

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 194

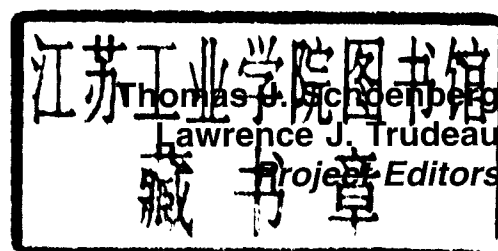
TOPICS VOLUME



Volume 194

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Commentary on Various Topics  
in Twentieth-Century Literature, including Literary  
and Critical Movements, Prominent Themes and  
Genres, Anniversary Celebrations, and Surveys  
of National Literatures**



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## Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 194

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## Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

### Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author’s works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

### Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

## Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *TCLC* by nationality, followed by the numbers of the *TCLC* volumes in which their entries appear.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." In *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, edited by Charles Bernstein, 73-82. New York: Roof Books, 1990. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 127, edited by Janet Witlec, 3-8. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003.

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Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Roof Books, 1990. 73-82. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witlec. Vol. 127. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003. 3-8.

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Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Associate Product Manager:

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# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

## **American Frontier Literature**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <i>Introduction</i> .....                                | 1   |
| <i>Representative Works</i> .....                        | 1   |
| <i>Overviews and General Studies</i> .....               | 2   |
| <i>The Frontier Thesis and Frontier Literature</i> ..... | 26  |
| <i>Major Authors of Frontier Literature</i> .....        | 51  |
| <i>Further Reading</i> .....                             | 125 |

## **Little Magazines**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>Introduction</i> .....                                     | 126 |
| <i>Representative Works</i> .....                             | 126 |
| <i>Overviews</i> .....  | 127 |
| <i>Little Magazines and African American Literature</i> ..... | 146 |
| <i>Little Magazines and Literary Trends</i> .....             | 184 |
| <i>Little Magazines and Poetry</i> .....                      | 227 |
| <i>Further Reading</i> .....                                  | 239 |

## **World War II Literature**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <i>Introduction</i> .....                              | 241 |
| <i>Representative Works</i> .....                      | 241 |
| <i>Overviews</i> .....                                 | 242 |
| <i>The Literary Response to War and Violence</i> ..... | 299 |
| <i>Wartime Propaganda</i> .....                        | 329 |
| <i>Writing from Exile</i> .....                        | 345 |
| <i>World War II Drama</i> .....                        | 359 |
| <i>Further Reading</i> .....                           | 397 |

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 401

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 511

TCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 525

# American Frontier Literature

Fiction, poetry, and essays based on the American migration experience to the western frontier beginning in the nineteenth century.

## INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century, many Americans migrated across the Mississippi River and onto the plains, mountains, and deserts of the West, seeking new land and new opportunities. Writers chronicled this westward migration, composing stories about the individuals who struggled to survive and prosper under harsh and often dangerous conditions while freeing themselves from the constrictions of civilization. Stories about these characters and the land they set out to conquer resulted in the creation of many archetypal characters of frontier literature—including cowboys, mountain men, and settlers—and featured vivid descriptions of the natural beauty of the western landscape. In these works, writers of frontier literature were able to construct a mythology of the American West, and beginning in the nineteenth century and into the early years of the twentieth century, frontier literature remained an immensely popular genre in the United States. Readers were fascinated by images of majestic mountains, unending prairie landscapes, and inhospitable deserts, as well as the dangers posed by Native Americans, wild animals, and harsh environmental conditions. Although the term frontier literature is typically associated with the nineteenth-century American West, critics acknowledge that the description covers a broad range of settings and is used to refer to a vast collection of works deriving from the clash between the civilized and natural worlds. Represented by European thinking and the rules and customs of traditional society, civilization was thought to symbolize the past while the frontier—with its promises of adventure, opportunity, and individual freedom—was regarded as the future. However, the frontier also represented danger, alienation, and even violence.

In his seminal 1893 lecture, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” better known as the Frontier Thesis, Frederick Jackson Turner maintained that it was America’s frontier that best explained the distinctive history of the United States. He linked the settling of the American frontier with American exceptionalism: as Americans moved westward across the continent, communities became more democratic, less hierarchical, and allowed more individual freedoms.

The Frontier Thesis was widely disseminated amongst scholars and is considered one of the most influential theories in American history. With the onset of the twentieth century came the realization that the American frontier was closing. As civilization and its culture and traditions encroached upon the open frontier, writers began to reflect on the clash of cultures that formed the American experience, the death of the frontier and its values, and the impact of this demise on the concept of American exceptionalism. In the meantime, many writers have used the themes and concerns of traditional frontier literature to explore new avenues, such as the Far North or outer space; or have touched on a reversal of the frontier migration, as Americans confronted Old World values in Europe. Other authors have explored new frontiers in the form of social or political movements. However, traditional frontier novels and short stories remain popular in American literature and continue to be successfully translated into other mediums. These stories revisit themes central to American mythology and literature and reflect concerns integral to the American consciousness in the twenty-first century.

---

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Edward Abbey

*The Brave Cowboy* (novel) 1958

*Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (nonfiction) 1968

*The Monkey Wrench Gang* (novel) 1975

Rex Beach

*The Winds of Chance* (novel) 1918

Saul Bellow

*Henderson the Rain King* (novel) 1959

*Herzog* (novel) 1964

Willa Cather

*O Pioneers!* (novel) 1913

*The Song of the Lark* (novel) 1915

*A Lost Lady* (novel) 1923

James Oliver Curwood

*The Alaskan: A Novel of the North* (novel) 1923

William Faulkner

*The Wild Palms* (novel) 1939

*Go Down, Moses* (short stories) 1942

A. B. Guthrie

*The Big Sky* (novel) 1947

*The Way West* (novel) 1950

*These Thousand Hills* (novel) 1956

Ken Kesey

*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (novel) 1962

Jack London

*The Call of the Wild* (novel) 1903

*The Valley of the Moon* (novel) 1913

Frederick Manfred

*Lord Grizzly* (novel) 1954

*Riders of Judgment* (novel) 1957

Cormac McCarthy

*All the Pretty Horses* (novel) 1992

*The Crossing* (novel) 1994

*Cities of the Plain* (novel) 1998

*No Country for Old Men* (novel) 2005

Larry McMurtry

*Horseman, Pass By* (novel) 1961

*Lonesome Dove* (novel) 1985

*Buffalo Girls* (novel) 1990

*Streets of Laredo* (novel) 1993

Frank Norris

*The Octopus* (novel) 1901

Jack Shafer

*Shane* (novel) 1949

*Monte Walsh* (novel) 1963

Nevil Shute

*A Town Like Alice* (novel) 1950

*The Far Country* (novel) 1952

John Steinbeck

*Grapes of Wrath* (novel) 1939; revised ed., 1972

Wallace Stegner

*The Big Rock Candy Mountain* (novel) 1942

Frederick Jackson Turner

*The Significance of the Frontier in American History*  
(nonfiction) 1894

Nathanael West

*Miss Lonelyhearts* (novel) 1933

*The Day of the Locust* (novel) 1939

## OVERVIEWS AND GENERAL STUDIES

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[In the following essay, Morey-Gaines examines the role of women in the male-dominated genre of frontier literature.]

"His career was like a prairie—vast, uncluttered, straight away."<sup>1</sup> So read one epitaph in remembrance of John Wayne, a man who represents one of the most essential archetypes of American culture. The current of emotion called forth by his death suggests that when Marshall McLuhan asks: "How long can the urban male live imaginatively on the frontier of eighty years ago?" the question is largely rhetorical.<sup>2</sup> The frontier has become an enduring metaphor of a history remembered with keen nostalgia by those who never lived it.

The frontier metaphor is essentially dependent upon the land for its various expressions. Early observers equated geographic horizons with the horizons of the American soul. Lyman Beecher, for example, announced that "all of the West is on a great scale and the minds and the views of the people correspond with these relative proportions."<sup>3</sup> The quality of American morality was associated with the quantity of American territory and valued features of American character came to be integrally connected with the western landscape. This cultural conviction, renewed with the visible loss of each remaining emblem of the frontier, makes the task of understanding the metaphor very difficult. Metaphor works by balancing seemingly disparate descriptions against one another, holding a complexity of meanings "in solution." To describe the American frontier mythos as metaphor is to make an important statement about its complexity, ambiguity, and value tension.

The frontier metaphor involves two distinct but interrelated zones, the wild West and the agrarian West. The geographic qualities of each zone are applied to the human beings who live in the West and a metaphoric reasoning from place to person produces at least two kinds of American heroes, the farmer and the gunfighter. While both types of hero are for a time visible in the agrarian and wild West, only the gunfighter gains cultural ascendancy. The popularity of the gunfighter and the obscurity of the farmer are heavily influenced by the literal and metaphoric location of woman in each zone. The agrarian West, more associated with woman,

seems unable to sustain its male hero. The wild West, defined in part by its defiance of woman, produces our lasting cultural heroes.

Women inhabit the shadows of a metaphor that is understood, however unconsciously, to have as its special referent the white, male American. Accordingly, this paper uses American literature written by men as a principal formative artifact of the frontier metaphor. Yet in spite of the understood exclusivity of the literature examined here, woman—idealized, suppressed, and finally vilified—is also a principal subject of this body of literature. Sexual tension is rendered metaphorically in the struggle between the agrarian West and the wild West and from the dust of that struggle the archetypal American hero and his archetypal antagonist is formed. The images of each shift within the metaphor of the frontier as the culture moves from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. In that shift is recorded a classic conversation about values, ideals, and dreams.

## II

Although the symbol of the agrarian West as a garden of the world was common to American political rhetoric of the mid-nineteenth century, it never arrived as a permanent motive in male-authored fiction. The domination of the wild West mythos over the agrarian mythos illumines the value preference of cultural imagination. In *Virgin Land*, Henry Nash Smith offers several reasons for the recessive profile of the agrarian West. Briefly summarized, these include the fact that the self-declared center of civilization—the East—persisted in regarding the West as an area interesting only for its rusticity, an interest quickly worn thin. Furthermore, “rain follows the plow” oratory was so false to the facts that its idealized version of rural life was doomed to early obscurity.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to these weaknesses of the agrarian myth, there is also a serious problem with the image of the agrarian hero as he is environmentally situated. In both the agrarian novel and the wild West novel the hero—whether gunfighter or farmer—is defined in terms of his relationship to the land. Both types of frontier novels present nature as an impersonal force that is at once beautiful and terrible in the power of its elements. Yet in one kind of frontier novel the hero thrives in his association with nature and in the other he falters; the deification of the frontier hero through association with the natural world is as common in the novel of the wild West as it is uncommon in the agrarian novel.

The agrarian works of Hamlin Garland and Frank Norris both contain repeated patterns of imagery that make it difficult to sustain an agrarian hero. In each, the vast beauty of the landscape is recorded back to back with the squalor and unhappiness that is visible upon closer

examination. Thus Garland may present us with the cool tranquility of a rural sunset whose chief detail is the weary, sweating farmer trying to milk a hot and fly-tormented cow. In Norris's *The Octopus*, the western epic envisioned by the ambitious young poet is always derailed by the intrusion of the people who populate the West. Against the magnificent backdrop of western landscape, they are “uncouth brutes . . . , grimed with the soil they worked on.”<sup>5</sup> From a distance, the rural countryside is a model of bucolic splendor, but a closer inspection reveals a life of toil and grim resolution.

In contrast, the wild West hero is magnified in proportion to the landscape, as in the oft-remarked passage from *The Prairie* that introduces the reader to Leatherstocking,<sup>6</sup> or, as in a more recent example, Max Brand's description of the outlaw Annan Rhiannon:

When they look up there, what do they see? Do they see Mt. Laurel? No, you damn well bet they don't. They see Annan Rhiannon standing in the middle of the sky with his black beard on his face; and the clouds that blow over the shoulder of Mt. Laurel, they're the hair blowing over the back of Rhiannon.<sup>7</sup>

The title character of Jack Schaefer's *Shane* embodies this land/man imagery carried to the limits of romantic mythologizing. More at home with his horse than human company, Shane is initially set apart from the human world by his effortless communion with the natural world. Man and horse are “like a single being,” and like his horse, Shane moves with a “quiet sureness and power.”<sup>8</sup> In moments of solitude or crisis, Shane instinctively turns toward the western mountains for sustenance. In the Gethsemane-like moment when Shane must choose whether or not to apply his power to change the situation between farmer and rancher, he turns to the sunset-lit mountains and stretches “his arms up, the fingers reaching to their utmost limits, grasping and grasping, it seemed, at the glory glowing in the sky” (p. 100).

Although Shane is physically small in stature, his presence commands and overwhelms all ideas of physical proportion so that he is, in fact, larger than life. The uncanny physical presence he gains through his association with the natural world is translated into an imposing metaphysical presence, giving him a legendary and Christ-like omniscience. Shane “was the man who rode into our little valley out of the heart of the great glowing West and when his work was done, rode back whence he had come” (p. 119). At once immanent in and transcendent of nature, the wild West hero is magnified to the limits of spiritual and physical boundaries, his immortality secured through his oneness with “the great glowing West.” In the language of the makers of those heroes and myths, the “courageous” but often “broken” characters of the agrarian novel “are no match for” the olympian characters produced by the novel of the wild West.



In many instances the same landscape that enhances the reputation of the gunfighter may only serve to emphasize the farmer's precarious hold upon his world. The important variable in the picture may not be so much landscape, or even occupation, although one may be inherently more romantic than the other. The truly crucial explanation for the failure of the agrarian novel has yet to be examined in current commentary *and it has to do with the ascendancy of women in the agrarian landscape in contrast to the helplessness of men*. The hidden problem of the agrarian myth is the gender associations that pervade the garden, and the metaphoric position of women as they relate to these images. The agrarian mythos suggests a feminine personification of the earth, lending metaphoric power to women rather than men. The archetypal association of women with land and nature further diminishes the farmer's heroic possibilities.<sup>9</sup>

Frank Norris's turn of the century plea for the small rancher in *The Octopus* provides an embarrassment of examples of the woman-as-land metaphor, parallel in image and purpose to the later Steinbeck novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Norris sees in the act of farming representations of "elemental Male and Female, locked in colossal embrace . . . , untamed, savage, natural, sublime." He struggles to give the wheat farmer epic proportions through imagery of cosmic sexual assault concretized by the plowing of the fields. Aided by the plow, a "multitude of iron hands," the farmer's "heroic embrace" of the earth is "so violent as to be veritably brutal," and the "warm, brown flesh of the mother earth is "responsive and passionate under this assault" (pp. 127-31). The earth is given a feminine personification, and the processes of seedtime, growth, and harvest are all expressed in sexual metaphors.

This aspect of the metaphor stresses domination of the earth mother; other aspects present her as a supreme, sensuous power. One of several examples in *The Octopus* is the milkmaid Hilma Tree. She is an earth mother figure, and like the male hero of the wild West novel, she is glorified and enlarged by her mystical connection with nature:

He saw her standing there in the scintillating light of the morning, her smooth arms wet with milk, redolent and fragrant of milk, her whole desirable figure moving in the golden glory of the sun, steeped in a lambent flame, saturated with it, joyous as the dawn itself.

(p. 210)

Motherhood is the finishing touch to the "delicacy of an elemental existence," and in one of Norris's more contrived moments he has her sitting upon a natural throne formed by tree roots, "the radiance of the unseen crown of motherhood glowing from her forehead, the beauty of the perfect woman surrounding her like a glory" (p. 504).

The poet, Presley, comes to see in her a "perfect maturity" and "infinite capacity for love," and with this realization, the long awaited inspiration for his epic comes to him, described by Norris in the following suggestive language:

A longing . . . to be strong and noble because of her, to reshape his purposeless, half-wasted life with her nobility and purity and gentleness . . . his inspiration leaped all at once within him, leaped and stood firm, hardening to a resolve stronger than any he had ever known.

(pp. 629-30)

In a very real sense she is the last hope of the farmer, for only she endures to nurture and inspire in the scattered farmers and the aimless poet the courage needed to continue their life-long struggles.

For Norris, nature is the "Force," the mystery of creation and life embodied by the growing wheat and the motherhood of Hilma Tree. Furthermore, truth and justice will prosper in the impersonal power of natural cycles, a Norris conviction illustrated by the grim death scene of the evil railroad agent. Trapped in the belly of a grain vessel, he is smothered by streams of wheat, the "nourisher of nations," the agent of the feminine-personified earth (p. 652). Given this pattern of intense sexual metaphor attached to the earth, it is no surprise that it is woman's uncompromised mutuality with earth that leaves her the transcendent figure closing each epic agrarian narrative. It is the women who endure and triumph.

Like the "Force" that runs the world in *The Octopus*, Ma Joad holds the migrant family together in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and she is an earth mother figure straight from the archetype. In Steinbeck's world women have an innate understanding of cyclic immortality, and with motherhood, woman comes into her own as a special elemental being. Thus, the whiney young girl, Rose of Sharon, joins the ranks of the Great Mother in the powerful closing image of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Left destitute by seasonal rains and perpetual unemployment, the Joad family seeks refuge in an old barn, finding there another worker near death from starvation. Rose of Sharon has recently lost a baby, and her breasts are swollen with milk. She and Ma communicate silently, on some intuitive level, and in the final sentences of *The Grapes of Wrath* the girl-grown-mother insists the dying man take the life nourishment she offers. Smiling mysteriously, she suckles him as she would a baby.

On the most universal level of the archetype, woman embodies life while man is the potential master of life who must transcend the claims of the Mother in order to achieve his heroic status.<sup>10</sup> Yet the overpowering

natural strength suggested by the metaphoric reciprocity between woman and land in the agrarian mythos creates a female, rather than a male hero. As an emblem of the rural agrarian frontier, woman represents the life and land he cultivates, farming and marriage become equivalent (and ambivalently regarded) actions. The mixed blessing of woman and the agrarian frontier is that while farming and marriage bring forth new abundance (crops/children), the woman-as-land metaphor only highlights the transience and frailty of manhood in this frontier. The relatively few examples of a true earth mother figure in American frontier literature suggests that American culture will not give mythological approval to the strong, dignified woman-image that the archetype might yield."

The remedy for the threatened male hero is a shift to the landscape of the wild West where woman's connection to the land is minimal. In the literature of the wild West the agrarian West represents civilization. Woman serves as an ambivalently regarded symbol of the progress of the domesticated West upon the wild West. However, the power of the idealized earth mother imagery disappears in wild West novels. Instead, woman's weakness is insured by her separation from the earth, and her civility is emphasized. She seems to be a very minor character in wild West novels. The male who profits from her diminution, however, is the wild West hero. A plow cannot seem to replace a horse or a gun as the true tool of the American hero, and the destruction of life rather than its cultivation becomes the primary interest of the frontier metaphor. In the last analysis, the real American hero is the individualistic gunslinger whose embattled identity is the subject of the wild West novel.

### III

The hero of the wild West is sworn to protect civilization and its tender messenger even though his identity as male is threatened by the imposition of civilized structures upon the frontier. To lose touch with civilization is to relinquish a host of traditional virtues that are considered essential to a superior race. On the other hand, to plunge into the primitive state demanded by the wild West (or the wilderness) is to regain a sexual and spiritual potency that is sapped by the structures of civilization. The frontier serves as the arena wherein these ambivalences and cultural uncertainties can be played out.

Jack Schaefer's *Shane* is an excellent illustration of how tensions between the values of the agrarian and wild West frontier are juxtaposed and resolved. The drama in the simple-seeming story of *Shane* is double-leveled and cross-purposed in its message. The external action leads to a symbolic and literal showdown between the agrarian West (represented by the farmer Joe

Starrett) and the wild West (the cowboys and cattle ranchers). The internal action of the story belongs to Shane who struggles to honor his renunciation of a violent past. While his resolve is strengthened by the temporary assumption of a farmer's garb and way of life, it is also threatened by the clear imperative he feels to defend the Starrett family with the power he has renounced.

The real interest of the story is not the farmer-rancher struggle, but the carefully anticipated moment when Shane will fling off his self-imposed exile and reveal his true identity as a joyous and powerful frontier god. The irony of having such a savior for the peaceful agrarian way is the ancient one that peace and justice are attainable only through the acts that are presumably repugnant to a civilized way of life. Thus the triumph of the agrarian West over the wild West is undercut at every point by the tormented hero who makes it possible, and the contrast between the inevitable helplessness of the farmer and the equally inevitable strength of the gunslinger cannot fail to diminish the farmer, the agrarian West, and the civilized values they represent. The uprooting of an old tree stump on Joe Starrett's farm is one of several double-messaged episodes in which the symbolic action persistently weakens the literal, physical action of the characters.

The invincible old tree stump is, like Shane, a resilient reminder of a wilder way of life and the order of things that preceded the domestication of the wilderness. Shane's decision to aid the farmer in his struggle against the rancher is symbolized in his willingness to help Joe cut the old root from the ground. Heretofore, Joe has been unable to remove the stump, but with the aid of the disguised gunfighter, the monstrous stump is finally dislodged (pp. 26-27). Only with Shane's cooperation is the triumph of the cultivated West over the wild secured. Another reading of this episode simultaneously suggests that the giant stump and root is also a phallic symbol and the inevitable cutting of the root symbolizes a severance of potency and loss of manhood in the winning of the agrarian West.

The sexual symbolism involved in this presentation of the winning of the West must not be underestimated. Sexual as well as national identity is linked to the conquest of the land. While Joe Starrett is unarguably a strong and admirable man, Shane is his acknowledged master in all things, including male sex dominance. For the classic precautionary reasons, Shane takes the dinner table seat facing the door of the kitchen. For symbolic reasons, however, the seat he so naturally assumes is Joe Starrett's chair, and Joe gives it up willingly (p. 35).

The prize that accompanies the seat of the father is the only woman in the novel, maid/mother Marian Starrett. Her status as a cherished but transferable possession is

made quite clear. Starrett is willing to relinquish his claim upon his wife as just compensation for Shane's protection, yet Shane is too honorable to take her, and Marian too honorable to be disloyal to her husband, in spite of the obvious mutual attraction between herself and the gunman (pp. 80 and 104). The farmer is "all man," but he is no match for the potency of the wild West hero, and they all know it.

It is no accident that Shane's superior status is revealed, in part, through covertly presented sexual themes. He has not simply renounced a violent past, but the full sexuality that is expressed in the violence of the wild West. The underlying sexual tension of the novel surfaces most clearly once the ultimate source of his innate power is revealed—his guns. Shane's "intangible and terrifying presence," hinting at dominion over more than one world, is seen to derive partly from his glorified association with the natural world, but is completed preternaturally when he straps on the gunbelt, noticeably absent throughout most of the novel:

Belt and holster and gun. . . . These were not things he was wearing or carrying. They were part of him, part of the man, of the full sum of the integrate force that was Shane. You could see now that for the first time this man who had been living with us, who was one of us, was complete, was himself in the final effect of his being. . . . Slim and dark in the doorway, he seemed somehow to fill the whole frame.

(pp. 101-102)

With the addition of the phallic guns, Shane is finally set apart as Exalted and Other in his revealed identity as the righteous arbiter of justice and administrator of death. This omniscient identity is integrally linked with his identity as a powerful sexual being. Thus, in addition to his special relationship to an unfeminized natural world, the guns are a further source of heroic power that is alien and unavailable to the farmer.

The sexual longing so discreetly displayed in *Shane* is often much bolder in other wild West novels<sup>12</sup> suggesting that at least one critical function of the wild West novel is the resolution of the sexual anxiety generated by woman's presence in the diminishing territory of American manhood. In every gun battle the hero secures a physical and moral territory that proclaims his manhood and the fitness of his judgmental prerogatives. Ostensibly, part of the territory he defends is that adoring woman, but in actuality every gun battle is as much a defense against her as for her. In *Shane*, as with other wild West novels, it is important that the woman give assent to the gunfight and that she witness or eagerly await the details of the battle. The witnessed act of violence publicly confirms a manhood unavailable to the agrarian hero, shows the gunslinger to be a righteous defender of civilization, and yet immediately removes him from the realm of woman's influence. It is perhaps

not surprising to find that the wild West hero is rarely seen in the embrace of the waiting woman, for the consummated sexual act is performed between men, with guns.

The motivating sexual tension of the wild West novel is played out in the language of violence, and the compliance of woman the civilizer to man the righteous destroyer is a critical part of the formula of American manhood. As this violent communion is separated from the geographic context that gave it credence, the execution of that act becomes increasingly vital as an affirmation of manhood and sexual domination. The modern-day winning of the West finally becomes more a matter of sexual than national aggrandizement, and the view of American womanhood shifts drastically once the special western landscape no longer exists to give the wild West hero strength and moral sanction.

#### IV

In the twentieth-century frontier novel the once-positive mother image is no longer supported by its natural setting. Woman becomes fearsome in her disregard of traditional mores of passivity and self-sacrifice. Will and sexual menace increase proportionally in twentieth-century images of the modern woman. The original tension between the wild and agrarian West, the struggle to control the frontier, is transformed into a desperate sexual contest between the gunfighter and the modern woman. She is the sexual dragon who prowls the highroads of American culture. She is the hunter who must be hunted and slain if the original hunter is to regain the sexual security once promised by the frontier metaphor. The metaphor has shifted, and the frontier is now located on new ground—an insane asylum in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*; Africa, South America, or Europe in Ernest Hemingway's works. These new battlefields suggest strange and intimately linked domains of sexuality, madness, and death that have come to be the important frontiers of the twentieth century.

An early short story by Hemingway establishes the ethos under consideration here, suggesting that in the twentieth century death is a most fearsome territory (even though human sexuality may be the far more treacherous and uncertain ground). "The Short Happy Life of Frances Macomber" is set in the jungles of darkest Africa, but the territory in question is sexual. Margaret Macomber is Hemingway's idea of the twentieth-century woman, "the hardest, the cruelest, the most predatory and the most attractive" in the world.<sup>13</sup> Frances Macomber is the "great American boy-man" who seeks to come of age through that classic ritual of manhood, the hunt. The modernity of the story is demonstrated by the fact that it does not end with Macomber's undisputed dominion over a villain, the land, death,

or a woman. When Macomber at last fearlessly encounters his prey, he is shot from behind by his wife before the primal hunting scene can be completed. Hemingway's portrayal of Margaret leaves no doubt that she shoots her husband, not accidentally or out of fear for his safety, but out of revenge for his belated claim to manhood that spells the end of her castrating domination over him. The once-adoring, waiting woman has become the biggest enemy the American male faces in the new frontier.

Margaret's sins against the American man are several. In an early incident, when Frances Macomber abdicates his place as master by showing himself to be afraid of his quarry, Margaret is quick to claim an analogous role as a sexual hunter. She dispenses her sexual favors to the safari guide as a sign of her disdain for her cowardly husband, in effect preying upon his masculinity. Her sexual defiance is, in itself, a violation of the sexual politics of American life. For a time, she is unnaturally autonomous. The extent of her transgression is not fully concretized, however, until she picks up her husband's weapon and uses this tool to become the hunter of her own husband. While her sexual betrayal is made clear only by suggestion, the shooting of Frances Macomber is vividly depicted for the reader. Violent intercourse takes the place of sexual intercourse.

In the same way, Ken Kesey's Irish cowboy, McMurphy, in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is also presented in a struggle that is primordially sexual. In this novel, mental health practices represent a mindless, mechanical conspiracy against freedom and individuality. Acting autonomously on the ward as the single identifiable source of repression, McMurphy's antagonist, Nurse Ratched, represents modern woman. Randle P. McMurphy seems to represent freedom of mind for all people. He champions, however, a romantic frontier ambience in which the male struggles for a balance of power that is to be sexually determined and reinforced. Thus, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is most accurately described as a wild West tale rendered in the savage polemic of sexual contest.

McMurphy is a modern-day Shane, the rugged individual who reluctantly but courageously takes up the cause of the weak and oppressed. He enters the ward like the gunfighter who is inseparable from his horse, and his several showdowns with Nurse Ratched evoke all the repressed hysteria of *High Noon*:

He walked with long steps, too long, and he had his thumbs hooked in his pockets again, the iron in his boot heels cracked lightning out of the tile. He was the logger again, the swaggering gambler, the big red-headed brawling Irishman, the cowboy out of the TV set walking down the middle of the street to meet a dare.<sup>14</sup>

His weapon is his sexuality, madness the fierce expression of his manhood against the brutality of the "normal," "sane" Nurse Ratched.

"Madness" as a desirable state of mind and sexual freedom are specifically associated with the male organ. Nurse Ratched, McMurphy discovers and announces to the ward, is a ball breaker. And, he goes on to explain by analogy, there is an indivisible connection between freedom of mind and male potency:

Seen 'em all over the country and in the homes—people who try to make you weak so they can get you to toe the line. . . . You ever been kneed in the nuts in a brawl, buddy? . . . If you're up against a guy who wants to win by making you weaker instead of making himself stronger, then watch for his knee, he's gonna go for your vitals. And that's what the old buzzard is doing, going for your vitals.

(p. 57)

When McMurphy later realizes how serious his situation is, he articulates the terror of Nurse Ratched's power. Lobotomy is the extreme measure she can order for her patients, nothing less than "frontal-lobe castration. I guess if she can't cut below the belt she'll do it above the eyes" (p. 165). Intentionally or not, this kind of metaphor decisively denies woman a place among the free and the brave. At best, she can have no mind at all. At worst, she is the sworn enemy of that which she cannot possess.

As if these values are not already clearly visible in the stereotypes of the genre, Kesey, by calling upon the spirit of Melville, has attempted to give the frontier formula a deeper metaphysical significance. The lineaments of good and evil are quite simplistic here, but the intention is unmistakable. McMurphy wears black boxer shorts with large, white whales leaping about upon them because a literature major said he "was a symbol." The double entendre is unavoidable as the whale's name simultaneously suggests the physical size and metaphysical significance of the organ that is the center of attention. McMurphy has got himself a whale of a dick and a whale of a cause. Even the nurse acknowledges the source of his power. Just as she is "rolling along at her biggest and meanest," McMurphy steps in front of her with nothing but a wet, skintight towel around him. "She shrinks to about head-high to where that towel covers him" while he towers above her (p. 87). Like a vampire checked by a cross, she is temporarily thwarted by the unseen organ. Billy Bibbitt, whose euphonious name and childish stutter evoke Melville's Billy Budd, is the innocent who is martyred in the struggle between these forces of good and evil. Nurse Ratched, of course, is the evil one.

Nurse Ratched is a fearsome parody of the nineteenth-century image of the benevolent and self-sacrificing mother (pp. 58-59). She is a classic Great Bitch Mother