Stanley. In Bull's conquest of Nettie—whom he effectively buys at the auction of her family's farm—we see a condemnation of the usual machismo and misogyny that characterize most Western novels. Bull regards all people as "scrub stock," commodities upon which he places the same value as his cattle, but women hold even less value in his eyes: "If the Bull looked upon men in the same way as on cattle, he had still less respect for the female of the human species. With few exceptions, he would snarl, spitting with contempt, women were all scrub stock, easy stuff that could be whistled or driven home to pastures" (4). In pursuing his wife, he searched for the type of docile, maternal woman who would mother both him and his progeny. Mrs. Langdon "was an innocent, harmless creature, soft and devoted, the kind that is born to mother things" (5). However, all of Bull's attempts at raising a family with Mrs. Langdon failed, as "the babes that came to her with every year were born only to die immediately, as on some barren homestead the mother fought out her agony and longing alone and with no one to minister to their needs" (5). The failure to produce children signifies a larger barrenness in the masculine ideal represented by Bull, of course: a relationship born of domination cannot bear fruit. As Bull

remains intent on increasing his herd and his capital, Mrs. Langdon grows old and infirm, neglected by her husband and unable to bear children.

Always desirous of female attention and company, Bull sets his sights on the young Nettie Day as a replacement for his wife, and his lust for Nettie is brutal and unrelenting. Nettie, the eldest of ten children who "had grown up like Indians" (9) on a poor, rugged quarter of land adjacent to Bull's ranch, is left homeless after her mother and father die and the Day ranch goes up for auction. Like Jake, her father's death leaves Nettie effectively a homeless orphan reliant on Bull for a job and shelter. Perceiving that Nettie is the last commodity left after the auction, Bull asks, "'how about the gell? My wife needs a good strong gell for the housework, and I'm willin' to take her along with her dad's old truck'" (46). After working on the ranch beside Mrs. Langdon for some time, constantly resisting Bull's advances, one night he finally breaks down her bedroom door: "as the door gave way a numbness came upon her and, without power to move, like some fascinated thing, she watched the approach of the Bull. She knew that she was trapped and clutching her throat with both hands she tried to force to her lips the cry that would not come" (77). After the rape, Nettie wakes from the nightmare and jumps out of her bedroom window. Then, in the chapter immediately following this assault on Nettie, we read Angella Loring's story, setting into motion Nettie's redemption and building the foundations for a new vision of family to offset the destructive, dividing force of Bull Langdon's rugged cowboy mentality.

The Power of Voice and Self-Invention

While the conflict between Bull and Nettie occupies much of the plot, the story of Angella Loring proves the more interesting, in that she exhibits the qualities of strength and perseverance that ultimately allow the text to imagine an alternative utopia as a counter narrative to Bull's destructiveness. Another in the text's long list of orphans, Angella comes to Alberta a dying, destitute woman from a proud but fallen family—her father was killed by her former fiancé—and she is fighting a disease because of which "a quite eminent scientist had pronounced [her] death sentence" (83). We find later that she has been diagnosed with tuberculosis, and the choice of lung disease is quite significant, in that regaining her ability to speak plays a central role in the novel.

In our introduction to Angella Loring, the text emphasizes her voice, which eventually allows her to speak for all of the dispossessed in the story. Indeed, she is the only character allowed to narrate for a brief time as she exercises her right to let "the full volume and force of [her] lungs pour out across the utter silence of the prairie" (85), an act that carries great significance on many levels. First, when one considers the publishing histories not only of Eaton but Mourning Dove and Hughes, as well, it becomes clear that these writers went to great lengths to gain access to that privileged sphere both by learning how to satisfy white benefactors and by making rhetorical choices that would endear them to the reading public. Secondly, all of Bull's subjects lack the means or power to express themselves. Writing of the material conditions that deny subaltern people a voice in her foundational work, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Gayatri Spivak contrasts two different meanings of the word "representation" to

show that while many poststructuralists point to every literate person's ability to represent themselves through language, they far too often neglect to think about the legal modes of representation to which subalterns are denied access. Disempowered subjects may be able to vocalize their discontent, Spivak argues, but have no power through legal channels to alter their lives. Nettie Day has no control of her own representation, legal or cultural. In fact, during Bull's first assault, Nettie literally loses the power to speak: "She knew that she was trapped and clutching her throat with both hands she tried to force to her lips the cry that would not come" (77); and shortly after, she can barely breath, much less speak: "his big lips closed over hers. The loathsome embrace seemed to strangle her" (81). So, while Jake and Nettie literally have their breath and voices taken away by Bull, Angella enters as a spokesperson of sorts, fully able and willing to sound her "war whoop" against Bull and what he represents.

In addition to the parallels between Angella and Eaton in exercising their voices despite their status as second class citizens, both the character and the author demonstrate the power of self-invention. As Jean Lee Cole argues, Eaton chose in her Alberta novels to take up a "man's pen" and to incorporate "women in the male myth of the frontier" (106). Angella embodies this challenge both by refusing to exhibit any traditional signifiers of female identity and by taking on a role ordinarily filled by men. She claims,

> I'm not pretty. My face is hard, my hair—what is left of it—of no color. My hands are calloused. I am a "tough old nut" as once I heard a "hand" of the Bar Q describe me. I wear men's clothes

> because they are comfortable and because I want to forget that I am a woman. (82)

Dressed in men's clothing and with hair cropped close to her skull, Angella begins the narrative determined to reinvent herself through a close connection to the land. In this way, she forsakes the aristocratic social trappings from her native England and identifies with an ancient, agrarian past. Free from social constraints, her fate is now tied to her small tract of land as she places the land above human relationships:

> I came out here. I am hard and strong. I don't intend to die. I've something to live for. Not a *man*. I hate men, as I have said above. I have deep-rooted never dying aversion for the whole mean race of men. That which I have to live for is this quarter section of Alberta land. It's mine. I love it better than anything else on earth.
>
> I broke my own land. I've put in my own crop. I hayed and chored, fenced and drudged, both in house and upon the land. I made most of my own furniture and I practically rebuilt the inside of this old shack. (83-4)

Dismayed by a corrupt social system that breeds the type of men to whom Angella was once engaged and who killed her father (and continuing the theme of self-determination for women in *Me*), she chooses to rebuild her identity through an association with the land, a project that unites Angella with others in the community and helps to develop a family comprised of orphans and misfits.

Forging Community

Despite being a recluse, Angella finds some commonalities in Nettie Day from the first time that she sees her, a bond possibility established by their common experiences with controlling men and one which provides the foundation for the text's resolution. After Mrs. Langdon realizes that Bull has raped Nettie, she dies from the shock of that knowledge, causing Nettie to escape the Bar Q ranch and go running into a snowstorm despite carrying Bull's unborn child. While out on his medical rounds, Dr. McDermott finds Nettie and takes her to Angella's house to receive care and give birth to her child. Here in Angella's small cabin, family and community are slowly restored. While Nettie wants nothing to do with her baby, Angella steps in as surrogate mother to prevent the alienating disaster that befell Bull's other son, Jake, and for a time Angella and Nettie live as two female heads of the household. Tenderness and respect characterize Angella and Nettie's relationship, more of a mother-daughter dynamic than a homoerotic one, providing a reconfiguration of the traditional nuclear family. However, this fantasy of a united, happy, female-headed family is quickly shattered by Bull when his cattle destroy Nettie and Angella's crops shortly after harvest and he subsequently kidnaps the baby and causes his death.

Significantly, this newly formed household receives outside help from Chum Lee and other immigrants to finally rid themselves of Bull's violence. First, he comes to the Bow Claire lumber camp, where Nettie and Doctor McDermott have recently nursed a ragtag group of lumberjacks to health after the plague has swept through their camp and the rest of Alberta. The group at Bow

Claire includes indigenous people, Jim Crow, Mutt, "a giant Russian, with a voice like a great bell" (281), and other outcasts. As Bull attempts to force Nettie back to his ranch, the motley group of men who clearly see Bull as their adversary can no longer hold back their rage as they fight back against the symbol of imperialism: "The Bull found himself surrounded by a mob of mad men, cursing and weeping because of their weakness and inability to pull down the man they longed to kill, they leaped and struck at him" (285). Chased out of the camp by the angry masses, Bull finds himself in the middle of the snow covered, still forest as the second act of rebellion by his subjects unfolds.

As Bull wanders in the forest and Nettie escapes, the Chinook wind reappears and Chum Lee sets off the events that lead to Bull's death:

> Dawn was breaking over the still sleeping land, and a great shadowy arch spread like a rainbow across the sky, the long-prayed-for symbol of Chinook weather. Before the day was half gone a wind would blow like a bugle call from the mountains, and, racing with the sun, would send its warm breath over the land. (287)

A weather phenomenon "which has its origins in the Japanese current" (13) and carries the power to swiftly raise temperatures by as much as 30-35 degrees Fahrenheit in a few minutes, the Chinook wind suggests the presence of alternative voices or perspectives to counter the dominant presence of whiteness represented in Bull. Moments of despair throughout the novel—Nettie's rape, Mrs. Langdon's and the baby's deaths—all occur during the cold of winter when

the land is utterly frozen. In this final scene, the Chinook wind threatens the icy, white, world-dominating figure of Bull. To reinforce the possibility that difference can overcome the all-encompassing force of imperialism, Chum Lee plays his part in the story when he awakens from a dream of home: "That fair vision of his home and the young wife he had left in China vanished into the cruel mists of memory. He awoke to intense cold, the bleakness of death itself in the one-room bunkhouse" (278). Like the Chinook wind, his memory of home is a warming one which consists of "summer seas, green as jade" (277). He packs up his belongings and leaves the Bar Q ranch for good, but before leaving he releases Bull's prized cattle, who have been neglected and starving in the cold. Rampaging across the countryside, the stampede finally comes to the place where Bull wanders in the forest trying to find his way home, and his prized Hereford, Prince Perfection, ends his life. The text leaves no mystery about this ending's moral: "A master vengeance was in that act of justice, though no torture of Bull Langdon's body could atone for the torture he had inflicted upon Nettie Day's Soul" (291).

With Bull dead, the novel closes with a utopian vision of family and reunification. Angella marries Doctor McDermott and Nettie marries Cyril Stanley, creating a community for a group of orphans, but this coming together cannot happen without the aid of the heterogeneous cast that inhabits the text. Jake, Chum Lee, and the outcasts at Bow Claire lumber camp all play a part in making possible the imaginary solution to all of the violent contradictions that play out in the novel. The sexual exploitation of women, the stripping of Jake's

voice, the appropriation of Indian land, and the narrow stereotypical possibilities imposed on Chum Lee all find closure in the story's resolution: women band together for safety and look out for one another, Jake finds a home and even begins to express himself, the newly formed community provides a presumably more responsible stewardship of the land, and Chum Lee commits his rebellious act. This resolution does not come without a cost, however, as Nettie's baby and Mrs. Langdon are dead, victims of Bull's violence, and the psychological effects of rape and racial stigma do not easily fade away.

In the text's resolution, a heterogeneous band of orphans and misfits triumphs over imperialism, offering what Lisa Lowe sees in Asian American literature, generally, as "an alternative formation that produces cultural expressions materially and aesthetically at odds with the resolution of the citizen in the nation" (6). *Cattle's* historical backdrop of imperialism, Chinese exclusion, sexism, and class struggle plays out in both the life of the author and the text. Early in her career, Eaton/Watanna by necessity mastered the forms and the persona that would allow her to participate in the white, North American cultural domain by becoming a trickster, a chameleon, a ventriloquist of sorts. While this self-invention brought popular success, *Me* shows the damaging psychological effects of having to consciously construct a persona that will gain one access to hegemonic culture, as seen in Nora's self-deprecation and internalized racism. At the close of her writing career, Eaton still displays an ability to dismantle the master's house from the inside by working in the Western idiom to criticize imperialistic United States cowboy culture. She creates a voice to speak for the

subaltern, exposes sexual violence and racism, and imagines a utopian, collective counter space to stand in opposition to self-interested masculinity. The complex conflicts and contradictions underlying *Cattle* and the shrewd means by which Eaton expresses them to a wide audience in search of western nostalgia demand that we look at this text as one expression of the modernist experience in America.

Notes

1. Quite relevant to Eaton's project in *Cattle*, coyotes are interloping scavengers, getting by the best they can on the margins of human civilization. Dawn Karima Pettigrew, in an article about tricksters in the novels of Thomas King, offers an intriguing analysis of Coyote's role as a survivor in American Indian belief systems: "Coyote […] creates a method of coping with the dominant cultural oppression that surrounds him and the Native Americans. As he survives nature and humankind, Coyote serves as a symbol of Native Americans' experience since the discovery of Columbus on their shores" (217). As I will show, the cultural outsiders who populate *Cattle*, led by Angella Loring and her coyote voice, struggle for survival under the oppression of Bull Langdon.
2. Until Jean Lee Cole in 2003 and 2004 combed literary magazines to unearth previously unknown texts by Eaton, very little of her output was readily available. Cole writes about this research process in "Newly Recovered Works by Onoto Watanna (Winnifred Eaton): A Prospectus and Checklist" (2004).
3. See, for example, Huining Ouyang's "Ambivalent Passages: Racial and Cultural Crossings in Onoto Watanna's *The Heart of Hyacinth*" (2009), where he argues that "Watanna's performance of Japaneseness, through her 'Japanese' romances and especially her Japanese authorial persona, links her with the practice of 'passing,' or the crossing of identity boundaries by those on the racial and cultural margins" (211).

4. I discuss a few of these below, but for a further example see Karen Skinazi's "'As to Her Race, Its Secret Is Loudly Revealed': Winnifred Eaton's Revision of North American Identity" (2007), which argues that "Eaton made an important innovation in Canadian American immigrant literature by revealing the experience of immigrating as a double outsider: as a racialized figure, and a Canadian" (32). Rachel Ihara's "Gentlemen Publishers and Lady Readers: Winnifred Eaton's Negotiations with the Literary Marketplace" (2007) does a thorough job of explaining Eaton's adept maneuvering within the culture industry.
5. For another valuable study of anti-Asian racism and the enforcing of borders between the U.S. and Canada, see Kornel Chang's "Enforcing Transnational White Solidarity: Asian Migration and the Formation of the U.S.-Canadian Boundary" (2008).
6. See Ihara, 466, and Ling, 9.
7. Bill Ong Hing's *Making and Remaking Asian America Through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990* (1993) offers an in-depth study of the initial welcoming of Asian immigrants and subsequent exclusion. See pages 20-21 for a discussion of the demand for Chinese immigrant labor.
8. Tom Buchanan is, of course, a well-known representation in canonical modernism of nativist, anti-immigrant white supremacy, at one point telling narrator Nick Carraway, "Civilization's going to pieces […]. I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read 'The Rise of the Colored

Empires' by this man Goddard? […] The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged" (13).

Frontier Modernisms
as Historically Determined, Politically Engaged Art

Always historicize!

--Fredric Jameson,
The Political Unconscious

Throughout this dissertation, Fredric Jameson's well-known credo has guided the ways in which I have conceived of and defined frontier modernisms, leading me to locate modernisms in a fairly fixed historical moment, the 1920s, a time period characterized by pronounced transformations in United States immigration policy, economy, and culture industry. By prioritizing the historical underpinnings of modernism, rather than its formal conventions, I have insisted that we recognize frontier modernisms as inextricably attached to and deeply engaged with their material conditions of existence.

Three questions have driven my investigations: what does modernism look like when we remove it from its traditional moorings and, following much of the recent criticism in the field, add to the mix authors not easily granted access to the publishing industry or to the realm of the dominant literary culture and who have to make their rhetorical choices accordingly? Second, what happens when we expand the geography of our analysis beyond the metropolitan centers of the United States and Europe and toward the equally contentious site of America's "frontier"? And, finally, what will we find if we understand modernism not as a unified artistic movement but as competing and dissenting attempts to articulate a complex historical *condition*—namely, the bubbling to the surface of

contradictions created by one hundred and fifty years of United States imperialism, conquest, and racial ideology? With this final question, I have joined the conversation about race-related revisions to modernist studies in the last couple of decades by Houston A. Baker, Alicia Kent, Werner Sollors, and others to show that it is imperative to look at race and definitions of American identity predicated on race as primary, constitutive features of modernism. Indeed, all of the primary texts in this study engage with racial ideology and the violent history of the frontier that stems from that ideology.

Reading modernism in this way, one finds that the intense clashes playing out on the Okanogans' Flathead Reservation or at Wounded Knee, in small Kansas towns, in the vast grazing lands of Alberta, and in the countless other contested sites of North America's frontier provide the material bases for similar struggles in the cultural realm. Hence, Mourning Dove, Langston Hughes, Willa Cather, and Winnifred Eaton's texts interact with prevailing discourses of primitivism, Manifest Destiny, Anglo-Saxon supremacy, stereotypes of the rootless Jew and the savage Indian, and notions of the "Yellow Menace"—ideas that fuel and provide excuses for physical violence against Native, black, and Chinese Americans. Recognizing these ideological contexts as constitutive features of modernism underscores the fact that we must read modernist texts as artistic representations born of race-based conflict and contradiction. Further, attempting to resolve sometimes irreconcilable discrepancies between the world of ideas on the one hand and the material, economically-driven realities of imperialism and the rise of consumer capitalism in the United States on the other,

frontier modernisms often find resolution by looking to the past and to cultural tradition for wholeness, as Mourning Dove and Langston Hughes do when they emphasize the power of ancient storytelling traditions as a means to maintain community, and as Willa Cather attempts to do in creating a mythic indigenous past to confirm the role of the land in creating white American identity. At other times, the texts I consider insist on the necessity of moving forward and working to reestablish shattered communities, as is the case with the newly formed family of misfits in *Cattle* and the restored bond between Sonny and Harriet at the end of *Not Without Laughter*. But however they play out, I have argued, all modernist texts attempt to deal with the historical upheavals that determine them.

To be sure, thematically, frontier modernisms explore many of the same issues stressed in all forms of modernism, including breaks with the past, a sense of alienation, and the difficulties of representation. But the specific historical context out of which each of the texts I examine emerges bring about very different perspectives on these themes. *Cogewea* grapples with the violent, forced rupture experienced by the Okanogan people under United States colonialism. *The Professor's House* involves a more abstract crisis in white American identity brought on by the changing signification of the frontier. The alienation felt by Sonny in *Not Without Laughter* results from DuBoisian double consciousness and from the effects of living in a community devastated by poverty and loss, which are psychological and material conditions imposed by the dominant white power structure. *Cattle* seeks an empowering voice with which to counter the masculine system that has stripped Jake and Nettie Day of their right to self-representation.

And, finally, all of these texts struggle with linguistic crises as they work to establish fictional renderings whose form and diction effectively capture their uniquely felt encounters with modernity and allow them entry into the mainstream cultural realm.

This last point is an important one, because the label "modernism" has traditionally denoted a detached, often experimental, narrative form. My emphasis on a historically produced definition of modernism does not exclude the role that form plays in representing a particular history. Indeed, as I discussed in Chapter One, the modernism-realism debates within the Frankfurt School serve as a reminder that the relationship between history and form is a dialectical one. Accordingly, Mourning Dove, Hughes, Cather, and Eaton all make stylistic choices that best speak to the contradictions existing within their work, rhetorical decisions that often play out dramatically in the unequal power relations between a writer of color and the white publishing industry, seen in the palpable struggle between Mourning Dove and McWhorter in *Cogewea* and the careful maneuvers by which Hughes placates Charlotte Mason's desire for the primitive. In *The Professor's House*, Cather's literary choices—the use of passive language, the framing devices that enclose Tom Outland's story, the opposing settings of two very different houses—enact the same sense of confinement that Cather perceives in a country whose frontier is being redefined and where a changing immigrant population threatens white identity. For Eaton, the search for a genre that will best represent the history of United States imperialism and Asian exclusion leads

her to the popular Western form as a means to subvert the white male dominance usually reproduced by that particular genre.

In a literary field that has traditionally revered disconnected and even "reader-unfriendly" works (to borrow Sollors' phrase), the range of styles—many of them variations on popular forms—that I include under the designation "frontier modernisms" indicates the complex relationship among a given author, dominant culture power, and the novel form. While language seeks to colonize and interpellate subjects, as Mary Layoun suggests, each writer in this study demonstrates agency within the dominant systems of language and imperialism by turning the relationship into a dialectical one. Working with established mainstream cultural forms, Mourning Dove, Hughes, and Eaton alter them to fit their experiences outside of the dominant culture, providing resistances in language that echo their arguments about the physical, violent contestations of border encounters on the frontier. Indeed, this expansion of the term "modernism" from a formal perspective is one of the most crucial things that recent criticism in the field has undertaken, although it is a project not nearly as extensive as it ought to be. Baker made some of the most significant early headway in this area and has inspired a wealth of criticism about Harlem Renaissance texts, while Kent, Schledler, Sollors, and Keresztesi have shown the additional perspectives that Native, Latino, black, and "ethnic" American writers can provide in perceiving how extremely varied the manifestations of modernism are. It is to that expanded definition of modernism that I have sought to contribute.

Frontier modernisms, as I have conceptualized the term throughout my dissertation, are artistic representations of a transitional moment in American history when race and immigration policy were being redefined. During the 1920s the shift from a producer capitalism to an intensely consumer-driven one changed labor needs, and the shrinking possibilities of growth and exploitation within national borders demanded expanding the imperialist project abroad. These factors brought into question long standing beliefs about imperialism, nationhood, and white American identity. At the same time, writers from outside the dominant white heteronormative culture asserted in fiction their own experiences within colonialism and its racist environment. Mourning Dove, forcibly brainwashed in missionary schools, uses the terrain of the Western novel to find a way home. Hughes' revision of the *bildungsroman* contains his struggles with primitivist discourse and double-consciousness and envisions a restored community with the power to counter their negative psychological effects. Cather attempts to fill an absence in her understanding of white American identity by inventing a fake Native origins myth in the American Southwest. Eaton, after spending most of her career behind an invented Japanese persona, denies the primacy of race in determining one's identity and instead envisions a community based upon the common opponent for women of violent white masculinity. All of these authors use the novel form as a politicized aesthetic with which to voice their opinions about how the changing nation should proceed and, interestingly, they all emphasize the importance of strong, accepting communities. In *Cogewea*, community is tenuously restored when Cogewea and

Jim come together to start a family that respects Okanogan traditions but is able to live in the colonized present. In *Not Without Laughter*, Harriet demonstrates the ability of black artists to create communities with like-minded people. In *The Professor's House*, the novel's crisis stems from Tom Outland's impossible vision of a utopian society at Blue Mesa. In *Cattle*, the dispossessed find commonality and come together as a family. Considering that traditional readings of modernism emphasize the inevitable dissolution of community in an age characterized by isolation, wandering, and intense subjectivity, I argue that the texts that provide the basis for this study can revive the kind of radical critique so revered in canonical modernisms by people like Kazin and Singal, namely the idea that modernism can offer a liberating acceptance of difference. Further, by adding these kinds of modernist texts to the established canon, we can once again recognize modernism as a movement providing a politically engaged art that insists on the potential for change. In this way, the works that I have labeled "frontier modernisms" present us with the kind of alternative counter-tradition that Raymond Williams called for 25 years ago and add a crucial new perspective to the changing field of American modernist studies.

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