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The Other Vanishing American: Disappearing Farmers in American Literature, 1887-1939.

Carolyn Kuchera

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**THE OTHER VANISHING AMERICAN: THE DISAPPEARING FARMER IN
AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1887-1939**

**BY
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B.A., English, Minnesota State University Moorhead, 2001
M.A., Literature, Portland State University, 2006

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, literary depictions of farmers borrow from the established trope of the “Vanishing American” Indian to portray farmers as disappearing before the forces of modern civilization. I argue that writing about farmers from this era ought to be approached as a type of extinction discourse: the rhetoric surrounding the decline of a race or culture. Extinction discourse, whether applied to the American Indian or to farmers, fuses mourning over a passing way of life with celebration of civilization’s progress.

Farmers are portrayed as primitive figures, as fundamentally incompatible with modern civilization, in all of the fiction included in this study: Joseph Kirkland’s *Zury* (1887), Hamlin Garland’s “Up the Coolly” (1891) and “The Silent Eaters” (1923), John T. Frederick’s *Druida* (1923) and John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). While the works vary in their valuations of primitivism, alternately favoring the nostalgic or the progressive impulse, the farmer vanishes nonetheless. For the purposes of this study,

“vanishing” signifies not so much a sociological fact as a representational act performed in response to a perceived loss. Literary constructions of the vanishing farmer are performative: they help produce the condition (disappearance) that they subsequently describe. The rhetorical origins of industrial agriculture are rooted in this disappearance. The developing reactions to the farmer’s “disappearance” and the varying rhetorical forms of those reactions are the focus of this study, which is contextualized through historical and sociological information. The divergent ideologies of nostalgia displayed in the fiction illustrate particular modern anxieties, while shadows or traces of Indian presence within these texts reveal a buried legacy of removal within Western expansion. This analysis also shows how portrayals of vanishing farmers often preserve the racialist logic of extinction discourse, wherein race contributes to extinction. The conclusion suggests a future direction for the literary analysis of farmers, arguing that they can be most productively approached as ghosts through Jacques Derrida’s theory of the “trace” and Toni Morrison’s notion of the shadow.

With its focus on the decline, and sometimes disparagement, of agrarian America, this dissertation counters the dominant critical narrative that associates American virtue and civilization with rural values.

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Introduction

Although something of a cliché in today's scholarly circles,¹ the notion of the Vanishing American was once “a supreme rationale for Manifest Destiny” (Dippie 124). A popular nineteenth-century pattern of thought, the “Vanishing American” refers to the broad notion that Indians were a “vanishing race;” that they had been withering away since white contact, dwindling in numbers, until someday soon not a single one would remain. The idea that Indians were vanishing of their own accord, rather than being actively destroyed, preserved the moral integrity of the nation, which had been, according to John O’Sullivan’s famous narrative, providentially chosen to “overspread and to possess the whole of the continent.”² The Vanishing American trope appears in a myriad of nineteenth-century guises, from the sentimental poetry of William Cullen Bryant, to the paintings of George Catlin, and to Jacksonian-era political discourse. Historian Francis Parkman furnishes an iconic example in *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (1851), writing that Indians were “destined to melt and vanish before the advancing waves of Anglo-American power, which now rolled westward unchecked and unopposed” (ix). However, while tremendously useful as a literary referent, the established “Vanishing American” trope is not the chief object of this study. Instead, I will be examining the

¹ Renato Rosaldo contends that the Vanishing American, once a “useful metaphor,” has become something of a “cliché” (“Imperial Nostalgia” 115).

² John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, no.1 (July-August 1845): 5-10

unlikely role of vanishing rhetoric in shaping another destiny: that of the American farmer.

In the article, “Influences of the Industrial and Social Revolution Upon the Agricultural Industry of America” (1919), Roy Hinman Holmes writes:

The present farming population of America has been formed under abnormal and necessarily temporary conditions, the chief of which being the availability of a large though limited amount of free land...it is an unnatural class formed upon an artificial basis, therefore liable to more or less rapid disintegration when the peculiar formative influences cease. (696)

Holmes depicts the “more or less rapid disintegration” of the farming class with such fated certainty. What he is forecasting here is no less than a gradual extinction; after all, to disintegrate is literally to decay, to be reduced to mere dust. Although the “free land” he mentions was never really “free,” but stolen long ago from the native tribes, Holmes significantly chooses “disintegration,” a variant of the metaphor widely used to portray the inevitable extinction of American Indians, to describe the farmers’ fate. As Holmes’s pronouncement suggests, at the turn of the last century, farmers were on their way to becoming the newest class of Vanishing Americans and a ready-made discourse awaited them.

Lee Clark Mitchell discusses the Vanishing American trope as an outgrowth of the nineteenth-century American “desire to capture quickly passing moments of untamed wilderness” and the symbolic role of the Indian as embodying that “evanescent [wilderness] experience” (xiv). The closing of the frontier generated a pair of now familiar extinction discourses concerning the vanishing wilderness and the vanishing

American Indian. Farmers helped tame that wilderness, clearing the land and later being cleared off themselves. Also closely associated with nature, the disappearing farmer fits into this melancholy framework as another victim of increasingly complex and corporate patterns of western settlement. Mitchell summarizes the trajectory of this progressive national development: “The land would pass from Indian to trapper and prospector, from frontier trader to urban businessman, from homesteader to corporate farmer” (6). No occupation had a more central place in American tradition than farming. A strong strain of agrarianism in American thought held that “farm life produced better people and that citizens close to the soil were more democratic, honest, independent, virtuous, self-reliant, and politically stable than city dwellers” (Fite 4). However, a “fundamental and far-reaching” change took place in American society in the latter half of the nineteenth-century marked by the fact that around 1890, the value of industrial output for the first time exceeded the wealth produced on farms (9). By the census of 1920, the urban population had outgrown the rural with fifty-one percent of the population classified as urban (8).³ Farmers, the second wave of vanishing Americans, share with their predecessors the experience of being overrun in order to make way for a different ideal of land use.

The desire to record a fleeting culture informs representations of farmers as it does those of Indians. Brian Dippie perceptively notes out how the idea of the Vanishing American fuses “the nostalgic with the progressive impulse,” combining mourning for a lost and distinctively American heritage with a celebration of national progress (xii). Nostalgia vanishes its object as surely as an unquestioning faith in progress that holds all

³ The 1920 census defined “urban area” as a town with at least 5000 population.

persons, places, and institutions as continually evolving through the extinction of the less fit. Dippie refers to the assumptions underlying the belief in the Vanishing American—that extinction is tragic but inevitable—as “truisms” requiring only “periodic reiteration” as “justification” (xii). The “more or less rapid disintegration” of the farmer class that Holmes prophesies is itself a reiteration of a claim he made seven years earlier in *Atlantic Monthly*. In that piece, titled “The Passing of the Farmer,” Holmes forecasts:

In a relatively short time the typical farmer of today, who tills the land that he owns, with the help of his growing sons, will be but a national memory. Though he is the most conservative of men he cannot forever cling to the past. In his attempt to modernize his occupation, the individual owner must fail. (517)

This prediction tempers progress with nostalgia, assigning the farmer a place in the “national memory” while evacuating him from national life. The tendency to “cling to the past” is a stereotypically primitive trait. Depictions of farmers as passing away before the forces of modern civilization, like earlier portrayals of Indians from which they borrow, focus on the primitive qualities of their subject to suggest that disappearance is a matter of fundamental incompatibility with modern society.⁴

⁴ While I could analyze representations of farmers as anti-modern without the Indian analogue, I believe it is useful to situate the two groups together in the history of western expansion. Admittedly, sometimes what I point out as “primitive” is nothing more than an opposition to modern society but often these “primitive” tendencies have solid historical antecedents. The authors evidently had more than a merely abstract concept of the “primitive” in mind when they set down to write about the farmer’s situation. The recent history of Indian Removal surfaces in a few ways in the fiction, as traces of the original Vanished Americans embed themselves in the text: (1) In the vital importance of speaking the language, as dialect-rich speech and relative illiteracy prevent farmers from skillfully navigating land transactions; (2) Through the notion that a clannish culture, based on family and village ties, threatens national development; and finally, (3) In the way that those inhabiting land desired by more powerful, moneyed interests will conveniently be deemed “primitive” and their method of sustenance declared outmoded.

Midwestern American farm fiction published around the turn of the twentieth century centers on the trope of the vanishing farmer. Works at the center of this study—Joseph Kirkland’s *Zury* (1887), Hamlin Garland’s “Up the Coolly” (1891) and “The Silent Eaters” (1923), John T. Frederick’s *Druida* (1923), and John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) may favor the “progressive” or the “nostalgic” side of vanishing rhetoric, but the farmer vanishes nonetheless.⁵ For the purposes of my study, “vanishing” signifies not so much a sociological fact as a representational act performed in response to a perceived loss. Renato Rosaldo reminds us that the “vision of the vanishing primitive has proven sometimes false and sometimes true” (116). Thus, I am more interested in literary responses to this loss than in arguing whether it constitutes an extinction.

Literary responses to the decline of the traditional farmer borrow a prophetic tone to describe farmers as primitives doomed to extinction from established discourse on the Vanishing American Indian. Despite Washington Irving’s 1819 prediction that the natives “will vanish like a vapour from the face of the earth; their very history will be lost in forgetfulness,” the authors in my study certainly have not forgotten them (*Traits of Indian Character* 251). Rather than disappearing without a trace, the first Vanishing Americans leave their mark all over these texts. By analyzing traces of American Indians in the farm fiction, I illustrate how a buried legacy of removal shows farmers as first usurpers, but then as fellow members of the dispossessed American underclass.⁶

⁵ The one exception to this rule is *The Grapes of Wrath*, which posits a survival strategy rather than accommodating disappearance.

⁶ “Traces” here refers to signs of an “absent presence”; for example, Winfield Joad’s toy “Injun bow” in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The concept of “absent presence” belongs to Jacques Derrida. See *Writing and Difference*.

My analysis shows that portrayals of vanishing farmers often preserve the racialist logic of extinction discourse, wherein race contributes to extinction. Further, like the notion of the Vanishing American Indian and extinction discourse in general, literary constructions of the vanishing farmer are performative: they help produce the condition (disappearance) that they subsequently describe. Dippie acknowledges this performative aspect when he refers to the Vanishing American as a “self-fulfilling prophesy” (xii). Similarly, Mitchell discusses the “kind of anticipatory nostalgia” that some writers express for “that which, however threatened, had not yet passed,” “lament[ing] what still stood in front of them” (29). This premature mourning hastens the loss that it anticipates. The imaginative connection between the word “vanish” and the image of a magic wand seems most apropos. With its focus on the decline, and sometimes disparagement, of agrarian America, my project promises to counter the dominant critical narrative that associates “American virtue and civilization with rural values.”⁷

Rural Primitives

The rural primitive plays a double-role in an increasingly urban, industrial society. It is both the symbol of everything that must be superseded for the sake of a higher civilization and a marker of how far civilization has fallen from a state of natural goodness. In *Zury*, for example, the Ansteys, a family of poor farmers, represent the degraded primitive. The narrator deems Mrs. Anstey “almost ‘unspeakable,’ with her

⁷ Maria Farland argues that, “the denigration of rural America merits further critical attention” (“Modernist Versions of the Pastoral” 907).

bare head and feet, and her whole system ruined with the ceaseless drug-taking which prevailed at that day” (109). Conversely, with her innocence, mystical connection to nature and implied fertility Druida embodies the venerable qualities of the romantic primitive in Frederick’s novel.

For as long as cities have existed, David Danbom reminds us, so has an antagonism between urban and rural people. “To the farmer’s urban detractors,” Danbom contends, “he exemplified the worst in American society...he epitomized the crudeness, waste, ignorance, and degeneracy of society” (24). By the early part of the twentieth century, Danbom notes, “exposing rural degeneracy had become an honored practice among social scientists” who worried that “the weakness and inactivity of rural social and political institutions had allowed the countryside to degenerate physically, intellectually, and morally, thus threatening the nation with contamination” (31).⁸ Arthur Estabrook’s study, *The Jukes in 1915*, charges its rural subjects with being: “feeble-minded,” “ineducable, slovenly, and inefficient” (qtd. in Farland 906). Holmes argues that names like “rube” and “hayseed” aptly convey a “social inferiority which is a reality to some extent” (“Influences of...” 700). He goes on to assert that “farmers, in the mass, are rightly considered a backward people because of the constant echoing of the past in the ears of the individual by the old type of family whose function it was to dominate the individual” (700-701). For these outspoken critics of rural life, the farmer’s primitivity

⁸ Sociological studies focusing on rural degeneracy include: Robert Dugdale’s *The Jukes* (1874); Edward T. Devine’s *Misery and Its Causes* (1909); Henry Herbert Goddard’s *The Kallikak Family: A Study of the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness* (1912), and Florence Danielson and Charles Davenport’s *The Hill Folk: A Report on a Rural Community of Hereditary Defectives* (1912).

was a matter of biological and mental deficiencies as well as a product of his backward social institutions.

Despite the preponderance of negative evaluations of rural life, the farmer did have friends in the city who saw him as a moral center whose independence and self-reliance made him an ideal American and an “important counter” to the social ills of the exploding “industrial city” (Danbom 24).⁹ Promoters of agrarianism believed that “industrial activity separated men from each other, from nature, and from satisfying work” (25).¹⁰ Cornell agriculturist Liberty Hyde Bailey describes the importance of the farmer to civilization as a whole in language reminiscent of Jeffersonian agrarianism¹¹:

It is very necessary that at least a part of our civilization have contact with real experiences, real situations, with elementary conditions. The tendency of the time is the splitting and the complexing of our civilization and the developing along partial lines...It is very necessary that a good part of our civilization have direct contact with Mother Earth and with types of experiences that bring many native qualities into play. (Bailey 131)

⁹ See David Danbom. Social scientists of the era considered the social and political problems of the industrial city to include: “immigration, crime, immorality, rampant materialism, irreligion, political bloc action, the disintegration of the family, and class conflict” (25)

¹⁰ Danbom refers to these urban supporters of rural agriculture as “urban agrarians,” a group composed of people from the following professions: politicians, academics, educators, social scientists, popular writers, editors, socially conscious ministers, “and popular social thinkers in general” (25).

¹¹ Particularly, Jefferson’s famous proclamation in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781), that: “Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth.”

Bailey's statement from 1915 focuses on the rejuvenating aspects of country life, insinuating that virtue comes from one's proximity to the soil. What exactly he means by "native qualities" is harder to decipher. The reference, which invokes native ways to critique civilized society, calls to mind depictions of the Noble Savage as the symbol of a simpler, somehow purer lifestyle (Mitchell 11). Louis Owens persuasively argues that, for Americans, the Noble Savage represents "that element within themselves which connected them with the earth, the intuitive self" ("Grampa Killed Indians" 88). Farmers also occupy an abstract and highly symbolic place within the national consciousness.

The debate over the virtues of the American farmer at the turn of the last century was not so much about individual farmers per se as it was about the "image of America and American values" which the farmer had long represented in the popular mind (Danbom 24). Thus, discussions of the vanishing rural primitive were always to some extent conversations about national progress. However, even those who prized rural values as an "antidote for what [America] was becoming" accepted and even approved of the fact that the nation's future would be an urban industrial one (Danbom 25). Whether or not one saw it as cause for lament or celebration, most agreed that the disappearance of the small-scale, traditional farmer was inevitable. That sense of doom, whether expressed by detractors or supporters of farmers, produces representations of farmers as vanishing before the progressive forces of industry. Nostalgically clinging to the farmer as an idealized remnant of a fast disappearing past or enthusiastically chucking him into the recesses of history ultimately create the same effect: both rhetorical acts deny

“coevalness” to the primitive farmer, banishing him from the present era (Brantlinger 2).¹²

Extinction discourse

The trope of vanishing is a staple of extinction discourse. Patrick Brantlinger argues that extinction discourse arises whenever Europeans and white Americans encounter indigenous people (1). This discourse centers on the premise that the disappearance of the primitive is the inevitable outcome of contact. A noteworthy feature of extinction discourse, according to Brantlinger, is “its uniformity across other ideological fault lines: whatever their disagreements, humanitarians, missionaries, scientists, government officials, explorers, colonists, soldiers, journalists, novelists, and poets were in basic agreement about the inevitable disappearance of some or all primitive races” (1). An equally remarkable aspect of extinction discourse that Brantlinger does not mention is its broad application: many extinctions, even partial ones and those that are more imagined than real, generate a similar discourse. In nineteenth-century American social constructions, the Indian vanishes before the progressive march of civilization, often to clear the way for the plow, which in turn paves the way for the corporation. In the later part of that same century, novelists, sociologists, and journalists portray the

¹² David Gross uses the term “non-contemporaneous” to describe those who have been denied coeval status. In his study of the way individuals deal with social change in the modern era he writes: “To be non-contemporaneous means to be from another time or ‘untimely.’ Something becomes untimely when it outlasts the increasingly compressed duration assigned to it by a fast-moving society, and hence comes to be viewed as superannuated and therefore passé” (59).

white farmer as passing out of existence because of his incompatibility with modern industry and commerce.

The insinuation that the primitive “vanish[es] of its own accord from the world of progress,” that he is essentially the cause of his own extinction, is another characteristic of extinction discourse present in farm fiction (Brantlinger 3). This notion of the self-extminating savage (or degenerate farmer) eased the guilt of those complicit in their extermination and sometimes “excused or even encouraged violence toward those deemed savage” (3). The violence visited upon the farmer was of a more cultural and economic sort, but the theory holds. Bankers, for example, could feel less guilty about turning a family off their land if they could believe that the family’s stubborn resistance to new, modern farming practices was to blame.

Brantlinger understands extinction discourse as “a subset of racial theory” (3). Natural historians, Darwin most famously, created racial hierarchies that placed the white Anglo-Saxon or Germanic race at the “pinnacle of progress and civilization” and the “dark races” in the bottom ranges of primitive inferiority (2). In approaching representations of vanishing farmers through the category of extinction discourse, I extend Brantlinger’s theory to encompass relatively primitive white Americans. While Brantlinger restricts his study to the decline of indigenous peoples, others have discussed farmers, particularly more ethnically diverse rural folk, as modern America’s primitive Others.¹³ Gina Rossetti defines the “primitive” as the “dominant culture’s projection of its

¹³ I use “Other” in a most basic sense to refer to any minority that is excluded from the dominant culture while at the same time informing the dominant culture’s own identity through negative definition. For more in-depth reading on the concept of Otherness in postcolonial studies, see Edward Said’s landmark study, *Orientalism* (1978).

internal fears, anxieties, and attractions” and includes poor whites and ethnic minorities along with racial minorities in the category of primitive (6). Maria Farland’s analysis of early twentieth-century representations of farmers in poetry and works of rural sociology leads her to conclude that, “Cut off from urban industry and innovation, the agrarian had become modern America’s Other, tethered to rituals, traditions, and habits seen as increasingly outmoded and outside the culture’s mainstream” (911). When writers apply the established literary convention of extinction discourse regarding indigenous peoples to white farmers, they often preserve its racialist logic.

Kirkland, for example, endows his farmer protagonist, Zury Proudler, with the racial markers of Jewishness, through a father named “Ephraim” and an avariciousness that is as legendary as it is supposedly hereditary. Frederick portrays Druida’s mother as stereotypically native; the wild, dark-haired, nature-loving matriarch even dies with her face pointed westward, in a manner reminiscent of Cooper’s Chingachgook. In “Up the Coolly,” Garland contrasts the fair skin of the city-dwelling Howard with his farmer brother Grant’s “large, long, rugged Scotch face bronzed with sun and scarred with wrinkles” (87). Lastly, Steinbeck hints that Grampa Joad may have Indian blood through the accusation of a disgruntled neighbor.

The remarkable persistence of racial ideology within extinction discourse on white farmers shows the centrality of the morally rationalizing trope of race to extinction discourse.

The Ideology of Nostalgia

The feeling that something meaningful has forever disappeared results in nostalgia for the lost object. When an individual helps to bring about an extinction and then mourns for what he or she has destroyed, they experience a specific type of nostalgia, theorized by Rosaldo as imperialist nostalgia.¹⁴ Imperialist nostalgia, according to Rosaldo, follows a wide spectrum of destructive acts—from the murder of others in the service of a colonial power to the deliberate altering of a way of life. Significantly, he mentions “elegiac postures toward small towns and rural communities” as examples of imperialist nostalgia, even though his primary focus is the nostalgia displayed by agents of colonization toward colonized cultures (*Culture and Truth* 105). Rosaldo’s explanation of imperialist nostalgia as a particularly modern response to change applies to extinction discourses on farmers and native populations:

Imperialist nostalgia occurs alongside a peculiar sense of mission, the white man’s burden, where civilized nations stand duty-bound to uplift so-called savage ones. In this ideologically constructed world of ongoing progressive change, putatively static savage societies become a stable reference point for defining (the felicitous progress of) civilized identity. “We” valorize innovation and then yearn for more stable worlds, whether they reside in our own past, in other cultures, or in the conflation of the two. Such forms of longing thus appear closely related to secular notions of progress. When the so-called civilizing process destabilizes forms of life, the agents of change experience transformation of other cultures as if they were losses. (108)

¹⁴ See Rosaldo’s *Culture and Truth*.

Farm fiction communicates a longing for the past by characters that feel a guilty complicity in the civilizing process. Two of the novels I discuss here specifically refer to missionary work. In *Zury*, Anne imagines herself performing “missionary” work among the “rough people” in her role as country schoolteacher. *Druida* also references the missionary work of Doctor Thompson, one of the novel’s main characters. Rosaldo interrogates the consensus view that nostalgia is an innocent longing for the past, arguing instead that nostalgic treatments of the “vanishing savage” form an “ideological pattern” that is “designed to conceal guilt” (116). In forwarding his critique of nostalgia as ideology, Rosaldo borrows his working definition of “ideology” from Raymond Williams who fuses the abstract and practical senses of the term as articulated by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1845). “Ideology,” according to Williams, denotes a sense of “illusion, false consciousness, unreality, [and] upside-down reality.” It also refers to “the set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interests,” often those of a “particular class or group.”¹⁵ Nostalgia for quaint rural folk both mystifies reality and serves the interests of city dwellers.

Depictions of the “good old days” reveal as much about the present as the past. Williams argues that nostalgic feelings toward the pastoral past change according to the historical moment (*The Country and the City* 12). In the turn-of-the-twentieth-century milieu, nostalgia for the pastoral reflects the instability created by rapid urbanization, industrialization, and technological advances. It is no mere coincidence that primitive farmers start vanishing in literature just before industrial agriculture takes over, drastically transforming the rural landscape.

¹⁵ For more on Williams’s theory of ideology, see *Keywords* pgs. 153-157.

Farland points out that, “while the importance of the closing of the frontier is familiar to most students of American culture, the relegation of the pioneer and the farmer to inferior status...has not been adequately considered” (910). My study articulates the features of a new extinction discourse engendered by western expansion, locating the discourse surrounding the farmer’s disappearance within the pattern of western settlement that features the more widely studied rhetoric of Indian vanishing.

History: Patterns of Settlement and Displacement, and the Resulting ‘Civilizing Missions’

The fates of farmers and Indians are inextricably bound in the nineteenth-century history of western expansion and development. The brutal policy of Indian removal and the reservation system opened up land for white farmers. However, in the progressive march of civilization, both groups would ultimately be left behind. The “virtues of agriculture” foisted upon reservation Indians with the Dawes Act (1887) could no more save the Indian than the one-hundred and sixty acres conferred by the Homestead Act (1862) could guarantee the settler a reliable means of subsistence. Many of the settler farmers who played a key role in displacing the Indians would find themselves uprooted by market forces and costly technological advances only decades later. The increase in cultivated land led to chronic overproduction, which, compounded by a lack of regulation over the railroad industry and the necessity of incorporating costly new technologies, resulted in a severe agricultural depression that stretched from 1867 to 1898. The Smith-Lever Act (1914) sought to further “civilize” farmers by establishing a collaboration between agricultural colleges and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide for cooperative agricultural extension work focused on instruction in modern, scientific

farming practices. In 1920, the urban population exceeded the rural for the first time in American history, as agriculture gave way to modern industry and droves of dissatisfied rural youth fled the country for opportunities in the city. Unlike Indian removal, the migration of farmers to towns and cities was voluntary, but it was often in response to forces beyond their control. This tremendous demographic shift is behind representations of farmers as vanishing.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830, signed by President Andrew Jackson, formally authorized the removal of all eastern tribes to reservations west of the Mississippi. Jackson's Secretary of War, Lewis Cass, invoked the rhetoric of the Vanishing American, arguing that removal was the only way to save the Indian from extinction. He touted removal as "the only means of preserving the Indians from that utter extinction which threatens them" (Dippie 62). However, at the time of removal, many eastern Indians were farming, a practice long encouraged by the U.S. government. James Barbour, Secretary of War under President John Quincy Adams, argued that removal contradicted established government policy aimed at civilizing the Indian through agriculture. In a report for the House Committee on Indian Affairs in 1826, he stated: "they have been persuaded to abandon the chase—to relocate themselves, and become cultivators of the soil—implements of husbandry and domestic animals have been presented them" (Dippie 63). Yet the 1830 Act made clear that it mattered less that Indians become farmers than that white farmers had access to Indian land.

Most of the tales included in this study are set in the Upper Midwest, in the states of Illinois (*Zury*), Wisconsin ("Up the Coolly") and Minnesota (*Druida*), primarily between the years 1860 and 1920. Most likely, the land owned by the farmers in these

novels originally belonged to the native tribes. By this period, however, the original inhabitants would have been almost completely absent from the scene, either expelled from the region entirely or contained within reservations.

My analysis of *Zury* discusses Indian removal in the state of Illinois at some length. The early chapters of the novel chronicle the family's homesteading efforts during the early part of the nineteenth century, a time of heavy Indian-white conflict in the state, although none of the characters encounters a living Indian. In 1832, the Sauk-Fox, the largest tribe, were forced out and pursued into Wisconsin by United States Army units and the Illinois militia (Heidler & Heidler 34). That same year, the Kaskaskia, Peoria, and other small tribes ceded their lands in Illinois and moved to eastern Kansas in a pattern followed by most Indians of the Great Lakes Region (Bowes 31-32).

Most of the Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Ottawa living in southern Wisconsin were removed to Kansas in the 1830s. In 1854, the Menominee and Ojibwe who refused to leave were granted reservation land in Wisconsin. Shortly after Minnesota became a state in 1858, continued battles waged by settlers and later, the United States Army, against the Dakota Sioux culminated in the four month armed conflict known as the Dakota War of 1862. By the end of the year, most of the Dakota bands had surrendered. The largest one-day execution in American history occurred in southwestern Minnesota when thirty-eight Dakota were hanged on December 26, 1862, in Mankato. The next spring, the remaining Dakota were removed from Minnesota to Nebraska and South Dakota, and their reservations within the state were abolished. Prior to statehood, many Dakota and Ojibwe had already been forced onto smaller reservations through treaties with European

settlers.¹⁶ *Druida*, set in western Minnesota, portrays farm life after the reservation system became the fixed policy of American government in 1863, as do all of the novels included in my study (Dippie 76).

The tenant farmers of *The Grapes of Wrath* were likely descended from folks who participated in the Oklahoma Land Rush after the Indian Appropriations Bill of 1889 opened up two million acres of Indian land in Oklahoma to white settlement. Fifty thousand people from Grampa Joad's generation lined up on April 2, 1889, to claim their one hundred-sixty acres of unassigned territory in the nation's first land run.¹⁷ Those quarter sections that they scrambled to claim were provided for under the federal government's Homestead Act of 1862. Under the act, any person could file for one hundred-sixty acres of federal land if he or she met the following conditions: (1) was an American citizen or had filed intention papers; (2) was 21 years old, or the head of a family, or had served 14 days in the U.S. Army or Navy; (3) had not fought against the United States (Schlebecker 66). Ownership was contingent upon the improvement of the land and bestowed after five years of residency. However, harsh and arid conditions in the west made it difficult to earn a living from the acreage provided. The fact that homesteaders rarely received the choicest land further added to the burden. Speculators managed to take control of the majority of the land at public expense, by bribing local residents and filing fraudulent claims. In fact, only a quarter of the trillion acres designated by the Act ever served their intended purpose. Instead, the bulk of this land

¹⁶ See Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*

ended up in the control of corporate interests, primarily the timber and railroad industries, rather than with individual settlers.¹⁸

In the decades following the Homestead Act, Midwestern farmers were mired in a deep economic depression. As the amount of land under cultivation increased, excess supplies of corn and wheat drove down the prices of farm commodities. Farmers lacked economical sources of credit and found themselves privy to land speculators and greedy middlemen. Railroads drained farmers' wallets with exorbitant rate systems and unfair grading practices. Many farmers, crippled with agricultural debt, lost their farms to banks and were forced into tenancy. In 1890, twenty-nine percent of the nation's farms were encumbered by mortgage debt. Croplands in Minnesota, for example, were mortgaged to just forty-four percent of their value.¹⁹ Alongside this rural depression, the urban industrial world enjoyed unparalleled economic prosperity. Unfettered by government regulation, monopolies sprung up, particularly in the rail and steel industries, concentrating vast wealth and political power in the hands of a few. Outrage over the disparity between industrial and agricultural profit incited a number of agrarian reform movements.

The Grange was organized in 1867 to improve the social situation of farmers. The organization, which had grown to 800,000 members in thirty-three states by 1875, set up cooperatives to improve the prices that farmers received for their products and to lower

¹⁸ See chapter 6 of Mitchel Roth's *Issues of Western Expansion* (2002).

¹⁹ Whitten, David. "Depression of 1893". EH.Net Encyclopedia, edited by Robert Whaples. August 14, 2001. URL <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/whitten.panic.1893>

their costs through large-scale purchasing. Although the organization had no formal connection to politics, it agitated for government intervention in the form of railroad regulation, control of monopolies, and the creation of parcel post and postal savings banks. The Grange was succeeded by the Farmers' Alliance in 1880. The new group operated more aggressively in seeking federal assistance to alleviate the economic strain on farmers. Leaders of the Farmer's Alliance established the Populist Party in 1891 and officially entered into politics directly.²⁰

In *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy*, Dippie shifts his focus from Indians to white farmers for just a few paragraphs in a chapter on agriculture and education. The brief digression positions white farmers as fellow Vanishing Americans. Dippie archly dismisses reformers who suggested agrarian-based Indian policy as an assimilatory strategy in the post-Civil War period. “The farmer’s glory days,” he writes, “had ended with the Civil War... [T]he passing of the old order was reinforced as urban centers mushroomed and the locus of the population in the United States shifted from the country to the city” (108). Commenting on the supremacy of big business in the era of Jay Gould, John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and J.P. Morgan, Dippie concludes:

... the ship of state was committed to a course of unprecedented material growth. While the farmers watched its progress uneasily and fought a rear-guard action to retain their traditional primacy in the nation’s councils, the values of the Gilded Age, from rags-to-riches to survival of the fittest, bore down upon their own. The simple farming life would have no significant part in the future.

²⁰ See Lowry Nelson, *Rural Sociology: Its Origin and Growth in the United States*, pg. 5.

Already dependent upon eastern capital and thus the national economy with all of its fluctuations, the farmer would have to make another concession to progress by adopting the costly technology of the day, or be left permanently behind.

(110-111)

Dippie finds it ridiculous that agriculture was posed as a solution to the so-called “Indian problem” at a time when the practice was proving a miserable failure for most white farmers. Yet despite this fact, Congress adopted the Dawes Act in 1887.

The Dawes (or General Allotment) Act removed traditional Indian prohibitions on private property, dismantling tribal holdings and dividing land into allotments for individual Indians. The stated purpose of the act was to assimilate the Indian into white society by dissolving reservations (Schlebecker 219). Agriculture and citizenship went hand-in-hand as the government extended citizenship to all Indians who took out allotments. An 1891 amendment to the act authorized the government to lease unallotted tribal lands, as well as individual allotments where “age or other disability” prevented working them personally (Dippie 179). In the decades after the enactment of the Dawes Act, Indians lost two-thirds of their land (Bowes 257). There were fewer than 5,000 landless Indians in 1887, but by 1934 the figure had jumped to 100,000 Indians without land (Dippie 314). “Far from making the Indians self-supporting citizens,” writes Dippie, “the Dawes act made half of them virtual paupers living on total family incomes of \$48 a year” (315). The disastrous policy of allotment was terminated in 1934 with the Indian Reorganization Act. That year, the chairman of the House Indian Affairs Committee, Edgar Howard of Nebraska, condemned the Dawes Act for facilitating “the ruthless spoliation of defenseless wards” (314). While Indians were being forced into farming, the

government set out to reform the rural social institutions and agricultural practices of white farmers with the Country Life Commission.

Established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1907, the Country Life Commission was charged with stimulating the “static social and economic conditions in agriculture” so that it could “become an efficient supplement to modern urban-industrial society” (Danbom 43). The commission was composed of outsiders—scientists, sociologists, and businessmen; only one member had any real contact with actual dirt farmers (43). Its members were charged with the task of developing “a new rural civilization” (51). The Country Life Movement’s major achievement was the 1914 passage of the Smith-Lever Act, which provided federal funds for county farm and home demonstration agents. Supporters of these services imagined the agents as “reorganizing rural society, instructing rural children in the ways of advanced agriculture, and making scientific farmers and homemakers out of their parents” (86). Danbom refers to the county agents as “missionaries” because of their outsider status and commitment to bringing “civilization” to the rural hinterlands. In fact, most rural people were satisfied with their condition, and even those who were not entirely content resented the outsiders who were charged with their “betterment” and “uplift” (85). When farmers resisted change, agents and others associated with the movement, quickly developed the attitude that the farmers were “ignorant and degenerate people who could not be trusted to control their lives and their own institutions” (97). At the turn of the twentieth century, social critics regarded both the Indian and the farmer as national problems to be solved through intrusive and meddlesome reform efforts.

The Rise of Industrial Agriculture

Throughout this study, I refer to the abstract “forces of industrial agriculture” that turn farmers off the land. This rather vague phrase may make this thing called “industrial agriculture” seem like a phantom monolith, cruelly menacing the small family farmer. However, this shorthand reference best suits my purpose, which is to analyze representations of vanishing farmers. Industrial agriculture shapes these representations, which seek to accommodate or resist the changes wrought by it. In my study, “industrial agriculture” is less important as a nuanced concept than as an established cause of the small farmer’s decline. Yet, the following discussion of the origins and development of industrial agriculture will illuminate my analysis of the fiction by providing a more detailed look at what will later be treated rather perfunctorily.²¹

Before 1831, American farmers were largely using the same techniques that had been used for three thousand years (McWilliams 412). Then between 1831 and 1900 came the introduction of a number of specialized agricultural tools, including the reaper, the steel plow, the threshing machine, grain drills, corn planters, harrows, cultivators, and grain binders (413). With the development of gas engines, automobiles, and tractors, what had been a primarily mechanical revolution in agriculture exploded into a full-scale industrial “revolution” (413).

Until the invention of the Farmall all-purpose tractor in 1924, the family farmer had at least one advantage over the big operations—the “cheap labor supply of his family” (McWilliams 413). The Farmall tractor changed all that, setting into motion the “large-scale technological displacement” of small farmers (413). The figures are

²¹ The exception is chapter four, where industrial agriculture is discussed at some length.

staggering; in the five years between 1920 and 1925, the number of tractors on American farms doubled, from 246,083 to 505,933 (413). Dr. William J. Hall calls the loss of jobs due to “agricultural progress” “the most helpless type of unemployment” (qtd. in McWilliams 416).

The effects of mechanization are broad and far-reaching, although the most significant result is the creation of larger-scale farms that require a larger capital investment to be run successfully.²² Mechanization lowered cost and raised production, increasing competition for land and driving up the price of rent. In order to bolster profits, many farmers turned from diversified farming to monoculture, which meant that most of a farm family’s food was no longer grown at home (McWilliams 410). Finally, because mechanization speeds planting and cultivating more than harvesting, it contributed to an increased dependence upon migratory seasonal labor while reducing the demand for full-time farm employment (415-416). *The Grapes of Wrath* illustrates this shift with the story of the Joads, who join the long procession of migrant agricultural laborers bound for California after being “tractored off” their land.

In the period between 1900 and 1940, a more scientific approach to agriculture yielded paradigm-shifting discoveries, including the development of new varieties of seed and stock, enhanced disease control, better methods of weather forecasting, greater deliberation in soil use, the invention of chemical fertilizers, more effective marketing techniques, and the manufacture of crops into chemical compounds (McWilliams 417).

Samuel Crowther echoes what was already becoming a common viewpoint by 1927: “A

²² Although it would not become a significant factor until the 1950s, corporate farming appeared on the agricultural scene in the early 1920s. By 1929, around 9,211 corporations were involved in farming (McWilliams 418).

farm is only an industrial plant in which chemistry and the handling of materials are the predominant factors” (qtd in McWilliams 409). Hybrid corn, a product of this new scientific approach, replaced open-pollinated corn on seventy-five percent of farms in the Corn Belt between 1933 and 1940 (Fite 72). In 1935, a “farm chemurgic movement” based on developments in agriculture, chemistry, and industry arose with a mission to transform “the farm into a factory for the manufacture of chemical compounds” (McWilliams 429). Agricultural by-products were now being turned into plastics, shingles, automobile upholstery, anhydrous alcohol, and corn syrup.

In summary, “industrial agriculture” can be understood as encompassing all of the developments and outcomes discussed above, primarily mechanization and the application of scientific methods, which made agriculture simultaneously more capital- and less labor-intensive.

Defining the Farm Novel

Extinction is actually the founding condition for most farm novels, which is to say that it was only after the urban population outnumbered the rural that a significant quantity and variety of farm fiction began to appear (Meyer 13). Farm fiction, according to Roy W. Meyer, is that which meets the following criteria: it (1) concerns incidents that take place on farms; (2) accurately handles the physical details of farm life; (3) uses vernacular; and (4) reflects certain attitudes, beliefs, or habits of mind often associated with farm people, including: conservatism, individualism, anti-intellectualism, hostility to the town, and a type of primitivism. All of the works in my study conform to this definition. I have limited my geographic scope mostly to Midwestern farm novels

because this has been the most prolific region for the genre ever since its late nineteenth-century emergence.²³ Texts from the Midwest region also allow for a rich consideration of the impact of western expansion and development on portrayals of rural places and people. Certainly, the South possesses its own rich tradition of agrarian fiction; but the vast differences, not only in terms of history and culture, but also in the more material aspect of applied agricultural practice, place an analysis of Southern fiction beyond the parameters of this study.²⁴ *The Grapes of Wrath*, set primarily in Oklahoma and California, lies outside of this geographic scope, but because of my study's focus on the agricultural frontier and also because of the novel's status as perhaps the most influential work of American farm fiction, I would be remiss if I did not include it. This study covers fiction published between 1887 and 1939. Widely considered as the first example of "real farm fiction," *Zury* presents a logical starting point for my study. *The Grapes of*

²³ Meyer identifies the Midwest as the region where the genre of farm fiction "chiefly flourished" (4). Caroline B. Sherman, in an essay on the development of American rural fiction, writes: "Midwestern novels were far ahead in number and in quantity" (70). I borrow my definition of the Middle West from Meyer, who including the following states in the region: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota and North Dakota (Meyer 4).

²⁴ Jack Temple Kirby distinguishes southern from western agriculture in the first half of the twentieth-century based on the following features: (1) greater tenancy in south and a higher proportion of tenants not related to owners; (2) in the midwestern model, the family farm spread in "classic" fashion as young men earned inheritance from parents or money from working in town to purchase their own farm; (3) plantation and monoculture characterized most of the south while the plains had various corporate farming enterprises; (4) The south lagged behind in terms of agricultural modernization and development, and (5) The south still did not have a majority population in cities by 1920 (Kirby 3).

Wrath concludes my study because not only does it carry the primitive farmer to the edge of the continent, it also turns Kirkland's derogatory view of rural primitives on its head.

The chapters are organized chronologically according to publication date, an arrangement that reveals a gradual shift in authorial attitudes toward the primitive farmer and by extension, toward modern society. The developing reactions to the farmer's "disappearance" and the varying rhetorical forms of those reactions are the focus of my study. Throughout, shadows or traces of Indian presence within these texts and divergent ideologies of nostalgia inform my analysis. My overarching contention is that by the late nineteenth century, farmers assume the role of Vanishing Americans, a discursive formation already firmly entrenched in literary representations of Native Americans, and that constructions of farmers borrow from the previous discourse.

In chapter 1, "The Incorporation of the Rural Other: Tracing the Rhetorical Origins of Industrial Agriculture in Joseph Kirkland's *Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County*," I will discuss the way that an assimilatory marriage to a New England school-teacher dissolves the primitive aspects of a farmer's identity and remakes him into a prototype of the modern, industrial farmer in *Zury* (1887). The old log home "that audibly beg[s] to be killed and buried" like an "aged savage" symbolizes Zury's primitive past, and it is promptly razed after the wedding. I argue that rhetorical origins of industrial agriculture have their roots in this vanishing, as industrial-age agrarian mythology grows out of existing agrarian myth in the story of Zury's transformation.

In chapter 2, "Nostalgia and Evolutionary Theory in Hamlin Garland's Fiction on Farmers and Indians," I will examine the striking similarity between two homesick protagonists with deeply divided identities, one a former farm boy and the other an

assimilated Sioux, in Garland's short stories "Up the Coolly" (1891) and "The Silent Eaters" (1923). Both characters employ a deterministic philosophy to explain of the disappearance of their ancestors' way of life, yet frequently lapse into nostalgic yearnings for the past. While this nostalgic attitude may seem at odds with determinism, I argue that nostalgia is actually a logical byproduct of determinism and that Garland's decision to trace the same plot line with both small Midwestern farmers and Indians shows their interchangeability as symbols of a mythic and irrecoverable past.

In chapter 3, "Rural Vanishings: Reading the Modern Pastoral as Extinction Discourse with John T. Frederick's *Druida*," I will approach *Druida* (1923) as exemplifying the modern pastoral, which, rather than seeking to restore an agrarian golden age, attempts to commemoratively preserve the lost object. In this way, the modern pastoral contains the tacit acknowledgment that what it *really* disappearing cannot be preserved. My analysis positions the novel as a failed assimilation experiment, focusing on the young farmwoman's courtship with two civilized suitors, a doctor and a professor. For both men, as well as for her author, *Druida*'s value lies in her status as a nostalgic object, promising a connection to a past golden age of rural simplicity. On a theoretical as well as a textual level, this attitude ultimately vanishes *Druida* by removing her from time and space.

In chapter 4, "Primitive (Mis)Readings in *The Grapes of Wrath*," I will demonstrate how issues of literacy connect the Joads with primitivity, while at the same time preventing them from grasping this connection. Steinbeck deliberately underscores the family's almost superstitious fear of the written word (even suggesting that illiteracy contributes to their eviction) to create a parallel between the Joads and Native Americans.

Perhaps because of their poor literacy, the Joads are heavily influenced by national origin myths—stories of rugged frontiersman battling harsh weather, untamed wilderness, and Indians for the possession of the continent that is their divine right. This mythological worldview keeps them from identifying with other members of the dispossessed underclass and from reading the signs of Indian presence that Steinbeck scatters throughout the novel and which indicate that the Joads are merely the latest victims of “progress.” In order to escape extinction, I will argue, the Joads will need to discard the rugged individualism of national myth and embrace the primitive value of collectivism.

In the conclusion, I will consider the farmer’s transformation from vanishing figure, to ghost, and finally to resurrected icon in literature and popular culture over the past thirty years. The farmer’s spectrality in contemporary American fiction, I will argue, can be productively approached by adapting deconstruction, postcolonial and race theories of haunting from Jacques Derrida and Toni Morrison. Finally, I will discuss the farmer’s new role as counter-cultural icon as a representative shift not unlike that experienced by the Indian in the 1960s and analyzed in Leslie Fiedler’s *Return of the Vanishing American*.

Chapter 1: The Incorporation of the Rural Other: Tracing the Rhetorical Origins of Industrial Agriculture in Joseph Kirkland's *Zury*

Introduction: "Strange Matings"

When critic Henry Nash Smith declared *Zury*'s main couple "one of the strangest matings in all literature,"¹ he probably had this scene in mind:

She was Anne Sparrow, and dark night was all around... Zury was the only object whereupon her eyes could rest without a shudder. Insanity gibed and gibbered her from all else. She took hold of his coat with both her hands, bowed her head upon them, and again sobbed aloud.

He took her in his arms and carried her over the fire to the rude couch, and did not try again to leave her. One of her slippers dropped from the white foot, now stained and splashed, and long afterward the mule-drivers cherished the misshapen little foot-covering that fitted so many strange prints in the soil near by.

In the first grey dawn Anne saw Prouder's figure outlined against the light of day at the mine-mouth... She sat up in her low niche, vainly trying to reduce her clothes to some kind of order. Day had dawned, and she no longer cared what became of him—or of herself.

There he was in all his undisguised vulgarity. Coarse and shabby, base and ignorant, egotistical and boorish, glorying in qualities he ought to be ashamed of, possessed by

¹ See *Virgin Land* pg. 243

sordid greed, and—ammonia! (223-224)²

The scene narrated above occurs in an abandoned mine where Zury Prouder and Anne Sparrow take shelter after a prairie fire interrupts a church picnic in the rural Illinois countryside. Their friendship is significantly strained by the time they find themselves sharing the “rude couch.” Months earlier, Anne staged a community Christmas play, including a mock wedding with the two enacting the roles of the historic Puritan couple, John and Priscilla Alden.³ Because Zury was married, the performance scandalized the unsophisticated backwoods audience, untrained to distinguish between performance and reality. The community proclaimed the mock marriage binding when Zury’s wife died several days after the play. Neither liked the idea of marriage to the other, and they avoided each other until the fire drove Anne into Zury’s strong arms. Anne feels alarmingly apathetic about her future the next morning—not caring what becomes of herself. The chapter’s title is “Anne Compromised and Persecuted” and several pages later she feels “cheap” (227). All this implies that the two had sex that night in the cave.

² In a later 1892 printing of the novel discovered by Kenneth LaBudde and discussed in a 1949 note for the journal *American Literature*, Kirkland revised Anne’s italicized thoughts in the cave scene to make her appear more respectable and to align the text more firmly with the sentimental tradition. Among other changes, Kirkland replaces “*ammonia*” at the end of the quoted passage with: “—*not now the strong, knightly champion of distressed womanhood. Night’s glamour was gone*”

³ John Alden, one of the original pilgrims, signed the 1620 Mayflower Compact. He was also allotted land under the first act that provided for the division of land, which was formerly held in common. William Bradford mentions Alden’s portion in *Of Plymouth Plantation*, where he writes that the assignment of land “made all hands very industrious” and that more corn was planted than would have been under the common system (75-76). John Alden was among the first American farmers to hold private property. The connection between Alden and Zury positions the latter at the forefront of another historic movement in American agriculture. Whereas Alden participated in the beginnings of private farms, Zury Prouder contributes to the beginnings of modern, industrial agriculture in America. In addition to its cultural and historical significance, the mock marriage points to the performative aspect of such integration experiments. I will argue that their ‘real’ marriage is also performative insofar as it creates an ideal mixture between savage and civilized.

Phil and Meg, the twins born roughly nine months later, belong to Zury and not to the no-account husband who Anne hastily marries months after the fire. In literature twins often signify the dual-sidedness of human nature, and offer the “means of a more complete integration” with others.⁴ The fact that this “strange mating” produces twins emphasizes the theme of integration within the text.

The vast cultural differences separating Anne and Zury make them an especially odd mixture. The two come from different worlds—a perceptual gap widened by the fact that Zury’s world is practically prehistoric. Anne is a “New England school teacher who brings an unexampled cultivation and refinement to rural Illinois” (*Virgin Land* 243). Zury is a brutish and extremely greedy farmer (and unlikely school board president) who works two wives to death before marrying Anne. Through their union, the novel explores the integration between primitive and civilized against a historical backdrop of territorial settlement. Words like “coarse,” “shabby,” “base,” and “boorish” highlight Zury’s primitivity in the quoted passage. The narrative links Zury’s primitive tendencies to his farming occupation through his ammonia stench. The text further underscores his primitiveness by positioning him against the light, at the edge of the cave. This liminal location also signals his upcoming transformation from caveman (pre-industrial farmer) into a ‘civilized’, business-minded gentleman (industrial farmer). The “order” that Anne tries to reestablish in the cave symbolically aligns her with civilization. She cleans up Zury’s manners and unruly dialect in the unlikely and protracted courtship that follows. The rest of the novel chronicles her mission to conceal the vulgarity that goes “undisguised” in this episode. Their wedding—nearly two decades after the incident at the mine-shaft—concludes this

⁴ The double or twin in fiction is directly related to “Freud’s breakthrough in understanding the human personality” as two-sided, according to Clifford Hallam. Tzevtan Todorov argues that twins provide the opportunity for a “more complete” integration with others in his 1975 study, *The Fantastic*.

mission. Assimilation disguises the earlier, more primitive Zury so completely that he is barely recognizable to his former peers by the novel's end.

The narrative encounter between civilized and primitive almost always ends with a “vanishing” either through biological obliteration, assimilation, or forced migration.⁵ The culturally (racially or ethnically) distinct individual vanishes through assimilation, which erases traces of difference. Extinction discourse (the rhetoric surrounding the decline of a race or culture) often leverages the trope of vanishing. Vanishing is a representational act performed in response to a perceived or anticipated loss; and it obscures the forces behind that particular loss. The loss that *Zury* responds to is the decline of pre-industrial agriculture. The novel participates in a major rhetorical shift wherein the virtue previously associated with agrarian life gets transferred to the business sphere. Vanishing enables the shifting of this ideal. The text vanishes the formerly heroic pioneer farmer, recast as an atavistic primitive, and replaces him with the businessman, who becomes the new American ideal for the industrial age.⁶

Joseph Kirkland's mother, Caroline Kirkland, influenced his literary interests. Caroline is critically regarded as one of the first chroniclers of the frontier.⁷ A woman of some eastern social standing, she came to the Michigan frontier with her husband in the 1830s. Her most famous work, *A New Home—Who'll Follow?* (1839), interweaves narratives about easterners who feel out of place in their new frontier environment

⁵ See Walter Benn Michaels, “The Vanishing American.” *American Literary History* 2.2 (Summer, 1990): 220-241.

⁶ In his introduction to the novel, John Flanagan addresses the strategic vanishing of Zury's farmer identity. Flanagan writes that Kirkland achieves the “first convincing and full length portrait of a farmer in literature” (x). He then praises Kirkland for “wisely subordinat[ing]” the farming “facet of Zury's activity” to his “other roles” (xii).

⁷ See Flanagan and Meyer.

(Meyer 20). In his study of the Middle Western farm novel in the twentieth century, Roy W. Meyer points out how much Anne Sparrow's initial reaction to *Wayback* resembles Caroline's own observations of frontier life (28).

Joseph Kirkland was born in New York in 1830 and travelled with his family to Michigan in 1835. John T. Flanagan, who wrote extensively on Kirkland, notes the influence of the author's early experience of "hardship and discomfort" on his fiction ("Joseph Kirkland, Pioneer Realist" 274). Kirkland, he writes, "had the chance to observe very early in life the customs and speech of people living under rather primitive conditions" (275). Kirkland moved to Chicago in 1856. Along with his rural childhood, *Zury* also draws on Kirkland's experiences working for the Illinois railroad and in the coal mining business near Danville, Illinois. Later, Kirkland would go on to serve as a private in the Twelfth Illinois Infantry and then as captain in the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War. He was present at such notable skirmishes as the attack on Richmond and the Battle of Williamsburg. The Civil War, only alluded to in *Zury*, would be the subject of his largely autobiographical third and final novel, *The Captain of Company K* (1891). In addition to *Zury*, its 1888 sequel, *The McVeys*, and the Civil War novel, Kirkland contributed to *The Dial*, *Scribners*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, where he served as literary editor from 1889-1891 (Flanagan 278). But it is *Zury* for which he is best remembered.

While *Zury* was not a tremendous commercial success, it did attract the notice of Hamlin Garland and W.D. Howells, who remarked on its "fresh and native" quality (Flanagan 281). Although Flanagan faults the novel for its "inartistic shifts of character and tone" and the way the "frontier realism of the early chapters gives way to the sentimental reconciliation of *Zury* and

Anne Sparrow," he praises Kirkland's ability to create believable characters and to catch the "nuances and tones of ordinary speech" (282). Roy W. Meyer lauds *Zury* as the most "genuine" example of "farm fiction" included in his study; Meyer attributes its authenticity to Kirkland's "apparent familiarity with everyday details of farm work: house-raising, rail-splitting, fence-building...corn planting, and plowing" (27). Meyer cites Kirkland's influence on later rural fiction, writing that, "his pictures of Illinois rural life anticipate all the Gopher Prairies, Winesburgs, and Spoon Rivers" (284). Highlighting the novel's primacy as a drama of settlement, Meyer calls its introductory chapter: "one of the clearest expressions in fiction of the widespread belief that the American continent was divinely intended for the white man's occupancy and, although the task of conquering it might be a demanding one, those who survived it would be richly rewarded" (28).⁸ On a related note, Meyer remarks upon the "strain of anti-primitivism" which runs throughout *Zury* (28). According to Meyer, Kirkland's novel "debunk[s] the romantic tendency of Thoreau's nature writing, for example, by revealing nature as stinking, unattractive, and in need of improvement" (27). In *Zury*, as I will argue, the primitive is something to be tamed, managed, transformed, and ultimately vanished.

Vanishing always serves the forces of progress. It is a particularly modern phenomenon. Primitive peoples and practices must disappear to make way for a new, superior order within a modern framework. *Druida's* nostalgic vanishing, which will be discussed in chapter 3, accommodates present progress by preserving an unchanging image of the past. Nostalgia eases

⁸ Meyer cites the first paragraph of the novel, which is as follows: "Great are the toils and terrible the hardships that go to the building up of a frontier farm; inconceivable to those who have not done the task or watched its doing. In the prairies, Nature has stored, and preserved thus far through the ages, more life-materials than she ever before amassed in the same space. It is all for man, but only for such men as can take it by courage and hold it by endurance. Many assailants are slain, many give up and fly, but he who is sufficiently brave, and strong, and faithful, and fortunate, to maintain the fight to the end, has his ample reward" (Kirkland 1).

cultural dissonance surrounding major social changes such as the population shift from rural to urban majority. *Zury* responds to the same phenomenon—increasing urbanization and industrialization—with a different approach. *Zury*'s assimilatory vanishing reconstructs the past to serve the future. Published in 1887, the novel's action spans the decades between the 1820s and the 1860s. *Zury* “gives the impression of having been created through the accumulation of tall tales,” as Smith notes.⁹ Tall tales, the basis of Spring County folklore, are retellings and reconstructions of existing stories.¹⁰ Kirkland deliberately reconstructs American pioneer mythology with *Zury*. Having “grow[n] up with the region,” he symbolizes the progressive evolution of a new American ideal (xiii).¹¹ The unlikely tale of *Zury*'s marriage to Anne contains a particular assimilationist fantasy. Nash Smith attributes the strange pairing to Kirkland's allegiance to “folklore” (284). I am interested in how Kirkland updates folklore surrounding the western pioneer, in how exactly the farmer vanishes and in what that disappearance accomplishes. Farmer *Zury* vanishes under the combined influence of feminine domesticity and proper English. The improved *Zury* that appears in place of the “coarse” and “boorish” old *Zury* maintains some of the more desirable characteristics of his vanished prototype. Thus, a new folklore emerges from an existing one. The resulting hero is a hybrid who blends hard work and industry with business acumen. The “sordid greed” that characterizes the earlier *Zury* remains, but in an updated form, as a charitable interest. Basically, vanishing (assimilation) is followed by

⁹ See *Virgin Land* pg. 283.

¹⁰ After a shooting match, a group of men gathers to tell old shooting stories. A narrative comment characterizes tall tales as a particularly American type: “Of course these grew from fact to fable and from fable to that wild, grotesque, caricatured extravagance which seems to be the type of American fun” (Kirkland 379).

¹¹ This phrase about growing up with the region echoes one repeated in E.W. Howe's *The Story of a Country Town* (1883). In the earlier novel, Howe's narrator repeatedly asserts that pioneer farmers have gone west to “grow up with the country.”

a second process: the incorporation of the Other. The text marginalizes or “others” Zury through comparison with Anne, who symbolizes the dominant, New England-based culture. Their marriage vanishes Zury, who assimilates entirely. A new folk hero emerges, although nominally the same. The old agrarian ideal is selectively absorbed into the altered depiction that fuses yeoman and industrial farmer. The rhetorical origins of industrial agriculture arise from this two-part process of vanishing and incorporation.

Marriage, like other forms of integration, attempts to strike a balance between dissimilar elements. *Zury*'s main couple represents a mixture of savage and civilized traits that is heavy on the civilized. Anne's thoughts about her new situation as teacher in a frontier town reflect the novel's overarching philosophy. She thinks: “The freedom was so perfect: nature (under proper restrictions) so lovely!” (181). Both Zury and the narrator share Anne's attitude toward nature as something that must be tamed and brought under control. Industrialization produces this detached and exploitive relation to the land. While pre-industrial (more primitive) agriculture conforms to natural forces, industrial agriculture attempts to defeat nature.¹²

The novel stages another “strange mating” between pre-industrial (primitive) and industrial (civilized) agriculture. The tension between old and new ways forms the subtext for *Zury*'s central romance. This integration also ends in a vanishing. The new industrial farmer is a businessman who rises from the mists of his vanished predecessor and acquires some of the updated traits of his overall-wearing, hayseed-headed prototype. *Zury* offers a rare glimpse into the rhetorical origins of industrial agriculture.¹³ I am interested in the loss at the center of this

¹² See William Conlogue's *Working the Garden* pg. 48.

¹³ Very few novels about farm life were published in the nineteenth century. According to John T. Flanagan, “As late as 1900 only a handful of genuine farm novels had appeared” (“The Middle Western Farm Novel” 113).

creation story.

The rest of this chapter is divided into the following sections: *Zury's* Dual Historical Context; New Savages; Anne Sparrow as Missionary; *Zury's* Vanishing; The Rhetorical Origins of Industrial Agriculture, and a Conclusion. The logic behind this arrangement is to first account for the rather complicated historical context of the novel. *Zury* is set in a past period of agricultural prosperity that is much different from the state of farming in Illinois in 1887, the date of the novel's publication. Then, the next section establishes the correspondence between pre-industrial farmers and Indians as vanishing Americans. Moving on, I will examine Anne's characterization as a missionary figure to highlight the thematic contrast between civilized and savage. References to Anne as a missionary reveal the modern ideology behind *Zury's* assimilation. "Zury's Vanishing" considers the disappearance of his farmer identity, focusing on the impact of domesticity and language. The penultimate section discusses how industrial-age agrarian mythology grows out of existing myth in *Zury*. It also looks closely at the loss at the center of this creation story. The new mythology relied upon evolutionary language that valorized progress and stressed the difference between old and new ways. This section highlights the performative aspect of these origins. An analysis of the assimilated *Zury* as a hero of industrialization wraps up this section on "The Rhetorical Origins of Industrial Agriculture." Predictably, the "Conclusion" summarizes the chapter's main arguments.

***Zury's* dual historical context**

Zury looks backward from the historical circumstances of its 1887 publication to an earlier period of agricultural prosperity in the state of Illinois. Piecing the novel's exact historical context together proves difficult since the only historical sign-posts are a

reference to Ephraim Proudner's service in the War of 1812, a narrative mention that the scene opens in the "first quarter of the present century," and repeated allusions to the slavery question (9). Based on these dates, we can roughly situate the novel's action between about 1825 and 1860. The text should be examined through a dual historical lens; such an approach enables a view of the novel as working out contemporary (1880s) issues through a prior narrative. Dramatic changes swept the Illinois agricultural landscape in the 1880s as a marked decline in crop prices sparked an agrarian crusade in a state where farmers (even smaller ones) formerly enjoyed an unparalleled degree of material prosperity. Reflecting back on Illinois' agricultural heyday, *Zury* tempers contemporary discontent by invoking past memories of boom times. The long-range of this historical romance, which spans decades, makes contemporary troubles appear insignificant compared to the longer history of agricultural prosperity. A broader historical view turns present unrest into a mere episode in the larger scheme of things. Most importantly, the text portrays *Zury* as a fair and likable mortgage-holder at a time when many farmers were growing suspicious of credit and organizing to fight high interest rates on agricultural loans. Further, by locating the origins of large-scale farming as early as the 1830s with young *Zury*'s innovative methods, the novel presents industrial agriculture as a latent force, one that always-already existed within more traditional agriculture. In this way, the text naturalizes the emergence of large-scale, industrial agriculture. The Darwinian language of evolution that crops up throughout the novel contributes to this sense of natural development.

Part of that sense of natural development derives from the narrative erasure of the Indians. Ephraim's service in the War of 1812 invokes an Indian presence that the novel

never directly recognizes. In fact, Illinois was admitted to the Union in 1819, due in part to lands acquired from the Indians in the War of 1812 (Heidler & Heidler 13). Members of the Winnebago, Potawatomi, and Sauk nations had abetted Tecumseh's confederation in the War; and his death along with the British departure from the Northwest in 1813 placed these tribes at the "mercy of the United States" (Heidler & Heidler 30). White settlers flooded Illinois after the War of 1812. Between 1820 and 1830, the total population of the state rose from 55,211 to 157,445 (Bowes 64). Before 1830, white settlers amassed in the southern part of the state along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. After 1830, settlement pushed into the northern part of the state, displacing the Sauks and Ho-Chunks. In the late 1820s, conflicts arose in this area between the Ho-Chunks and white miners who ignored treaty boundaries (Bowes 64). Notably, Zury's lead mine is in Galena, in the northwest portion of the state. Thus, his ownership of the mine is underwritten by a history of white-Indian conflict.

In 1830 President Andrew Jackson signed the Removal Act that provided \$500,000 in federal monies to negotiate treaties and finance the "transportation of entire tribes of Indians out of the East" to lands west of the Mississippi (25). Under the direction of Black Hawk, portions of the Sauk-Fox Indians protested a fifty-million-acre land cession to the United States, brokered by some dubious tribal representatives in 1804. Black Hawk, who fought with the British in 1812, consented to removal to Iowa. However, facing starvation, he led his four hundred followers back to Illinois in 1832. They were attacked by U.S. Army units and Illinois militia and pursued into Wisconsin in what came to be known as the Black Hawk War. The ensuing conflict left almost no Indian survivors (Heidler & Heidler 34). In that same year, the Kaskaskia, Peoria, and

other small tribes ceded their lands in Illinois and moved to eastern Kansas in a pattern followed by most Indians of the Great Lakes Region (Bowes 31-32). Settlers in the region witnessed and took part in their own local version of the Trail of Tears in the summer of 1838. Eight hundred Potawatomis traveled through Illinois in their forced march, which brought them six-hundred and sixty miles from northern Indiana to eastern Kansas; at least twenty-eight children died along the way (Bowes 79).

And so, when Kirkland places the Proudler wagon train before an unpeopled wilderness covered in “primeval forest,” he ignores a well-established Indian presence in northern Illinois (Kirkland 9). The Potawatomi Indians lived in the northern part of the state, where they would have been growing corn at the time of the Proudler’s arrival. For the native population, the appearance of these prairie schooners meant the destruction of their agricultural livelihood. One Potawatomi leader reported in 1832 that “the white people destroyed all [our] corn and the game had left the Country” (Bowes 66). The Sauk women who followed Black Hawk back into Illinois and who were subsequently exterminated by the militia carried with them “bags of seed-corn for planting” (65). The novel includes a passing reference to “Indian corn” as an inferior precursor to modern varieties (Kirkland 45). Thus, a long history of Indian agriculture is buried beneath the story of Zury’s evolution from primitive farmer to modern agriculturalist.

Illinois was the first state where, thanks to brutal and thorough Indian removal, pioneer settlers could obtain vast open stretches of untimbered land. When Ephraim Proudler arrives in Spring County from southern Pennsylvania he is struck by this new sight. In 1860, the decade in which the majority of the novel takes place, Illinois was the premier state in terms of corn, wheat, and oat production (Gates 24). Improvements in

farm machinery enabled farmers to double the area of their production over the course of just a few years between 1860 and 1864 (17). These advancements, all occurring during the 1850s and 1860s, included: the perfection of the reaper, improved corn planter, a plow better adapted to the prairie, the power sheller, the circular harrow, the corn cutter and stacker, as well as the introduction of the cultivator (16-17). A 1932 article in the journal *Agricultural History* describes a pair of gigantic Illinois farms in the 1860s, one a staggering 40,000 acres and the other, 26,000 acres. The article cites these mammoth "capitalist farmer" operations as the "true forerunners of the highly mechanized farms" of the 1930s (18). These mega-farms were the exception rather than the rule in 1860s Illinois where holdings of four to six thousand acres were considered "large farms." However, such "spectacular" examples had a tremendous influence on the direction of Illinois agriculture, according to Gates (24). The capitalist-farmers of the 1850s and 60s were the first to introduce the one-crop system to the Corn Belt (24). Corn is the only crop mentioned in *Zury*. Between 1882 and 1889, a period which includes *Zury's* publication, corn fell from sixty-seven to thirty-four cents per bushel (Destler). The novel's flashback to earlier, more prosperous times should be understood in the context of this agricultural crisis.

A handful of farmers' organizations arose in Illinois in the 1880s in response to the bleak agricultural climate, including the Farmer's Mutual Benefit Association of Illinois and the Illinois State Farmers Association. The former organization was founded in 1887, the year of *Zury's* publication. Members charged that the agrarian community was being robbed of the fruits of its own productivity. They based their claim on a number of signs, including "the growing influence of cities, decline of rural prestige, and

an increasing tendency to picture the farmer as an uneducated simpleton who deserved his fate" ("The Rise of the Farmer's Mutual Benefit Association" 92). *Zury* dialogs with this mounting conception of farmers as ignorant hayseeds through its portrayal of the early, unassimilated Zury, as well as its depiction of the Anstey family as comically behind the times. The novel participates in dominant representations of farmers as hopeless rubes while also providing—through Zury's transformation—a model instance of a farmer overcoming ignorance. Zury escapes the fate of the primitive Ansteys (who will certainly vanish before modernization) through an education in capitalist farming and politics. Not all Illinois farmers were hurt by the drop in prices. As Destler points out in his article on agricultural unrest in Illinois, farmers with capital and access to credit actually profited between 1880 and 1895, and "invited imitation" (111).

Zury provides loans and holds mortgages, actions that should theoretically make him unpopular with his farmer neighbors. Drainage costs, borrowing by cattlemen and speculative land buying by farmers all contributed to high farm mortgage indebtedness for Illinois farmers in the late-1880s (Destler 109). High interest rates and commission fees on loans, along with taxes on rural real estate, heavy railroad charges and the rapid dissipation of the public domain, spurred the growth of the agrarian movement in Illinois. Zury's character directly responds to these grievances. His name comes from the term "usury," which is the practice of lending money and charging an exorbitant interest rate. Usurers are among the most reviled characters in all literature. However, Zury's farmer neighbors treat his miserliness as a matter of local pride and exchange good-natured stories about his various financial schemes. Zury models not only profitable farming methods but also a specific relationship between farmers and bankers. The novel also

exonerates railroad interests through its portrayal of Zury's illegitimate son, Phil, who loves trains and works as a conductor. The goodness and gentleness that characterize him reflect positively onto the railroad industry. In one illustrative example, Phil shows his compassion by refusing to take part in a bird-shooting match with friends. Agrarian-rights organizations identified the retail middleman as another enemy of the farmer in this period. The middleman served as a reminder to the farmer that he was "linked in an industrial chain" to manufacturers and Wall Street (Destler). The Farmer's Mutual Benefit Association sought to eliminate the middleman by facilitating the cooperative buying of farm materials like twine and grain binders. *Zury* further excuses corporate interests through Anne Sparrow, who works as a clerk in a retail store. Much of the romance between Anne and Zury unfolds in her store, with the deliberate effect of transforming retail space into sentimental space.

A platform of principles adopted by the Illinois State Farmer's Association in 1873 epitomizes the anti-corporate stance taken by many independent farmers of the period.¹⁴ Among the platform's principles are those against the loaning of government credit to corporations, against the conglomeration of plow manufacturers, and in favor of state control of the railroads. The objectives of the farmer's association had little in common with those of the Illinois Agricultural Institute, a group of farmer-politicians representing the state's sixth congressional district. The organization's 1888 list of resolutions predictably favors greater state regulation of farmers and protects corporations.¹⁵ One resolution "call[s] the attention of the producing classes to the

¹⁴ *The Jones County Liberal* 25 Dec. 1873: Monticello, Iowa.

¹⁵ *Daily Journal* 8 Feb. 1888: Freeport, Illinois.

imperative necessity of adopting the most improved and successful methods of cultivating the greatest diversity of crops that can be grown to advantage on our soils." Another asserts that the "natural fertility of the soil, proximity to markets, unequalled transportation facilities, and many other unequalled advantages in the way of a high civilization, not enjoyed to such an extent by the farmers of any other section of the country, should stimulate the Illinois farmer to give more attention to improving his mind, farm, and stock, and cultivating a spirit of contentment that adds so much to the permanency and prosperity of the agricultural classes." This last resolution implicates individual farmers in their own vanishing by depicting their permanence as contingent upon their own attitude rather than external forces. The focus on achieving a "spirit of contentment" reveals the congressmen's anxiety in the face of the farmers' mounting discontent. The novel shows the Illinois state government's enthusiastic support of modern agricultural improvements. Zury is elected to the state legislature and (with Anne's help) becomes a skillful rhetorician who goes on to preach the virtues of agricultural improvement even after his term ends. The text goes beyond defusing the critiques waged by various farmers' organizations to furnish the farmer-politicians with a mouthpiece.

While the price of crops fell drastically, land prices—fueled by speculation—rose steeply. Rising land values hurt small farmers who now had to pay higher taxes on their land. Economic pressures forced small farmers to sell and move on. "Slowly but surely," writes Destler, "the poorer farm owners were crowded out" of Illinois (111). Emigration from rural Illinois peaked in 1893 (Destler). The vanishing that *Zury* registers is a historical reality. The public domain, the store of "free" land known as the frontier, was

disappearing. The small, independent farmer was also fading out of the bigger picture of Illinois agriculture.

New Savages

Zury links the less business-minded farmer with the Indian in terms of their inevitable disappearance. The description of *Zury*'s old home displays a modern attitude toward progress while linking farmers and Indians as primitive figures. According to the narrator, the "old log house [was] still standing, though almost audibly begging to be killed and buried as they say aged savages do" (342). The log house stands behind the modern one that he built after marrying Anne. The primitive structure represents his earlier life, before his metamorphosis, when he was still an ambitious but ill-mannered farmer. The description of the cabin as pleading for death like an old savage plays on a familiar nineteenth-century trope picturing the primitive as tragically but inevitably at odds with the modern world. The strange turn of phrase does not explain the circumstances behind the primitive's death wish. This omission implies that "savages" intuitively realize that their time has passed. Further, having them beg for death absolves their executioners of responsibility and consequently of guilt. The analogy makes the progression from cabin to luxurious home (and from farmer to business man) seem divinely ordained and even desirable.

The stark contrast between the recently civilized *Zury* and his neighbors, the primitive Anstey family, exaggerates the speed and degree of scientific and cultural progress on the prairie. Tall tales like this one depend upon exaggeration.¹⁶ The Anstey's are also destined to vanish but in the manner of the log home and the aged savage rather than through assimilation. The elderly

¹⁶ Patrick Brantlinger writes that extinction discourse, like tall tales, is "hyperbolic" (11). The doomed predictions forecasted in extinction discourse are exaggerated in both their "fatality and finality" (11). See Brantlinger's *Dark Vanishings*.

farm couple comes to marvel in slack-jawed wonder at the modern conveniences of the new Prouder home. Their responses show them as incompatible with modern technology. The narrative portrays their resistance to change as self-destructive. Superstitious Mrs. Anstey cannot distinguish between new inventions and miracles when examining the Prouders' indoor plumbing system. Her dialect-rich response shows her struggle to fathom recent technological advances:

“When matches fust come in, I thought it wuz a merikle t’jest scrape a little cold stick ‘n’ hev a fire right off. Then when a guerryotyper come along ‘n’ tuk my ol’ man so it seemed ‘s though he ‘d jes’ looked in the’glass ‘n’ the’ image hed struck in ‘n’ stuck thar—het wuz another. Then the railroad come along. But this beats’em all. Ye jes’ turn th’ handle, so-fashion, ‘n’ thar ye be! Yes—I thank the Lord!” (521)

Nineteenth-century literary and anthropological discourse often portrays primitivism as “self-extinguishing” (Brantlinger 2). Extinction discourse typically represents primitive types as vanishing because of some inherent flaw rather than due to external violence. Superstition is one of the “savage customs” typically blamed for the disappearance of primitive peoples (2).¹⁷ Kirkland attributes the Ansteys’ poverty to conservatism and ignorant superstition. The text uniformly depicts progress as good for its own sake. Like the log cabin, the Ansteys will need to make way for newer developments.

The narrative likens unscientific farmers to Indians with the Ansteys. When youngest daughter Eureka Anstey first sees Anne in her eastern-style dress, she studies her clothing as a “Sioux” might regard photographic equipment. She believes it is “Big Medicine” (116).

Eventually Eureka absorbs enough of her teacher’s civilizing influence to offset her primitive

¹⁷ Other “savage customs” believed to cause extinction are: nomadism, warfare, infanticide, human sacrifice, and cannibalism” (Brantlinger 2).

breeding. A passage describing the girl's feet declares the superiority of a specific blend of savage and civilized. The description also equates primitivity with childhood, suggesting the natural progression of individuals and societies into a more civilized state. Kirkland narrates as Eureka puts on her shoes:

Those feet would do for a sculptor's model. Going barefoot, as a child, if not too long continued, and on too severe tasks, gives to the foot a fine set of curves, strong and lithe. Each toe grows to maturity perfect and separate from its neighbors, having, at will, a life and motion of its own. It is almost as different from more civilized toes as a fresh grape is from a packed raisin. (184)

This opinion echoes Anne's earlier contention that "nature" is so "perfect under proper restrictions" (181). Significantly, this ideal limits the barefoot or primitive phase to a period of childhood. This bizarre passage makes sense if we read *Zury* as a fable of western settlement. The book's subtitle is "a novel of western life," after all. The barefoot phase corresponds to earlier stages of national settlement when individual freedom was more necessary and desirable. The newly mature nation (the adult foot), however, requires restrictions (shoes).

If the presence of the Indian defines the mythological West, as Leslie Fiedler persuasively argues in *The Return of the Vanishing American*, what can we infer from their near absence in *Zury*?¹⁸ The text puts Indians under erasure, but they remain as an absent presence. The only mention of an Indian occurs in a tall tale told after a shooting match. The boy's story comically portrays "Mr. Injin" as inept in modern weaponry (380). Farmers assume the "ultimate otherness" typically represented by the Indian in this novel of Western settlement (Fiedler 22). Both Mrs. Anstey's fear of the daguerrotype machine and Mr. Injin's fumbling with the rifle

¹⁸ See *The Return of the Vanishing American* pg. 21.

accomplish the same end: these comic scenes make the farmer's wife and the Indian appear hopelessly out of touch with the modern world. The savage is a placeholder against which the modern defines itself; it matters little whether an Indian or a farmer holds the position.

Traces of the erased Indian are discernable in the description of vanishing prairie grass. The Illinois prairie grass is proud, hardy, and absolutely destined to disappear before the encroachment of civilization: all characteristics popularly associated with Indians in extinction discourse. Farmers' plows destroy the prairie grass in Kirkland's retelling of a common narrative that has civilization triumphing over wildness. The grass growing among the wildflowers was "persistent" and "peculiar." It was a:

hardy, seedless growth that spreads only by pushing out its intricate, interlacing roots; tenacious of life, and resisting drought and even fire with wonderful hardihood, but never deigning to reestablish itself after its chosen place has been desecrated by the plow. In ground that has been cultivated and then allowed to return to waste, other grasses may be sown, strange weeds may plant themselves in wild waste; but its former proud occupant never returns. (10)

The text presents extinction as inescapable. The grass *never* returns. This line possesses all the "fatality and finality" of extinction discourse (Brantlinger 11). The text depicts the vanishing grass as "self-extinguishing" insofar as the decision not to return is presented as a free choice. Pride keeps the grass from returning, not the inhospitable landscape. The grass perishes because of an internal flaw, much like the savage in extinction discourse. This description of the doomed prairie grass naturalizes progress and overwrites a history of violence and native dispossession. It does so by presenting settlement as a confrontation with the landscape only, ignoring the human dimension. This consideration of the prairie grass introduces the motif of progress and the

destruction that attends it.

In *Zury*, progress entails the individual's ability to adapt to drastically new environments. Thus, assimilation is a kind of progress. The text examines Zury's evolution through the twin influences of environment and biology. "Frontier life," writes Kirkland, "was what [Zury] needed to grow in" (16). After comparing Zury to a horse that works best with the reins loosened, Kirkland sets the tone for a study in literary naturalism: "So sets out a traveler magnificently equipped with natural gifts. Let us see how circumstances favor, or dwarf, or distort their growth" (16). Zury readily adapts to changing circumstances, thereby improving on his natural gifts. This tale of modern progress requires the continual triumph of civilization over savagery—a conquest that begins in the buried narrative of Indian displacement and carries through to Zury's remaking into a modern paragon of agribusiness.

The disappearance of savagery through assimilation was also the goal of the 1887 Dawes Act. This piece of federal legislation, passed the same year that *Zury* was published, sought to make Indians citizens by first making them farmers. The Dawes Act identified Indian potential for citizenship with the "ability to adopt civilized habits of life" (Michaels 221). Each family was given 160 acres of reservation land. Citizenship was conferred along with land allotment in an elaborate ritual during which the Indian placed his hand on a plow while swearing to give up the hunt in favor of agriculture.¹⁹ The example of the Dawes Act shows the progressive trajectory of assimilation efforts around agriculture. As the government sought to make farmers of Indians, a massive propaganda campaign was underway to convert farmers into scientists and businessmen.

¹⁹ This citizenship ritual was practiced between 1887-1924. It is described in the U.S. Department of the Interior's "Ritual on Admission of Indians to Full American Citizenship." A copy is held in the Joseph W. Wellington collection at the Montana State University Library in Bozeman.

“A Little Queen among the Rough People”: Anne Sparrow as Missionary

Anne’s intellectual theories along with “independence,” “pride,” and “strength” kindle a missionary impulse that brings her into the wilderness of Wayback, Illinois. She grew up in a “modest” but “intellectual household” (90). Her widowed mother edited a local paper. Anne wrote book reviews in her time off from the cotton factory. After her mother’s death, Anne attempted to make her living as a newspaper writer but failed. She takes her “broad views” from the New England “socialistic movement” which put her in touch with the era’s “most advanced thinkers” (91). She imagines herself becoming “a little queen among the rough people she was to meet in the wilds” (294). Her fantasy is quickly destroyed once she meets her students, who terrify her with their “barbarism in manners, dress, and person” (162). She fears herself “unfit” for teaching such “uncouth rustic[s]” (97). She worries after her first day teaching: “Had she (metaphorically) descended to the very foot of the social ladder to be told that she must go lower or starve?” (97). She must descend further into the primitive realm in order to survive. The fear behind such literary forays into the wilderness is always that the agent of civilization will “go wild” herself; that the savage influence will ultimately predominate over the civil. However, Anne triumphs over her new environment by winning the minds of her students and the heart of Zury, the roughest school board member.

Their integration improves Anne as well as Zury. Although Anne changes far less than her husband, their marriage is depicted as achieving the ideal mixture of civilized and savage. Their mixture recalls Anne’s statement that nature is lovely under the proper restrictions and her preference for Eureka Anstey’s semi-civilized toes. Anne’s most significant change is that she overcomes her fear of the dark after bearing Zury’s children. Her contact with the primitive Zury

works like a vaccine that inoculates her against darkness. Anne loses her fear of darkness without herself becoming dark (primitive, foreign). However, Zury cannot become *enlightened* without shedding his primitiveness.

Her victory requires that she first conquer a highly symbolic fear of the dark. She was, Kirkland writes, “morbidly sensitive to darkness” (92). The narrative equates darkness and wilderness. When the school board members disband after her interview, Anne is left to find her own way to the tavern in the dark. She imagines that “Black Dread has found her at last” and screams out (102). Mr. Anstey appears, and she begs him to take her out of the “wilderness” (103). She loosely reenacts this moment months later while dressed as the Puritan Priscilla in a Christmas play. The scene contrasts her English heritage with the darkness of the woods and the western savages. She delights the schoolhouse crowd with a song sung in “her sweetest tones and clearest English” (194). The soliloquy she delivers “pointed to the cruel sea at the east of her, the more cruel savages on the west, the dark woods all about her. And home, dear England, so far away!” (195). Her mock marriage to Zury, in the role of Puritan John Alden, follows this speech. Their friendship suffers until Anne’s fear of the dark drives her into the most primitive of locations (basically, a cave) and into the stinking rustic’s arms.

When a grass fire breaks out after a church picnic, Anne abandons her effeminate escort, Mr. McVey, and clings to the more capable Zury for safety. Significantly, McVey is also a Boston native and the only man in town with an education comparable to hers. The fire forces Anne and Zury to take shelter in a coal mine. He wants to swim across the river to escape the fire and to let others know they are safe. She is terrified of being left along in the dark cave. Nearly insane, she pleads with Zury to stay, even threatening to drown herself. She sees him as a

“vision of life and comfort” (220).²⁰ She thinks him a “constant friend and protector,” and wonders why she did not want to marry him (222). She reminds him of their mock marriage ceremony and suggests that he would never leave her if their wedding had been real. He asks her to let him go but she refuses. The ensuing scene is quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

The next morning Zury leaves for home before Anne in order to avoid gossip. She runs into McVey on the road to town. She finally accepts his outstanding marriage proposal after considering that he is “more like her in education, language, habit of thought and feeling, than anybody of either sex whom she had met since she left New England” (295). They marry soon after, despite her advancing pregnancy. Zury uses his influence to get Anne a bookkeeping job at the general store in a nearby town. The twins that come soon after the wedding belong to Zury. Soon after their birth Anne finds that the “darkness had lost its terrors” (308). The newborn’s first visitor is Zury himself (308). The children, Meg and Phil, *never* appear with their supposed father and namesake, Mr. McVey. The twins are described at one point as possessing “the unconscious cruelty of the savage in our nature” (312). They embody the mixture of primitive and civilized represented by their parents.

Zury promotes the integration of opposites. Anne is not satisfied with the super-similar McVey but yearns instead for the brute Zury. She is not disappointed when McVey leaves for California to seek his fortune or when he dies several months later. Instead, she collaborates with Zury on speech writing for his Senate-run before finally consenting to marry him. Perspective explains the differing outcomes of the respective assimilation experiments explored in this and an upcoming chapter. Whereas *Druida*’s nostalgic (past-focused) narrator maintains an unsullied

²⁰ The text stresses the unreasoning quality of Anne’s decision-making at this point. She is referred to as “lunatic,” “madwoman,” and “insane” within the space of a paragraph (221).

vision of primitive perfection, *Zury*'s progress obsessed (future-focused) narrator blends primitive into civilized.

Zury's Vanishing

The domestication of Zury Prouder begins when he admires the “nicely whitewashed” picket fence surrounding Anne’s cottage (318). He then appreciatively notes the flowerbeds, curtains, lampshades, doormat, and the yard swing. These feminine touches appeal to him for their value, which he judges in monetary rather than aesthetic terms. Zury’s association of interior decorating with money is underscored in another visit to Anne’s home. This time the table-spread catches his eye. He assembled a:

...mental inventory of the pretty and simple surroundings, so different from the coarse, bare space and plenty of his own farm-house.

‘That table-spread reminds me of purple ‘n’ fine linen; the tents of Kedar and curtains of Solomon. How much might that have cost, Mis McVey?’

‘Two dollars.’

‘Gee Whillikin’s! Two dollars!’ (424)

The biblical reference he applies to the purple linen table-spread brings up issues of primitivism and imperialism. The tents of Kedar appear in the “Song of Solomon” (1:5). “Kedar” is the name of the second son of Ishmael, and also of a nomadic Arabian tribe that lived in tents made of the skins of black goats. The bible verse that Zury references reads: “I am dark, but lovely, oh you daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar and the curtains of Solomon.”

Later nineteenth-century American domestic culture appropriates items from the Far East like the tablecloth. It also incorporates its own internal Others—farmers like Zury, who is

cleaned up and effectively house-trained in the novel. The presence of Oriental-style furnishings in an Illinois parlor room suggests a complex circuit of international trade. The table-spread symbolizes wealth and luxury to Zury, but to a twenty-first century reader it indicates imperialism.

Amy Kaplan persuasively argues that issues of imperialism and domesticity are related. In “Manifest Domesticity,” she writes:

The border between the domestic and the foreign, however, also deconstructs when we think of domesticity not as a static condition but as a process of domestication, which entails conquering and taming the wild, the natural, and the alien. Domestication in this sense is related to the imperial project of civilizing, and the conditions of domesticity often become markers that distinguish civilization from savagery. Through the process of domestication, the home contains within itself those wild or foreign elements that must be tamed; domesticity not only monitors the borders between the civilized and the savage but also regulates traces of the savage within itself. (582)

Zury conforms to Kaplan’s thesis that domestication works to separate civilized and savage while also policing the savage within. The narrative repeatedly distinguishes between domestic and foreign as in Mr. Anstey’s criticism of Zury as a stuck-up “European furriner,” in Anne’s initial fear of the “alien” West, and in Zury’s contention that his black servant is “no more fit fer an American citizen ‘n’ a voter, th’n a ringtailed pssum with one eye” (526, 338). This novel of western settlement repeatedly distinguishes those who belong in the west from those who ought to remain strangers.

Zury is a racially coded character whose Jewish ethnicity is underscored by his father’s ethnic name (Ephraim), his own name—an adaptation of “usury,” and repeated allusions to his

legendary avarice that is tellingly, an inherited trait. Describing Zury's early development into a capable settler farmer, Kirkland writes: "As to niggardliness, there was a confessed rivalry between [father and son]. Each would tell of the money-making and money-saving exploits of the other, and of his efforts to surpass them" (76). The portrayal of Jewish peoples is a fraught issue in American literature of the mid-nineteenth century. As Gina Rossetti argues in *Imagining the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature*, the shaky economic climate prompted many American authors and cultural critics to depict Judaism in derogatory terms (103). Yet, she notes that on the "positive" side of the Jewish stereotype, Jews are credited with a "cunning and keen business sense" that contributed to their financial success (103). Zury's thrift is the subject of much discussion, and occasionally celebration, for the citizens of Wayback. On the "negative" side, according to John Higham, "the Jew was seen as the incarnation of those instincts that individuals and societies alike needed to outgrow; childish, primitive, thoroughly inbred, the Jew embodied a stage of sexual development which was understood as primitive and perverse and therefore degenerate" (214-215). The cave scene, with its not too subtle suggestion of primitive sexual conquest, certainly bears out Higham's observation of the sexual degeneracy of the stereotypical Jewish character. The novel forwards the idea of Jewishness as a primitive stage of development to be outgrown with its focus on the progressive development of Zury Proudler in the direction of increasing social refinement and charity towards the less fortunate.

The quintessential Anglo, Anne tames Zury and his domestication extends the British imperial project in America. Her Puritan role in the Christmas play and her very proper English align Anne more closely with England (or at least New England) than with western America. Her characterization as a missionary figure places the West in a subordinate position by depicting westerners as dependent upon the east for culture and enlightenment. Zury's assimilation

presents a model for countless other western pioneers because he is a type, a mythical compilation of tall tales more than a single man.²¹

The image of whitewash joins the assimilatory strategies of domesticity and proper grammar in *Zury*. This imagery both conveys the power of whiteness over darkness and associates whiteness with capital. Zury appreciates the “nicely whitewashed” picket fence surrounding Anne’s home (318). Like a jealous lover, he thinks that McVey did not do the whitewashing but that Anne herself had to do it. The whitewash attracts Zury’s attention because it improves the home’s value. Whitewash is like the fine veneer of civilization that attaches to persons and objects and raises their value.²² When someone insists that all the credit for Zury’s political speech belongs to her, Anne responds: “The speech was his, and his alone. It’s just as sensible to call it mine as it would be to say that a man built a house when he only whitewashed it” (358). Her metaphor implies that Zury supplied the content, and she contributed the form. This fits with a persistent and familiar Western stereotype associating primitive peoples with body and civilized peoples with mind; another variation identifies nature with primitivism and culture with civilization. The narrative reinforces the stereotype with its explanation of the collaborative speech-writing process between Anne and Zury. In the first example, “Anne found herself...drawn into the task Zury had laid out for her—putting his ideas into shape” (344). And, a page later: “she would take up his theme, give all his words, together with as many more,

²¹ Zury’s representative quality is established in the opening pages. The Prouder family wagon train is described as “only one of a million like unto it which have traversed this land, headed westward in the century past, and will continue to travel for a generation yet to come” (4).

²² Another allusion to whitewash occurs when Zury marvels at the tone of Anne’s hand, saying: “Thar’s a hand t’ make a white-wash brush turn pale!” (366). Civilization is likened to veneer in a 1908 work of rural sociology: “civilization is at least partially veneer; polish does wonders for the appearance of folks as well as furniture...much of the so-called barrenness of country life is the oak minus the polish” (Butterfield 6).

throw in personal hints which had perhaps been suggested by the day's conversations" (345). In their rhetorical collaboration savage and civilized are blended into a democratic language remarkable for its intelligibility and ability to inspire a large audience.

Zury solicits Anne's help when he decides to run for the state legislature. The language in which he frames his proposal reinforces the Cartesian split between mind and body, and predictably locates Anne in the mind and himself in the body. He tells her: "Ef I hed your brains, and my body, tew, I'd turn the tables...Farmers ain't no fools. They'll listen to reason" (327). She coaches him before his first large public assembly, developing phrases "that would sound half-way familiar and half-way new" (347). The following phrase exemplifies their collaborative efforts with Anne supplying the familiar and Zury the new:

"Friends and fellow-citizens! When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one man to offer himself to his fellow-men, as a candidate asking for their votes, a decent respect for the opinions of mankind requires that he should give them such reasons for granting his request as he may be able to present, be those reasons good or bad."
(348)

This hybrid phrasing was "shrewdly adapted to taking the simple hearers captive" by not talking down to them but also not talking over their heads (348). The text situates this discursive adaptation against the larger social adaptation of its main character. The Darwinian notion of fitness, another term for adaptability, comes up twice before this—when Anne worries that she's "unfit" to teach such unrefined students and when Zury contends that his black servant is less "fit" than a possum to be a citizen. The recurring commentary on adaptation underscores the importance of assimilation in the narrative. The quoted example adapts the Declaration of Independence to campaign purposes. Ironically, the pair manipulates a freedom-based discourse

to captivate their audience. Here, the narrative openly acknowledges the power of rhetoric in shaping reality while using that same rhetorical power to reconstruct an influential American icon: the farmer.

Zury attracts the widowed Anne with his public speaking abilities. She is enthralled by the “rude, grotesque, picturesque force of the plain man’s diction” (465). Zury’s speech patterns are quite unlike her “clearest English” and “Boston pronunciation” (214). She experiences an “intoxicating delight in hearing her best words uttered in Zury’s strong voice and masterful manner” (363). She responds physically to his voice uttering her words; it made “her heart beat fast, her cheeks glow, and her eyes shine with the new joy of oratory” (363). The situation resembles that in the mine cave during the fire when she admires him as her “fearless,” “powerful,” “protector” (222). She is once again attracted to his primitive side but this time the interest is more intellectual than physical. She is dazzled by the effectiveness of their specific rhetorical blend. Previously, her ideas went unheard without his body to express them. Zury literally enlivens her discourse. Once she tempers his primitive dialect with her own proper English she is ready to accept his marriage proposal. Mr. Anstey verifies the change in Zury’s speech. The old farmer tells Zury that the neighbors criticize him. He says, “the ‘llaow ye don’t ollers talk country fashion” (526). Zury’s linguistic assimilation paves the way for a broader cultural and biological integration with civilization.

The novel treats the eventual extinction of folks like the Ansteys as a biological imperative, as if they belong to a separate and weaker race that is doomed to pass. Zury escapes extinction only through assimilation. He loses the greater part of his previous identity in the process; in that sense, Zury’s old self vanishes or disappears. His legacy will continue in a significantly altered form through his children. The oldest child, Phil, inherits his father’s hard

work ethic. That virtue, developed in the frontier farmer, is thus transferred to the train conductor son. In this way the tall tale of Zury's unlikely rise to wealth and social eminence extends existing American mythology by building upon the agrarian ideal. The virtue that Jefferson famously located in the breast of the farmer is transplanted to the railroad man.

The Rhetorical Origins of Industrial Farming

The rhetorical origins of industrial farming in the United States can be traced back to around 1880, the decade of *Zury's* publication.²³ By "rhetorical origins," I mean nothing more than the beginnings of writing about large-scale, industrial agriculture. A "paradigm shift" in terms of popular thinking about agriculture took place at the end of the nineteenth century (Conlogue 15). No longer viewed as a way of life, farming was now understood primarily as a business. Farm industrialization is more than the use of machinery and scientific methods; it rests upon a different ideology. "Industrial agriculture, William Conlogue argues, "aggressively seeks to replace haphazard tradition with rationality, systemization, efficiency, organization, professionalization, and an identification of farming with urban manufacturing" (16). Depictions of industrial-style farming in the agricultural press as early as the 1880s and in farm novels like Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) supplied a vocabulary to help Americans imagine the new style of farm (16). Those responsible for rewriting the definition of farming and the farmer, including Kirkland, were not closely associated with agriculture (15). From the very beginning, hegemonic forces have shaped popular conceptions of the industrial farmer.

Zury's assimilation through marriage mirrors a much larger integration process underway in late nineteenth century America between pre-industrial and industrial farmers. Conlogue

²³ See Conlogue.

argues that the transition to industrial agriculture precipitated a changed relation to nature. While preindustrial agriculture conforms to natural forces, “industrial agriculture tries to overcome nature on a limitless scale” (Conlogue 48). Anne sounds very much like a spokesperson for industrial agriculture when she thinks: “nature (under proper restrictions) so lovely!” (181). She worked in a Massachusetts cotton factory before coming to Wayback. She imports an efficient, factory-style sensibility to Spring County. Her marriage to Zury weds factory with frontier. The narrative highlights this contrast with a juxtaposed description of the couple:

At the very time when [Zury] Prouder and his neighbors were wagoning corn all the way from Spring County to Chicago, a young girl named Anne Sparrow was growing up in a Lowell cotton-factory, wearing out her shoes and a clean pine floor by her ceaseless tread, to and fro, behind frames which held hundreds of whirring spindles. As she walked, with a springy, half-dancing step, she kept time to the rhythm of the machinery. (89-90)

Anne’s movement coincides with that of the machinery, rhetorically connecting her with machine technology. The “springy, half-dancing step” shows that she maintains a measure of vitality. She is just lively enough to attract a more primitive type like Zury. However, their particular amalgamation tends toward the civilized (i.e., machine rather than body or industrial rather than pre-industrial) extreme.

Paradigm shifts like the one taking place in agriculture require the redefinition of existing terms and the updating of old mythology. A crucial part of this redefinition involves remaking the farmer in the image of the businessman. An 1890s *Farm Journal* editorial exemplifies the rhetoric of farmer as businessman: “We farmers are manufacturers, and when we adopt the successful manufacturers’ emphatic methods we shall succeed as well as they” (qtd. in Conlogue

17). Evolutionary language figures largely into the rhetorical transformation of farmer into businessman. Agricultural reformers contended that the “industrial farmer was the final step in a natural evolution of the agriculturalist from pioneer to manufacturer” (Conlogue 16). For example, in *The Modern Farmer in His Business Relations* (1899), Edward Adams asserts “evolution has at last developed a race which, having overcome all other beings, shows signs of trying conclusions with nature herself” (48). The period’s rural sociologists hailed the emergence of a new type of farmer as an inevitable natural fact. In *Chapters in Rural Progress* (1907), Kenyon Butterfield confidently declares: “The new farmer has always existed because he is the old farmer growing. He has kept pace with our industrial evolution... As agriculture became a business, he became a businessman” (56). Butterfield’s influence on cultural interpretations of farmers was significant; William Conlogue refers to Butterfield as “the father of rural sociology” (17). Kirkland uses similar evolutionary language in presenting Zury’s development from farmer into entrepreneur. *Zury*, like the wider rhetoric surrounding the farmer in the late nineteenth century, is performative in that it helps to bring about the change that it subsequently describes.²⁴ Industrial agriculture would have appeared even if no one had written about it, but it arose more swiftly because it was written about. Novels like *Zury* hastened the rise of industrial agriculture by rewriting agrarian mythology to make acceptable what might otherwise have been an alarming degree of change. The “pastoral cast” given to the redefinition, argues Conlogue, helped “make it more palatable to the nation” (16).

The era’s rhetoric commonly contrasts the new farmer with the old farmer in an evolutionary framework that associates newness with progress. New farmer and old stand in the same relation as the larger binary abstractions of civilized and savage. The “new farmer,” writes

²⁴ Extinction discourse, a category to which much late nineteenth-century writing on the farmer belongs, is often performative in this way.

Butterfield, “is in league with the ongoing forces of civilization” (54). *Zury* anticipates the rhetorical contrast between new and old farmer established by rural sociologists in the early twentieth century. *Zury*’s evolution entails the gradual shift from old to new ways. His transformation involves the slight redefinition of vast rhetorical constructs such as freedom, independence and conservatism. These traits, previously associated with the small farmer in preindustrial agrarian mythology, helped to settle a country. However, with settlement drawing to a close, the meanings of these terms must also be settled. Kirkland, like Butterfield two decades later, rhetorically transfers those pioneering virtues to the industrial farmer. *Zury* accomplishes this through its hero’s adaptation. The novel compresses the gradual changes of a century into one farmer’s lifetime.

At the beginning *Zury* perfectly fits Butterfield’s rather mythic definition of the “old farmer.” The old farmer, according to Butterfield, was “a pioneer, and he had all the courage, enterprise, and resourcefulness of the pioneer. He was virile, above all things else. He owned and controlled everything in sight. He was a state builder” (54). However, as the narrative progresses, *Zury* sheds his “old” ways. The pre-industrial type is represented by *Zury*’s father, Ephraim, and by the primitive Anstey family. Pre-industrial farmers frequently relied on a barter system involving the exchange of machinery, labor and knowledge (Conlogue 13). Ephraim favors this system of cooperative labor. The elder Prouder proposes a log-rolling bee to construct a fence around the family’s property, but *Zury* rejects the idea (43). This example establishes a generational difference in attitudes toward the barter system and firmly aligns *Zury* with the new agriculture. Preindustrial farmers often felt suspicious of “book farming” (Conlogue 14). Forced book reading is a common punishment for misbehavior in the Anstey family. When Silas Anstey refuses to take his medicine, his wife tells him to “shet up!” and “go read yer book!” (114).

When Alphy Anstey will not properly introduce herself to visiting adults, her mother yells: “Oh, you ‘m a bad child! Go read yer book!” (142). Mrs. Anstey openly reveals her prejudice against books to Anne. When the schoolteacher shares a fact about hogs taken from her reading on the subject, the farmwife replies: “Wal, I give in, the’ *dew* know a leetle suth’n’ even in the big cities whar th’ books is made up!” (118). The Ansteys function as primitive Others against which Zury’s progress toward a new industrial agricultural ideal is measured.

A number of seemingly insignificant episodes work together to establish Zury as a new farmer, one in step with the new agriculture. By setting the novel in the past, decades before its 1887 publication, Kirkland plants the seeds of industrial farming well in advance of their late nineteenth-century germination. The effect is to create a rich history of industrial farming that makes the late nineteenth-century upheaval of agrarian tradition appear less abrupt. Zury adheres to many of industrialization’s precepts, including division of labor, trade, and a willingness to acquire debt (Conlogue 16). Even as a child, Zury provided sage business advice to his father. He persuaded the elder Prouder to take out mortgages on the homestead to finance future growth in acreage and herd size. Additionally, a young Zury cleverly puts ants (those archetypal symbols of labor) to work for him cleaning birds’ eggs for his dying sister. The pale-green eggs decayed too rapidly and cracked when Zury tried to clean them. His solution, which is narrated at great length, naturalizes the division of labor:

He made a pin-hole in one end of each egg; and with the first streak of dawn he was up and out hunting for an ant-hill...where some almost infinitesimal marvels of *industry* in formic shape were always busy at their incomprehensible tasks. Here he deposited the eggs, and soon saw the little creatures doing his desired work in a manner delightful to behold. (18, emphasis mine)

The use of “industry” shows this unassuming side story’s participation in the text’s larger project of ushering in an era of industrial farming. Getting lesser individuals to perform mundane tasks is one of the hallmarks of the division of labor. This story of an ingenious brother’s devotion to his ailing sister greatly sentimentalizes the division of labor, otherwise a rather cold, machine-like process. Zury effectively assembles a miniature factory that is “delightful” in its workings. Finally, a full-grown Zury shows he understands the imperatives of trade when he combines business with pleasure on a sleigh ride to visit Phil in Galena, Illinois. He arranges an informal family reunion, offering to bring Anne and her daughter Meg along for the ride. Anne finally consents to marry Zury after the long trip. Significantly, Zury wins both profit and a wife with the same enterprise. Zury brought not only his strongest horses but also “seventeen fine crocks of butter, stowed where it would be in nobody’s way but his own” (467). “Butter,” the narrator adds, “was worth at the lead mines [in Galena] exactly double what it was at Wayback” (467). This particular love story celebrates capitalism as much as it does the relationship between Anne and Zury.

Just as the new farmer is seen as an outgrowth of the older one, industrial-age agrarian mythology grows out of existing myth in *Zury*. The eponymous hero blends yeoman with new farmer. Redefinition is crucial to the process of updating the myth. The most significant redefinition involves Zury’s nickname: “The Meanest Man in Spring County.” Zury is not a “mean” man in the most obvious sense of one who is deliberately cruel. “His ‘meanness,’” according to the narrator, “was not underhanded” (86). We can learn much about the rhetorical origins of industrial farming by simply analyzing the changing connotations of the word “mean” in the text. One of its many definitions, “to signify,” relates to the study of semantics itself. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists many definitions for the word, but three of the most interesting

for my purposes, include “average,” “base,” and “characterized by a lack of generosity.” What follows is a consideration of the implications of each varied signification of the term within the text.

First, Zury is a type representative of millions of pioneers who came west to make their living. He stands for the average frontiersman, even though his feats are exaggerated to achieve mythic proportions. Zury’s transformation into industrial farmer offers a model for all to emulate. This definition implies that, if the “meanest” (or most average) man can accomplish so much, *anyone* can if they are willing to modernize their occupation.

Next, the quality of baseness suggested by the nickname fits with my analysis of Zury as a degenerate primitive who is redeemed by Anne’s civilizing influence. The text supplies abundant support for this connotation of “meanest.” When Zury reproaches himself for being unworthy of Anne, he thinks:

he was not nearly the masterful man he had always thought himself, but in reality a very narrow, ignorant, ill-bred, and unwise person seeking for happiness where only a *mean*, unworthy, and temporary gratification can be found. Money-making as an end and not a *means* of life, is like climbing a chimney that grows narrower toward the top. (461)

In Zury’s thought process “mean” not only appears as synonymous with “base” but also in connection with a developing philosophy of wealth. The convoluted analogy implies that profit-getting should be intrinsically gratifying, that the acquisition of wealth ought to be as enjoyable as the spending of the riches. Bankers and investors engage in money-making as an activity in itself, certainly not farmers. The belief in money-making as a worthy goal sanctions capitalist enterprise. This revision of agrarian myth relocates virtue from physical labor to a more abstract sort of toil.

The final definition of “mean” that I will examine—“characterized by a lack of generosity”—also relates to Zury’s burgeoning business sense. Zury’s transition from primitive to industrial farmer depends upon a major rhetorical shift in terms of his notorious stinginess. The shift is rhetorical rather than practical because in reality Zury does not become any less frugal. Instead, the meaning of this sort of “mean”-ness changes. Greed is one of the “vulgar” characteristics disguised by Zury’s transformation.²⁵ Frugality and conservatism are traits commonly associated with the pre-industrial (a.k.a, the yeoman or “old”) farmer (Conlogue 12). Butterfield, writing in 1908, states the popular position: the “rural environment breeds [financial] conservatism” (62). Zury’s tightfistedness is epic. It characterizes him as much as his hard work ethic and brutish appearance. Zury inherits his legendary thriftiness from his father, reinforcing the textual association between frugality and old-style farming. “As to niggardliness,” writes Kirkland, “there was a confessed rivalry between [father and son]. Each would tell of the money-making and money-saving exploits of the other, and of his efforts to surpass them” (76). Zury’s famous greed takes a charitable turn under Anne’s influence. The improvement is only superficial, though. Zury still holds to his earlier creed that one might as well do good, if it does not cost anything.²⁶ His charitable impulse arises in conjunction with his dawning business sense. Before his transformation into a businessman, he merely did “good turns” (87). Only later does he become a “philanthropist” and the change is only nominal. The hero of the revised agrarian myth is a philanthropist as well as a businessman.

Anne motivates the charitable deed that turns Zury (albeit superficially) from self-

²⁵ In the scene narrated at the beginning of this chapter, the narrator assumes Anne’s perspective to describe Zury in all of his “undisguised vulgarity.” A list of criticism follows, including the fact that Zury is “possessed by greed” (223).

²⁶ This sentiment appears repeatedly throughout the text in slightly different phrasings. For example, “[he] liked to do good turns to others when it cost him nothing” (87).

interested do-gooder to philanthropist. He comes across a ragged woman with a bunch of hungry looking children in the train station and thinks: “if you were such a feller as the widder McVey’d ought to marry, that thar poor woman wouldn’t be left alone and friendless with her babes” (445). In the internal conversation that follows, the word “business” is repeated over and over as Zury considers helping the family. This repetition establishes a rhetorical connection between business and charity:

‘T ain’t none o’ my business,’ said Zury aloud in reply [to himself].

‘No, Zury you’re mighty right, it ain’t none o’ yer business! That’s because ye ain’t *her* kind of man. Ef you was Anne’s kind of a man,--like her son Phil, for instance, it’d be your business, fast enough!’

‘What business has the woman got travelin’ about alone, like a blamed tramp, anyhow?’

‘Same business ye ‘ve got yourself mebber,--‘cause she can’t help it, no more ‘n yew can.’

‘I can help it. I can go right home to th’ old farm t’-morrer!’ (445)

Zury imagines that Anne’s ideal type is her own son. The implication is that Phil would not hesitate to help a family in need. Anne asserts that “business is [Phil’s] highest pleasure” later in this same chapter (458). The association of the younger generation with business completes the novel’s evolutionary arc from Ephraim Proudler, a homesteader who arrives in a covered wagon from Kentucky, to the transitional figure of his son Zury, and finally to Zury’s illegitimate son, Phil, a straight-up businessman. Along with connecting business and charity, Zury’s thought process associates the “old farm” with a selfish lack of charity. Zury considers retreating back to the “old farm” where he can forget others’ suffering. The text revises agrarian myth for the

industrial age by reframing the famous independence of the yeoman farmer as a negative trait.

Instead of going back home and ignoring the family's plight, he brings them to the store and buys them provisions. Anne works at the general store, and Zury carefully arranges the good deed to gain her approval. Like all of Zury's previous "good turns," this particular good deed is calculated to his advantage. It is just another example of choosing to do good when the benefit outweighs the cost. Anne overlooks the self-serving quality of his action, and compliments his "liberality" (449). She calls him a "divine instrument of providence" (449). He replies humbly saying that providence must work with "poor tools" (450). Anne responds reassuringly, "Poor tools! It would be the first task you were ever found to be a poor hand at, if you were to turn into a philanthropist and didn't do it well" (450). The text establishes Zury as a philanthropist at an opportune moment—just before he purchases a lead mine to operate with Phil. Zury dwells happily upon the "unlimited capital" that he can supply the young man (475). Giving Phil this financial support on the heels of his earlier generosity toward the poor family creates a parallel between charity and business investment. Philanthropy excuses avarice to some extent since at least some of the wealth funnels back into the community. Zury's greed is tamed and ostensibly channeled for the public good. However, charity is significantly different from more traditional methods of helping one's neighbor, like the log-rolling bee. Philanthropy is an expression of corporate rather than communal values. Unlike a barn-raising in which everyone works together for the common good, charity places the receiver in a subordinate position. Additionally, the familial nature of the venture paints business as a family affair. Like the farm before it, the mine can pass through generations. The shared detail of family ownership mitigates the difference between these occupations. The notion of individual families working together forms a cornerstone of agrarian idealism. With Zury and Phil's business partnership, Kirkland adapts

existing agrarian mythology to include industry.

A mythology grows up around Zury, who is the subject of much local gossip and hero of numerous tall tales. In crafting these legends Kirkland builds on existing folklore adapting certain aspects of the agrarian ideal to the industrial age and discarding others. The rhetorical origins of the industrial farmer have their roots in this process.

Conclusion

The late 19th-century was a time of transition in American agriculture. Zury's speech patterns register this progressive evolution. The narrative even describes his English as in a "transition state" (421).²⁷ The textual focus on Zury's increasing rhetorical proficiency suggests the importance of discourse in the transition to industrial agriculture. Historically, the transition unfolded on two discursive levels: one involving the public and the other the individual farmer. Popular discourse helped market an image of the new agriculture to a public accustomed to a traditional ideal. It also helped to sell the farmer on a new version of himself and his occupation. Once the farmer accepted a business-minded view of agriculture, he would need to learn the language of business in order to thrive. The new corporate tongue would be very different from his local dialect. The discrepancy between colloquial and formal speech is exaggerated for comic effect in *Zury*. However, the language gap presented a real barrier to integration between farmer and industry. By portraying dialect-speakers like the Ansteys as hopelessly out of touch with modern life, the text speeds the collapse of the language barrier and promotes integration.

²⁷ Kirkland writes: "His English was in a transition state. With attention he could express himself reasonably well, and this attention he habitually gave when talking with Anne and other educated persons. But with his old associates his dialect was as uncouth as ever. Then too, when he had been talking carefully for a while, he was apt to grow interested and forgetful, and slip back to the old ways" (421).

The novel celebrates not only the evolution of one representative farmer but also the modernization of agriculture. “Few plants,” contends the narrator, “have changed and improved more by cultivation than has maize. ‘Indian corn,’ as the Indians knew it, hard and hardy, small, strong, and poor, would scarcely be recognized in the prairie giant of these days” (45). Zury’s own metamorphosis from primitive farmer to civilized businessman renders him as unrecognizable to his neighbors as modern corn to an Indian. Zury speaks like a “European furriner” and never has “hayseed” in his hair or “parara mud” on his boots, according to his neighbor Mr. Anstey (526-27). Zury’s housing situation reflects his personal changes. His old log cabin that is likened to an “aged savage” is torn down to make way for a new home, which was “hideous” at first. By the end, the house is:

so hidden in its own improvements as to be utterly unrecognizable. Its whole south side is occupied by a greenhouse and hot-house...opening out on a flower garden...all showing by inherent signs that they are the delight of some ladylike soul, aided by a gentlemanlike purse. (511)

Again, as with the examples of modern corn and Zury himself, the older version is unrecognizable in the face of the newer one. The newer model erases the older. Each of these evolutions occurs through integration. The corn is a hybrid. The Zury who no longer “talk[s] country-fashion” is the product of an assimilatory marriage. The much improved home blossoms out of its more “hideous” bud. Because the more primitive version is wiped out, each of these integrations constitutes a vanishing. The rhetorical origins of industrial agriculture have their beginnings in these vanishings.

Chapter 2: Nostalgia and Evolutionary Theory in Hamlin Garland's Fiction on Farmers and Indians

When author Hamlin Garland visited Isleta Pueblo, west of Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1895, he was deeply moved by the sight of Tewa Indians threshing wheat. "This was glorious!" he proclaims in his account of the trip. "We were to see the trampling of wheat, a process as old as the hooked knife—as old as the pharaoh. I felt at the moment an elation, the exultation of the dreams permitted to explore the past and stand beside [the] beginnings of agriculture" (Underhill 58). Garland watched a young man in flimsy white garments drive a group of ponies over the piled wheat, urging them on with a pleasant call that was "quite musical" to his ears. Meanwhile, an older man assisted, using a pitchfork to collect the stray sheaves and place them back in the pony's trail. A handsome young woman in traditional dress and moccasins used a broom fashioned from willow branches to sweep up the scattered kernels. "The shouts arose, the whips cracked, the horses whirled in snorting protest before the driver's hissing lash and again a sense of its remoteness, its simplicity, its solidarity. It was like something seen in dreams," Garland explains (58). The communal aspect of the scene heightened its beautiful, dream-like quality. Garland was delighted to be treated not as a stranger, but as a "neighbor" by the Tewa Indians (58).

Just four years earlier he had published *Main-Travelled Roads*, a collection of stories depicting the drudgery of midwestern farm life. W.D. Howells describes the stories as "full of the bitter and burning dust" of the prairie (Introduction 3). Yet labor that is toilsome for the white farmers of Garland's native Midwest becomes "glorious" to

him when performed by the pueblo Indians. He writes, "I never expect to see a more peaceful, pleasant suggestion of a farm scene. It was as though the golden past, the imagined peace of the dawn of our own past had been alienated to me" (61). Garland's use of "alienated" here differs from common usage. For Garland, in this context, "alienated" likely means communicated mystically or telepathically.¹ And so, he connects with his past by accessing it through the medium of the pueblo farm scene. His subsequent observations make clear which modern day forces he sees as preventing communication with the past or "alienating" him from it in the more traditional sense of the term: "to make estranged."² The gloriousness of the place comes in part from its distance from "American business" and "railroads," which "seemed very far away indeed" (53). A train that roars by the pueblo disturbs the "peace" that Garland feels moments earlier (61). And a "sadly utilitarian American windmill" spoils the beauty of the padre's Spanish-style garden with its "offensive appearance" (55). Garland imagines the pueblo as a haven from business and technology, but he also values the communal aspects of pueblo life. Children work beside their parents and men gather to swap stories with an attitude of "companionable jocularity" (58). Garland regards Isleta Pueblo as a window into a timeless universal past before social isolation, technological upheaval, and the commercial focus of modern farming and civilization in general spoiled everything.

Garland's romanticizing of the Pueblo Indians is fairly standard for his time.

Suzanne del Gizzo describes the primitive's meaning as "the 'other' of the west...an

¹Garland was keenly interested in telepathy. It is the subject of his novel, *The Shadow World* (1908).

² See the *OED* definition of "alienating"

empty holding place that reflects Western desires and anxieties about its own culture and identity" (498). The primitive functions, according to del Gizzo, like an "inverted mirror, showing the West aspects of itself that help define it by what it believes it is not, or more compellingly, by what it believes it has missed or lost" (498). Certainly, Garland regards the primitive Tewa Indians as possessing what he has lost, namely the "simplicity" and "solidarity" of the past. Garland feels so completely alienated or estranged from his own past that he believes it is only accessible in dreams. He repeatedly describes the Pueblo as dream-like. Alienation from one's own past is essentially alienation from one's self. As someone who feels alienated from self and society, and who looks to the primitive as an anecdote to that alienation, Garland is very much a modern, Western subject (Torgovnick 227).

Most of the stories in Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) evoke a sense of homelessness that George Lukács theorizes as central to the modern experience.³ A number of these stories involve the homecoming of the native whose prolonged absence has turned him into a stranger (Foote 171). In "Up the Coolly," Howard McLane returns to visit his mother and brother on their Wisconsin farm after a ten-year absence. Now a successful New York actor, Howard feels like a stranger among his family and former neighbors. Lukács's theory of "transcendental homelessness" encompasses the notion that one is no longer defined by one's origins but rather is responsible for the construction of his or her own identity (del Gizzo 503). Marianna Torgovnick connects transcendental homelessness to primitivism. She maintains that the alienation within transcendental homelessness is accompanied by a yearning to "go home" and that this longing often

³ See Lukács, Georg. *Theory of the Novel*. Trans. Anna Bostock. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971.

manifests as an interest in the primitive in literature (187). Torgovnick's theory explains how the homelessness of *Main-Travelled Roads* would lead Garland to Isleta Pueblo four years later.

Against the alienation of modern culture and the burden of self-creation, primitivism emerges in art as something mysterious and unchanging that promises "an historical and/or psychic origin—a home in its most basic sense" (del Gizzo 503). As del Gizzo notes, Freud elucidates the linkage between the primitive and this modern desire for origins in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929). He contends that this desire for the "oceanic," for a "comforting feeling of 'eternity,'" is a left-over from a "primitive stage of mental development" that persists in more civilized adult minds (qtd in del Gizzo 503). Freud's theory posits the primitive as promising a "connection, union, and intimacy with both others and the surrounding environment" to the civilized subject (del Gizzo 503). This connection with self, others, and the surrounding environment is precisely what the estranged Howard McLane lacks. He seeks to engage the primitive wonder of his boyhood through the familiar rural landscape, his family and former neighbors, but all these fail to allay his sense of alienation.

More than thirty years later in "The Silent Eaters" (1923), Garland restaged the scenario of the long absent son returning from the East to find his people living a degenerated version of their former life. This time, however, his narrator, Iapi, is a Sioux who comes back from his eastern boarding school to find his family on the Standing Rock Indian reservation. With this story, Garland again holds up the "inverted mirror," using the primitive to reflect his anxieties about his own culture and identity. Iapi also struggles with feelings of homelessness after spending four years in Washington, D.C.,

where he "acquires the white man's wisdom" (203). In both Garland stories, assimilation (contact with the more highly "civilized" urban areas) prevents a satisfying physical as well as psychic homecoming.

Both these characters, the former farm boy turned New York actor and the eastern educated Sioux, are trapped between two cultures and do not feel entirely at home in either. Their identities are deeply split, so that they are simultaneously the insider and the outsider within their respective cultures. With their hybrid status, both men yearn for a fully native perspective in order to perceive the world as Garland imagined the Isleta Indians could: as an organic unity of self and environment. Both stories depict the narrator's culture of origin (small Wisconsin farmers and Plains Sioux) as rapidly disappearing, which makes a satisfying homecoming more urgent and impossible. In each, the window into the changeless, primitive past is fast closing. The vanishing Indian trope provides Garland an alternate model for approaching a way of life—that of the small, midwestern homesteader—that he understood as always already disappearing. In both "Up the Coolly" and "The Silent Eaters," vanishing is what happens when people refuse to assimilate or change. Howard and Iapi assimilate into the dominant culture and survive to tell the story of the passing of their former way of life. The price of their assimilation is a split identity and the resultant loss of a "true" primitive perspective. Garland's sympathy ultimately rests with the narrators, the assimilated survivors who must go on without access to a primitive perspective capable of reconnecting them with their selves and the surrounding environment. Awareness of their inability to "go home" prompts nostalgia for the unchanging realm of their youth. At first glance, this nostalgia appears at odds with Garland's evolutionary philosophy. However, the nostalgia of these

stories is a byproduct of his evolutionary philosophy, a less intellectual and more personal response to the change that his philosophy posits as inevitable and swift. The fact that Garland traces the same plot line with both small midwestern farmers and Indians shows their interchangeability as symbols of a mythic and irrecoverable past. A key feature of that changeless and golden past is the idea that people once enjoyed an undivided connection with nature, with their community, and with themselves.

Donald Pizer writes persuasively of how Garland's work contains "underlying attitudes at odds with its ostensible themes" ("Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* Revisited," 62). "Alongside a myth of progressive time, of a world potentially better in the future," Pizer argues, "Garland also builds a counter-myth of a world so far better in the past that the good life is irrecoverable" (64). Garland's idealized report from Isleta Pueblo demonstrates the tenacity of this "counter-myth" in his perspective. The tension between these myths is evident in both "Up the Coolly" and the "Silent Eaters," which oscillate between nostalgia and evolutionary determinism. The congruence between the protagonists as witnesses to a vanishing way of life shows how fully Garland equates his own rural roots with an earlier, more primitive stage of social development. The imaginative connection between farmers and Indians that Garland forges provides a clear sense of the farmer's position as "modern America's 'Other,'" to borrow Maria Farland's phrase.⁴ My study contributes to the field of modern fiction studies by elucidating the relationship between modernism and nostalgia. In what follows, I begin by tracing the first impulse in these stories, the nostalgic longing for home and familiarity, at length before examining the evolutionary counter-impulse which prompts that nostalgia and

⁴ See Farland pg. 911

which is in turn used as a strategy for coming to terms with it.

(Almost) Homecomings

"Up the Coolly" opens with Howard McLane homeward bound on a train from New York. The passing scenery becomes more beautiful as it grows in familiarity. "He gazed out upon it with dreaming eyes" from the train window (45). He imagines that the grain appears "more golden" to him "than to anyone else" because of his ten year absence (45). The sight of the Wisconsin River prompts "little movements of the heart, like those of a lover nearing his sweetheart" (45). The stage is set for a splendid homecoming, but his first glimpse of his hometown disrupts the fantasy. Once off the train, Howard looks around at the town and declares it "poor and dull and sleepy and squalid" (46). However, when he lifts his gaze to encompass the green wooded hills surrounding the town, he regains his deep appreciation of his birthplace. He utters the same exclamation that Garland does upon first sight of Isleta Pueblo: "Glorious!" (46). This vacillation between idealization and despair also appears in the two subsequent homecoming scenes: Howard's reunion with his family at their new but diminished farmstead and his visit to the house where he was born.

As he approaches the family's current farmhouse, his heart again flutters but this time with "pain" rather than pleasure. "Instantly the beautiful, peaceful valley was forgotten. A sickening chill struck into Howard's soul as he looked at it all" (51). He finds his brother milking a cow and hesitates before walking over. "The longer he stood absorbing this farm-scene with all its sordidness, dullness, triviality, and its endless drudgeries, the lower his heart sank. All the joy of the home-coming was gone" (52). He

has to introduce himself to his brother Grant, who does not recognize him after ten years. The two stare silently at each other, and Howard detects a "hard, bitter feeling" in his younger brother (52). Howard then catches sight of his mother in a rocking chair on the porch. Her attitude of "sorrow, resignation, and a sort of dumb despair" causes his throat to swell. The two embrace affectionately and she tells him how she has "longed" to see him (53). He admits that he is ashamed for staying away for so long. They sit down to a humble dinner of bread and honey prepared by Grant's wife. An argument breaks out between the brothers after Howard asks why they had to sell the old farm. Grant chastises him for ignoring their appeals for money to help pay the mortgage. Howard claims he did not receive the letters. This does not satisfy Grant, and he continues to rail against Howard, who threatens to leave the next morning. Grant growls that he does not care what he does. Howard retreats to his room, "with horrible disgust and hate of his brother and of this home in his heart" (57). He "remember[s] his tender anticipations of the home-coming with a kind of self-pity and disgust" (57). He considers the gifts in his suitcase that he never got to distribute and thinks regretfully of the "tender reunion" he had imagined (57). The next morning, Howard does not leave but stays and tries to help Grant with the haying. When another argument ends that collaboration, Howard seizes on an alternate plan for achieving the satisfactory homecoming denied him at his brother's farm.

Howard strikes out on the "old road which he used to travel when a boy" (63). The road leads to the house where he was born. The sweetly familiar landscape stirs childhood memories of boyhood sweethearts. Leaning against an oak tree and gazing up into space, "the thrilling inscrutable mystery of life fell upon him like a blinding light"

(63). At last he encounters the "weather-beaten house" where he was born and where "the mystery of his life began" (64). He sees an old German woman in the garden and, in broken German, asks to see the house. "The house," Howard thinks:

was the same, but somehow seemed cold and empty. It was clean and sweet, but it showed so little evidence of being lived in. The old part, which was built of logs, was used as the best room, and modelled after the best rooms of the neighboring 'Yankee' homes, only it was emptier, without the cabinet organ and the rag-carpet and the chromes. The old fireplace was bricked up and plastered—the fireplace beside which, in the far-off days, he had lain on winter nights, to hear his uncles tell tales of hunting, or to hear them play the violin, great dreaming giants that they were. (65)

His impression of the house as "the same" but different corresponds to his feelings about the town and his family's new dwelling. This impression is most uncanny in the Freudian sense of blending the familiar and the unfamiliar.⁵ Howard seeks a return to the "mystery" of his origins but change makes those origins imperceptible. The lifeless house cannot communicate the "mystery of life." The foreignness of its new tenants underscores the alien quality of the once familiar dwelling. Tellingly, the fireplace—the symbolic center of domesticity—is "bricked up and plastered" (65). Rather than assuaging his sense of homelessness, the visit to his birthplace only intensifies it.

After the tour, Howard feels "sick to the heart" with longing for his childhood (65). "Oh, to be a boy again!," he nostalgically muses. "An ignorant baby, pleased with a

⁵ Freud describes the feeling created by the mixture of familiar and strange with the German word "unheimliche," which translates literally into "unhomely." See Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (1919).

block and string, with no knowledge and no care of the great unknown! To lay his head on his mother's bosom and rest! To watch the flames on the hearth!" (65). From here, Howard hatches a plan to buy back the old farm. While he envisions the plan as a selfless act of charity toward his family, it is really just another attempt to purchase the satisfying homecoming that has eluded him so far. The absurdity of the plan reveals the depths of Howard's alienation.

Iapi, the Sioux narrator of "The Silent Eaters," experiences a similarly bittersweet homecoming when he returns to the Standing Rock reservation after five years of study in Washington, D.C. The son of one of Sitting Bull's closest advisors, Iapi witnesses events like the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn and the rise and suppression of the Ghost Dance religion. In Washington, his teacher is Lieutenant Davies, who works for the War Department. Davies prepares him for the shock of his return, saying: "Your boyish imagination idealized your people and the life they led. You saw them under heroic conditions. They are now poor and despairing and you will be shocked at their appearance and position under the agent, but do not let this dismay you" (205). On the westbound train home, Iapi's heart swells as Howard's did under the same circumstances (207). His narration suggests the momentousness of his homecoming:

My command of English words will not permit me to express the wild thrill of my heart as I looked out of my window and saw again the wide-lying plains of Dakota, marked by the feet of the vanished buffalo. I was getting home! Five years is a long time when it involves such mental changes as had come to me. It seemed that half a lifetime had passed since I sorrowfully took the steamer to go down the river to learn the white man's language. I was a wild-eyed, long-haired

lad then. Now I was returning, clipped and clothed like a white man, yet in my heart a Sioux." (207-208)

Iapi's homecoming is juxtaposed against a scene of extinction. The buffalo tracks, the first feature to catch his attention, signal an absence that presages the disappearance of his own people. The vanishing trope precedes a statement on the thoroughness of his assimilation. Outwardly, Iapi has been transformed into the image of a white man. This transformation ensures that he will not vanish like the buffalo, or the more stubbornly resistant members of his own tribe.

The natural landscape retains a timeless quality for Iapi that contrasts with the visible decline of his tribe. The sight of the small, dirty cabins disheartens him as he enters the reservation. Iapi narrates:

The farther I went the more painful became the impression made upon me by these captives. They were like poor white farmers, ragged, dirty, and bent. The clothes they wore were shoddy gray and deeply repulsive to me. Their robes of buffalo, their leggings of buckskin, their beaded pouches—all the things I remembered with pride had been worn out (or sold). (209)

Iapi's impressions upon returning home parallel Howard's. For both, the human features of the place have changed for the worse, a degradation at odds with their valuation of the natural landscape as timeless, beautiful, and familiar. The people, too, have changed, becoming dirtier and more hopeless than he remembers.

Like Howard's, Iapi's reunion with his mother is tender. She welcomes her estranged son with a hearty embrace as he enters the teepee. However, when he helps his father harness a team of horses to the wagon, the act becomes a metaphor of captivity.

Iapi recounts:

It was a strange thing to me to help my father harness a team to a wagon. He whom I had seen a hundred times riding foremost in the chase, whom I had watched at break of day leading a band of scouts up the steep side of a sculptured butte, or with gun in hand guarding Sitting Bull as he slept, was now a teamster, and I, clothed in the white man's garments, was sad and ashamed. (210)

The harnessed horses represent the loss of freedom that mirrors the captivity experienced by Iapi's father on the reservation. The father's complicity in enslaving the horses reflects his own guilty involvement—as mediator between Sitting Bull and agency officials—in persuading his own people to accept the white man's ways.

In both stories, the protagonist's remembered home has changed so substantially that it appears no longer to exist. Because they have assimilated so thoroughly, they appear as strangers to their former neighbors and family. These factors make homecoming especially difficult, if not impossible; they also account for the split identities of the narrators. Stephanie Foote's observation about Howard applies equally well to Iapi: "this almost but not quite quality of his homecoming might be related to his inability to coincide with himself during his visit" (173). Their difficulty "coincid[ing]" with themselves is a product of their split identities as simultaneously both insiders and outsiders.

Caught between Heart and Mind: Split Identities

The split identities of the narrators contribute to the "almost but not quite quality" of their respective homecomings. Foote notes that, in *Main-Travelled Roads*, the

collection that includes "Up the Coolly," "all natives, once introduced to the values of the east, become strangers" (162). Howard's foreignness is evident from the moment he steps off the train. He looks at the scenery with the same curiosity that he imagines the towns' natives would exhibit while contemplating the Brooklyn Bridge. Clearly, he feels himself a tourist, but his status is more complicated than that. Howard is a stranger in a once familiar land. He "still took pride in being a Western man" (45). Yet, he hears the cowbells and pleasant sounds of the hay fields with the "ear of the city dweller" (68). His experiences in New York place him between two worlds. He is too much the insider to idealize the pastoral setting. At an apparently cheerful party, Howard's "native ear and eye" perceive the underlying dissatisfaction of the guests with their narrow and grueling lives on the farm (75). Howard's split identity is literally inscribed on his body, in his sense organs, which demonstrates the extent to which his perceptions are affected by that divided identity.

Two different names, one white and one Sioux, dramatize the split identity of "The Silent Eaters"'s narrator. Iapi (later Philip) confuses even his own self-identification with a couple of telling pronoun slippages. In his narrative, he alternately refers to his tribe from the position of a member (as "we") and that of an observer (commenting on the Sioux as "them"). In keeping with standard constructions that associate the primitive with the body and the civilized with the mind, Garland portrays Iapi as a Sioux at heart but a white man in intellect. He receives his education from a white man, Lieutenant Davies, a government agent with the War Department. From Lieutenant Davies, Iapi learns a deterministic philosophy that holds that "the plains Indian was a perfect adaptation of organism to environment until the whites disturbed him" (205). This philosophy leads

Iapi to regard the assimilation of his people—their removal to the reservation—as a sad but necessary and inevitable step to their survival. Iapi acknowledges his influence, declaring that the agent's "speech and his thought are in all that I write" (205). It is a measure of his deep alienation that Iapi should comprehend even his own race through Davies's perspective. Iapi admits as much when he credits Davies for furnishing his understanding of the Sioux race. In fact, it is Davies who convinces Iapi that his "heart," "emotions," and "superstitions" are "red" (206).

While the mind / body split is more pronounced in "The Silent Eaters," the dichotomy also characterizes Howard's ruptured identity. In these stories, civilization is synonymous with education. The information most prized by these narrators no longer comes from nature, or family, or community, but from books. In each story, the thought of their books leads the narrators to meditate on their split identity. After spending a rainy day indoors in his brother's dismal farmhouse: "It came to Howard in that peculiar reaction which surely comes during a visit of this character, when thought is a weariness, when the visitor longs for his own familiar walls and pictures and books, and longs to meet his friends, feeling at the same time the tragedy of life which makes friends nearer and more congenial than blood-relations" (79).- Howard's alienation arises from the distance he feels from his family who had "no books" in their home (81). Similarly, Iapi rejects "red" superstition, specifically a belief in the efficacy of the Ghost Dance, at the sight of his books. He reflects:

Within my heart, opposing passions warred. Here were my brothers about to fight their last battle—persisting in a defiance which was as insane as their religion. I could not deceive myself. The instant I returned to the white men and the sight of

my books I acknowledged the tragic desperation of my people. The dance became merely another of the religious frenzies which wise men say have attacked the human race...for ten thousand years. (267)

White civilization separates Howard and Iapi from their origins and, in each case, they suffer guilt as a result of this estrangement.

Howard and Iapi worry that, by assimilating, they have saved themselves while abandoning their people. During an argument with Grant, Howard's heart throbs as he considers the difference in their circumstances: "Again he saw his life, so rich, so bright, so free, set over against the routine life in the little low kitchen, the barren sitting room, and this still more horrible barn. Why should his brother sit there in wet and grimy clothing, mending a broken trace, while he enjoyed all the light and civilization of the age?" (85). Similarly, while Iapi studied in Washington, his family faced starvation on the reservation due to decreased government rations. His mother writes to tell him that his little sister has died of starvation and that many on the reservation are sick with lung diseases. Iapi remembers how his "heart bled with remorse, for I was warm and well fed" (205). Iapi seems more conscious of his dual identity than Howard, perhaps because it is more politicized. Iapi describes his fraught position between the tribe and the government:

It did not take me more than a day to see that I was caught between two fires. My friends were all among those whom the agent called "The irreconcilables," and my chief was relying on me to help them defeat the treaty for their lands, at the same time that the agent expected me to be a leader of the progressive party. It was not easy to serve two masters, and I was forced to be in a sense double

tongued, which I did not like. (213)

The tension between "The irreconcilables" and the progressives that Iapi perceives is essentially that between tradition and progress. Garland regards a resistance to change as the defining characteristic of the "primitive" red man and of most of the small Wisconsin farmers in "Up the Coolly." Grant voices this characteristic inflexibility when he turns down Howard's offer of financial assistance. "I am too old to make a new start," states the thirty-year-old farmer (87). Within the laws of determinism that govern these stories, resistance to change leads to disappearance because progress is deemed both inevitable and desirable. Assimilation ensures the narrators' survival but at the cost of a split identity and attendant guilt.

No longer anchored in origins, the identities of the narrators are largely self-created. The process of self-creation "often entails an attendant realization that all identities are in some sense performed" (del Gizzo 504). Howard's occupation as an artist and actor calls attention to this performative aspect of identity construction. The realization of identity as something performed gives rise to "anxieties about 'falseness' and 'inauthenticity,'" according to del Gizzo (504). In "Up the Coolly," these anxieties surface in Howard's attempts to recover authentic feeling through artificial means, specifically through poetry, painting, and theater. Foote argues that "eastern aesthetic forms" shape Howard's interpretation of the "cultural expressions" of the natives of the Coolly (175). Howard cannot feel their "particular sorrows," contends Foote, without first "translat[ing] the expression of the regional folk into universal aesthetic forms" (175). His inability to find sympathy in direct experience is a measure of his alienation.

Personally, Garland displays a similar need for defamiliarization in order to

sympathize with the plight of struggling farmers. Garland spent his youth on various midwestern farms. He visited his parents at their South Dakota farm in order to gather material for "Up the Coolly." Yet it takes the dream-like space of Isleta Pueblo for him to connect with his agrarian origins.

Representations: Restaging the 'Wretchedly Familiar'

Howard relies heavily upon representations to understand both self and others (Foote 175). The actor depends upon aesthetic distance to bring him closer to the reality at hand. This is the case when, walking through the tall grass and fireflies to his brother's house, he suddenly has an epiphany about the nearness of the pastoral scene. He reflects: "How close it all was to him, after all! In his restless life, surrounded by the glare of electric lights, painted canvas, hot colors, creak of machinery, mock trees, stones, and brooks, he had not lost, but gained, appreciation for the coolness, quiet, and low tones, the shyness of wood and field" (51). Without this level of remove, the familiar sights of the farm often disgust him. When he wades through the muck in search of Grant, he quickly loses his appreciation for nature:

How wretchedly familiar it all was! The miry cowyard, with the hollow trampled out around the horse-trough, the disconsolate hens standing under the wagons and sheds, a pig wallowing across its sty, and for atmosphere the desolate, falling rain. It was so familiar he felt a pang of the old rebellious despair which seized him on such days in his boyhood. (84)

Earlier, Howard avoids the wretchedness of a similar scene by "look[ing] at it through his half-shut eyes as the painters do, and turned away with a sigh at the sound of blows

where wet and grimy men were assailing frantic cows" (69). Howard's sympathy with the farm scene requires a certain aesthetic distance and an artistic cast of mind.

At his welcome-home party, he feels an affinity with the rural guests only after Uncle William pulls out the fiddle to play the "old tunes" (77). Here the aesthetic distance of the music is supplemented by temporal distance as the songs are from the good old days. These tunes "had a thousand associated memories in Howard's brain, memories of harvest-moons, of melon-feasts, and of clear, cold winter nights. As he danced, his eyes filled with a tender light. He came closer to them all than he had been able to do before" (77). He turns Grant's tirade on the degradation of farm labor into something distant and beautiful. Howard "thrill[s] with emotion" at the words which he likens to "some great tragic poem" (76).

Even off the stage, Howard continues to act. He dresses in a "knockabout costume" his first morning on the farm, and approaches the breakfast table with "the manner, as he himself saw, of the returned captain in the war-dramas of the day" (59). As Foote observes, the phrase "as he himself saw," suggests the self-conscious nature of his self-presentation. Later, he gets into the exaggerated character of a dialect speaking rustic in an attempt to appeal to his brother. "I kinder circumambiated the pond," he explains of his trip to the barn (84). Although Howard may take "pride in being a Western man" (45), his concept of what it means to be a Western man depends heavily upon representation.

Howard shocks his mother by suggesting that her baby granddaughter could star in a comedy. "You don't mean to say you put babies on stage, Howard?" she responds in astonishment (55). This suggestion is meant to be playful, but it introduces a larger issue.

Soon, everyone—even rural folks—will be immersed in representation from infancy. The Coolly will soon be transformed irrevocably by modernity. In a few years it will be unimaginable for a woman, such as Grant's wife, to reach middle-age without seeing a play. She confides in Howard, "I've never seen a play, but I've read of 'em in the magazines. It must be wonderful; the way they have wharves and real ships coming up to the wharf, and people getting off and on. How do they do it?" (79). Not wanting to ruin the mystery, he responds, "If I told you how it was done, you wouldn't enjoy it so well when you come on and see it" (79). The reader knows, as Howard must, that the poor woman will never escape her daily round of chores long enough to make it to the big city. For the moment, the Coolly's residents remain sheltered from this type of performance. The ships she mentions are only "real" to the naive observer who can accept their reality at face value without peering behind the curtain. The following section discusses the assumption of the perspective of a naive or primitive observer as an anecdote to the modern subject's alienation.

Looking through "Baby eyes": The nostalgic gaze

The term "nostalgia" denotes a yearning for the past, often in idealized form. The word is from the Greek, *nostos* ("returning home") and *algos* ("pain, ache"). "Up the Coolly" and "The Silent Eaters" are undoubtedly nostalgic tales. Slavoj Žižek theorizes that the "innocent, naive gaze of the other that fascinates us in nostalgia is in the last analysis always the gaze of a child" (43). The naive spectator is still capable of believing in what he sees. The power of the naive perspective lies in the hope that an innocent spectator can believe in something for us, in place of us (Žižek 39). Garland expresses a

desire for something like this innocent, naive gaze through Howard when he first catches sight of "the line of hills on which his baby eyes had looked thirty-five years ago" (46).

The problem for Howard, and also for Garland, is how to regain that perspective.

Howard tries artistic detachment as a means to see beyond the degradation of the present to the beauty and wonder of his childhood. However, the half-shut eyes, the music, and the epic-quality that he lends Grant's speech are different from the nostalgic gaze because Howard is still in the subject position. Howard assumes the perspective of an innocent, naive spectator in two instances. Going beyond the merely primitive to the downright animal, Howard contemplates the "desolate interior" of Grant's barn through the eyes of the horses:

It was a small barn, and poor at that. There was a bad smell, as of dead rats, about it, and the rain fell through the shingles here and there. To the right, and below, the horses stood, looking up with their calm and beautiful eyes, in which the whole scene was idealized. (84)

The horses function here as holders of a naive perspective insofar as they are natural and unaffected. Howard imagines the barn through their eyes. He projects his own desire to see things as better than they are onto the horses. This is the same scene that leads Howard to question the indifference of a universe in which one brother can enjoy all "the light and civilization of the age" while the other must "sit there in wet and grimy clothing" (85). Horses, like children, are untroubled by weighty matters like social inequality. The example of the horses' eyes is extreme, but it illustrates the concept of the naive perspective.

After fighting with Grant his first night home and going to bed angry, Howard

dreams that he is back in his New York apartment. He lingers on the details of the bedroom, and his imagination rests upon a landscape painting "by a master greater than Millet" (58). In the rustic bedroom of the farmhouse, Howard's fraught imagination seeks a comforting image of ruralness, but he does not discover one. The object of interest in this description is the tear-stained boy who looks on at the scene. Howard describes the painting as such:

A farm in the valley! Over the mountains swept jagged, gray, angry, sprawling clouds, sending a freezing, thin drizzle of rain, as they passed, upon a man following a plough. The horses had a sullen and weary look, and their manes and tails streamed sideways in the blast. The ploughman, clad in a ragged gray coat, with uncouth, muddy boots upon his feet, walked with his head inclined toward the sleet, to shield his face from the cold and sting of it. The soil rolled away black and sticky and with a dull sheen upon it. Nearby, a boy with tears on his cheeks was watching cattle; a dog seated near, his back to the gale. (58)

The painting depicts the same type of labor that he sees his brother performing on the farm during his visit. His vision of the painting enables him to forgive Grant for his rude treatment because he can finally sympathize with his desperate situation. As when he looks at the cows with the "half-shut" eyes of the painter, Howard cannot find sympathy with his brother's daily round of toil directly but only aesthetically, from a distance. A stranger in his former environment, the represented pastoral is more accessible to him than the lived experience of country life. The presence of a crying boy makes this particular representational strategy of Howard's more complicated than the others. After his disappointing visit to the house where he grew up, Howard exclaims his yearning to

"be a boy again" (65). He repeats this wish at the end of the story, commanding Grant to "make me a boy again" (87). Howard sees himself in the crying boy and Grant in the ragged ploughman. The crying boy in the painting does not question his immediate sadness; he does not intellectualize his situation as the unavoidable outcome of "circumstance" as Howard does, but lets the tears flow. Howard's dream affords him a naive perspective on the situation that dissolves his accumulated grievances. Waking from the dream, he thinks of the "pitiless labor" that his brother must begin again at five o'clock (58). The thought brings tears to his eyes.

Foote argues that Howard must imagine the picture of the ploughman and boy "in order fully to return home" (173). In other words, Howard needs the picture to entirely reconnect with his origins. Beside this picture hangs a painting of an Indian in a canoe by George de Forest Brush. According to Torgovnick, the "longing to 'go home'" often generates an "interest in the primitive" (187). Thus Howard's homesickness manifests an interest in agricultural landscapes and Indians alike. In the modern era, both farmers and Indians become objects of nostalgia.

In many ways, Howard and Iapi are reflections of the author. Like both characters, Garland witnessed the disappearance of his childhood way of life. Although Iapi is assimilated, he is closer to the changeless, communal world of the primitive than Howard. Borrowing the perspective of the young Sioux, Garland portrays Sitting Bull and his tribe in their full mythic proportions. The first section of "The Silent Eaters" treats the days of peace and plenty enjoyed by the simple people before the whites stole their ancestral hunting grounds. In the following, Iapi recounts the good old days:

In those days the plains were black with buffalo and the valleys speckled with

red deer and elk, and no lodge had fear of hunger or frost. In winter we occupied tepees of thick warm fur with the edges fully banked with snow and we were not often cold. We had plenty of buckskin to wear and no one went unsatisfied. You would look long to find a people as happy as we were, because we lived as the Great Spirit had taught us to do, with no thought of change. (160)

The inability to conceive of change is a defining feature of the primitive in modern constructions. Sitting Bull displays this primitive inability to imagine the future when he tells a white colonel, "It is not easy for me to sit down...and dream out the future. It is all dark to me" (202). Garland associates changelessness with boyhood, as for example in his 1917 autobiography *A Son of the Middle Border*. There, he writes of "the unchanging realm of the past—this land of my childhood. Its charm, its strange dominion cannot return save in the poet's reminiscent dream. No money, no railway train can take us back to it. It does not in truth exist—it was a magical world, born of the vibrant union of youth, and firelight, of music and the voice of moaning winds" (8). Through Iapi, Garland momentarily accesses that mythical realm of the past when nothing changed and no one worried about the future.

Another chief characteristic of the naïve or primitive perspective is the innocent Other's ability to believe in what the cynical, world-weary modern subject no longer can. The na(t)ive Other believes for us, in place of us, in Žižek's formulation. This construction, with the "t" parenthetically inserted, implies the convergence that the "civilized" individual perceives between the naïve and the native perspective. Like representations of the native, depictions of the traditional farmer traditionally emphasize his natural innocence, and inability to recognize artifice. The na(t)ive Other expects

representations to mirror reality, to express a higher and knowable Truth. Naivety inheres in the term “native” and the farmer’s naivety with regard to the modern world aligns him with the native Other. Iapi loses his utility as a na(t)ive observer after receiving his white man's education. With his faith in the Great Spirit shaken by Lieutenant Davies’s conception of an indifferent universe, he cannot share his tribe's belief in the Ghost Dance. Watching his people dance, Iapi experiences a real crisis of faith. He explains, "My learning was for the moment of no avail. I shook like a reed in the gust of this primeval passion. Was it insanity or was it some inexplicable divine force capable in very truth of uniting the quick and the dead in one convulsive, rapturous coalition?" (246). As Lonnie Underhill notes, Iapi knows too much to be able to believe" (“Hamlin Garland and the American Indian,” 112). After returning to the white men and his books, he comes to regard the dance as just another religious frenzy. Once Iapi imbibes Davies's philosophy, he is no more capable than Howard of reconnecting with the glorious, unchanging realm of the past. Iapi yields the primitive, naive perspective for only a brief part of the story; for the majority, he embodies—like Howard—the conflicts inherent in an assimilated subject.

While the native subjects of "The Silent Eaters" afford the opportunity for deeply nostalgic description, they also allow Garland to apply his deterministic philosophy to explain the vanishing of their race. In "Up the Coolly," Howard understands the degradation and decline of the farm population in the loosely deterministic language of "circumstances." Garland's determinism is even more explicit and less subtle in "The Silent Eaters" as he employs Davies as his philosophical mouthpiece. The books that recall Howard and Iapi from their nostalgic revelries and force them to confront the

tragedy of their people are apparently works by Social Darwinists. The desire for homecoming and the various representational strategies for getting in touch with the past, which have been the focus of my study so far, should be understood as products of this evolutionary philosophy, as reactions to its focus on change.

Determined Vanishings

Garland's determinism is of a Darwinian cast that regards all life as perpetually in flux, with the direction of change determined by circumstances. Herbert Spencer's theories of physical and social evolution profoundly influenced Garland's thinking. In "Up the Coolly" and "The Silent Eaters," he applied this philosophy to both Indians and farmers, whom he regarded as "living a retrogressive existence, far from the benefits of a complex social organization" and engaged in a pre-industrial type of labor (Pizer in "Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* Revisited" 56).

Evolutionary philosophy governs even Garland's literary theory, which assumes literature progressively develops from simple to complex forms. Garland believed that American literature "must...keep pace with evolution and mirror the increased complexity, heterogeneity, and individuality which were...summed up in the idea of American democracy" (Pizer in "Herbert Spencer and the Genesis of Hamlin Garland's Critical System," 166). This interest in mirroring evolution while working with particularly American material also helps explain why Garland would be drawn to Native American subjects. In addition to serving as anecdotes to his modern sense of alienation, his fictional Indians also allow for the working out of his critical theory. In fact, these two functions of his Indian subjects are not separate but connected. Despite a professed belief

that the movement toward greater complexity and specialization coincided with the creation of the "greatest perfection and the most complete happiness," Garland's evolutionary theory left him longing for a past simplicity (Pizer 166). His critical theory contributes to his sense of alienation as it distances him from his more clannish background in rural villages.

Change is precisely what Garland represents in "Up the Coolly" and "The Silent Eaters." That change unfolds according to Spencer's theory of social evolution as moving from the simplicity of collectivism to the complexity of a more individualistic society. The rural Wisconsin community of "Up the Coolly" is clannish, as tightly knit and distrustful of outsiders as Iapi's tribe. Both stories chronicle a transitional period in the protagonists' cultures as contact with the outside erodes traditional bonds and beliefs. Spencer's influence is discernible in Howard's observation on "the tragedy of life which makes friends nearer and more congenial than blood relations" (79). Howard has moved from the simplicity and homogeneity of the family unit to the more complex social organization of friendships based on shared interest. Howard and Iapi's evolution outpaces that of their peers because of their particular circumstances. As Howard assures Grant, the disparity in their situations has nothing to do with their relative intelligence but with a string of determining events. He relates them to Grant: as the oldest son, Howard went to school in town while Grant worked on the farm, and their father's unexpected death meant that Grant never got the chance to take his turn at school. "If you'd been in my place," Howard says, "*you* might have met a man like Cook, *you* might have gone to New York and have been where I am...Circumstances made me and crushed you" (86). Davies voices a similar determinism, blended with Spencerian philosophy, in a letter to

Iapi: "a tragic end is inevitable...Throw in your lot with the white man. On the whole, the white man has the organization for the new conditions" (268).

Iapi first meets Davies after the difficult winter following the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Sitting Bull and a band of Sioux, including Iapi, had retreated to Canada, but cold and near starvation forces them to surrender. Davies is among the white officers who escort the group back to Fort Yates in the early spring. When Davies figures out that Iapi can read, he gives him books. Soon after, Iapi goes with Davies to Washington, D.C., for five years. Iapi describes Davies's influence in almost the same language that Garland himself uses to explain the intellectual impact on him of Eugene Véron's modern, evolutionary views of art in his *Aesthetics* (1879). Iapi narrates: "His speech and thought are in all that I write" (205). Garland wrote the following statement on the first page of Véron's aesthetics: "This book influenced me more than any other work on art. It entered into all I thought and spoke and read for many years after it fell into my hands in about 1886" (qtd in Pizer's "Romantic Individualism," 466). The striking similarity of these pronouncements shows Garland's personal identification with Iapi as a former innocent who has fallen into knowledge that separates him from his origins.

Howard's philosophy is less coherent than Iapi's but still identifiably Spencerian. He understands the locals as mostly static and unchanging. What change they do experience is in the direction of regression rather than progress. Howard hints at their impending extinction with suggestively Darwinian language. One of the first things he notices after stepping off the train in his hometown is the "unchanged...grouping of old loafers on salt-barrels and nail-kegs" (46). They may even have slightly degenerated, in Howard's opinion, becoming "a little dirtier, a little more bent, a little grayer" (46). Yet

"they sat in the same attitudes, [and] spat tobacco with the same calm delight" that Howard remembers from his days as a high school student (46). Garland underscores the static quality of rural Wisconsin life with the highly symbolic McLane family clock, with a "dial so much defaced that one could not tell the time of day" (81). The family itself, as Grant informs Howard with a sneer, is "liv[ing] just about the same as ever" (54). Their unchanged standard of living includes a shabby dining room, sloppy table manners, and depressingly humble fare. Grant blames the decline of poor farmers like himself on the unavailability of relatively cheap, unsettled land. "Ten years ago," he complains, "Wess, here, could have got land in Dakota pretty easy, but now it's about all a feller's life's worth to try it. I tell you things seem shuttin' down on us fellers" (75). When the young local men are forced off the land and must go elsewhere in search of work, the unmarried women are left without potential partners. Howard's unmarried cousin Rose brings up this point at the party when she says that all the boys have gone west, leaving a bunch of "old maids" in the Coolly (71). "Marriage is a failure these days for most of us," she explains. "We can't live on a farm, and can't get a living in the city, and there we are" (72). The population of the Coolly is destined to age and dwindle as the youth leave for opportunities in the city and its residents, like Howard's childhood hero Freeme Cole, "degenerate into...stoop-shouldered, faded, garrulous, and quarrelsome old" men (47). After his sister-in-law Laura confides her deep dissatisfaction with rural life to Howard, the narrative voice interjects a Darwinian explanation, "She did not know that the struggle for a place to stand was eating the heart and soul out of men in the city, just as in the country" (80). The displacement of poor farmers is just another stage of society's evolution from simplicity to complexity for Garland.

Racial markers distinguish Howard from his country-dwelling family, equating whiteness with a higher state of evolution. At several points, the narrative associates his Uncle William and Brother Grant with something vaguely but unmistakably Indian. Just off the train, Howard meets his Uncle William. Garland stages their encounter as that between civilized and primitive. Howard is described as having "something unusually winning in his brown mustache and blue eyes, something scholarly suggested by the pinch-nose glasses, [and] something strong in the repose of the head" (46). In contrast, the older man stood "as erect as an Indian, though his hair and beard were white" (47). Although most likely intended to oppose Howard's youth with William's advanced age, this description also establishes a comparison of white farmer and Indian. The phrasing suggests that William's Indianness exhibits itself in spite of his white ancestry, that the primitive lies beneath the superficial layer of white hair and skin. William displays the full force of his primitive magic later on, at the party where he brings out his fiddle. The tunes he plays are by turns mournful and wild, but always ethnic or racial in character. As he performs, his countenance assumes a dusky hue. "Music," Garland narrates:

had always been William's unconscious expression of his unsatisfied desires. He was never melancholy except when he played. Then his eyes grew sombre, his drooping face full of shadows. He played on slowly, softly, wailing Scotch tunes and mournful Irish love songs. He seemed to find in these melodies, and especially in the wild, sweet, low-keyed negro song, some expression for his indefinable inner melancholy. (77)

In associating William with the unconscious, the narrative echoes a common assumption of Western metaphysics—that the primitive represents the unconsciousness of the

civilized subject. William certainly plays this part for Howard; his fiddling stirs "a thousand associated memories in Howard's brain, memories of harvest-moons, of melon-feasts, and of clear, cold winter nights" (77). Significantly, the memories William evokes are tangled, unarticulated, and almost pagan in character—very much the stuff of the unconscious as opposed to the rational mind.

Howard also thinks of his brother Grant as a "savage" and a "brute" after the argument in which Grant charges him with deserting the family (57). One of the paintings Howard recalls that hangs in his New York apartment depicts an Indian paddling a canoe through a canyon (58). The subject of this painting proves noteworthy because Grant unknowingly alludes to it the next day in a conversation with his mother. When she pleads with Grant to be less aloof towards his brother, he responds: "if he expects me to gush over his coming back, he's fooled, that's all. He's left us to paddle our own canoe all this while...He looked out for his precious hide mighty well, and now he comes back here to play big gun and pat us on the head" (66). Grant's mention of the canoe evokes the image of the Indian in the painting and establishes his primitivity, while Howard's role of "big gun" reinforces his association with white civilization. Guns are the civilized weapons of choice, used to defend settlers from "hostile" Indians and to maintain law and order in the Wild West. The textual association of Grant with the dark primitive and Howard with the white conqueror carries through to the final scene between the brothers.

In this scene, Grant refuses the money Howard offers to buy back the old family farm. Howard presents the financial assistance as an apology for abandoning the family and asks for his forgiveness. However, Howard's gesture is not without a measure of self-interest. In exchange for the money, he begs his brother to restore his childhood (87). The

ridiculous request reveals the depths of Howard's nostalgia, showing how fully he associates his lost childhood home with his youth. It also underscores the correspondence between adulthood and guilt, as if a clear-conscience could restore his innocent boyhood. His plea contradicts the matter-of-factness of his earlier conclusion regarding Grant that "Circumstances made me and cheated you" (86). The rapid slippage from determinism to nostalgia in this final brotherly exchange is characteristic of the tension that drives the story. Ultimately, it is Grant who maintains the evolutionary philosophy against his brother's sentimentality. Grant's refusal significantly incorporates the language of "chance." He tells Howard: "Money can't give me a chance now" (87). He goes on in evolutionary terms: "I'm too old to take a new start. I'm a dead failure. I've come to the conclusion that life's a failure for ninety-nine percent of us. You can't help me now. It's too late" (87). Grant's definitive statement precedes the highly racialized image of the two brothers that closes the story:

The two men stood there, face to face, hands clasped, the one fair-skinned, full-lipped, handsome in his neat suit; the other tragic, sombre in his softened mood, his large, long, rugged Scotch face bronzed with sun and scarred with wrinkles had histories, like the sabre-cuts on a veteran, the record of his battles. (87)

The description situates the civilized against the primitive as Howard's fair skin is contrasted with Grant's swarthy complexion. Interestingly, while both brothers presumably share the same genetics, only Grant is distinguished by an ethnic marker. While directly identified as Scotch, Grant's "tragic" aspect and "sombre" mood are common attributes of Indians in literature. By likening his wrinkles to battle scars, Garland transforms the farmer into a warrior. Grant could accept Howard's money and

return to the comforts of his ancestral home. But, like a wise chief who lays down his weapons when he knows he is beaten and boldly welcomes death, Grant refuses assistance. In this way, his inevitable demise is an act of self-extermination. However, his self-extermination should not be construed as an act of free-will. Within the confines of the narrative, bound by a philosophical determinism, no other option is available to Grant.

"The Silent Eaters" similarly ends with a determined vanishing, as white contact leads to the inevitable extinction of the Sioux. The figure of the plowman is central to Iapi's description of the encroachment of white civilization into Sioux Territory. While Sitting Bull held "hard to the ancestral customs, like a rock in a rushing stream," many other tribes "were retiring before the wonder-working plowmen" (169). Sitting Bull warns his people to be wary of the "spies" who seek to "steal the Black Hills as the plowmen have already taken the land east of the Missouri" (171-172). The chief sends scouts to monitor the presence of whites on their land. Iapi summarizes their reports:

The settlers were thick beyond numbering on the prairies and that all the forests were being destroyed by them. They were plowing above the graves of our sires, whose bones were being flung to the wolves. Steamboats hooted along the rivers and iron horses ran athwart the most immemorial trails. Immigrants were already lining the great muddy river with forts and villages, and some were looking greedily at the Black Hills, in which the soldiers had reported gold. (172)

Iapi depicts the plow as literally exhuming and profaning ancestral burial grounds. The plow also works on a more metaphorical level to unearth tradition, replacing hunting with agriculture. When Sitting Bull receives news that Custer's soldiers are preparing for

battle, he remains steadfastly committed to peace. He tells his followers: "Let us go deep into the West where the soil is too hard for the plow, far from the white man, and there live in peace. It is a land for hunters; those who plant the earth will never come to dispossess us" (173). The loss of the buffalo overshadows the threat of the plow as the narrative progresses beyond the Battle of Little Bighorn.

The disappearance of the buffalo spells the vanishing of his tribe in Iapi's narrative. The buffalo are synonymous with Sioux culture in Iapi's mind. He claims that the strongest words of the white language cannot begin to approach the meaning of the buffalo for his people:

They were our bread and our meat. They furnished us roof and bed. They lent us clothing for our bodies. The chase kept us powerful, continent, and active. Our games, our dances, our songs of worship, and many of our legends had to do with these great cattle. They were as much a part of our world as the hills and the trees, and to our minds they were as persistent and ever-recurring as the grass. (188)

The buffalo, like the culture of those who depend upon them, are portrayed as immutable until disturbed by outside forces. Garland intertwines the extinction of the buffalo with that of the Sioux; both disappear swiftly and completely. Chapter five, which chronicles Sitting Bull's surrender, begins with a contemplation of the buffalo: "the few remaining buffalo seemed to sink into the ground, so swiftly they disappeared" (195). In attributing the buffalo's disappearance to almost supernatural causes—it is as if they magically fall underground—the narrative ignores the wholesale slaughter of the buffalo by white hunters. The phrase removes agency, making it appear as if the buffalo vanish of their own accord. This self-exterminating aspect appears later in Garland's depiction of Sitting

Bull's last days. In fact, it is a staple of extinction discourse, the rhetoric explaining the decline of a race or culture as an inevitable outcome of progress.

In 1880, over Sitting Bull's objections, the tribe had signed a treaty ceding much of their land at Standing Rock. Iapi describes the situation in the language of extinction discourse: "Thus physically we were being submerged by the rising tide of an alien race. In the same way our old customs and habits were sinking beneath the white man's civilization" (222). Later, explaining his response to the Ghost Dance, Iapi narrates: "It seemed that I was looking upon the actual dissolution—the death pangs—of my race" (246). Whenever Iapi describes the debilitating encounter between his tribe and white "civilization," he uses either racial language or verbs synonymous with vanishing; e.g., "I, too, mourned the world that was passing so swiftly and surely" (202). He says of Sitting Bull: "He was a type of my vanishing race...and my heart went out to him" (261). The rhetoric Garland puts in Iapi's mouth belongs to the trope of the "Vanishing American," a common nineteenth-century convention that portrays the Indian as doomed to vanish upon contact with white civilization. Sitting Bull's bleaker pronouncements are similarly cast in this rhetoric of disappearance. Contemplating a return from his self-imposed Canadian exile after the Battle of Little Bighorn and aware of the danger of being taken as a prisoner, the chief says: "I am like a fly in a mountain stream when compared to this wonderful and cruel race" (196). The implication of his simile is that he will be swept away by swift waters.

Patrick Brantlinger opens his book-length study of extinction discourse with a quote from Darwin's *The Descent of Man*. In that 1871 work, Darwin writes: "When civilized nations come into contact with barbarians the struggle is short" (qtd in

Brantlinger 1). The evolutionary philosophy to which Garland subscribes quite logically appears on the page as extinction discourse. Brantlinger argues that a central premise of extinction discourse, "the belief that savagery was vanishing of its own accord from the world of progress and light," lessened "guilt and sometimes excused...violence" toward the "primitive" (3). He also notes that extinction discourse frequently takes a sentimental or mournful tone to address a "lost object before it is completely lost" (4). This observation enforces my contention that Garland's evolutionary theory creates nostalgia and is subsequently used as a strategy for dealing with that nostalgia. The sense that his childhood world is inevitably disappearing before modern civilization makes Howard profoundly homesick. At the same time, he tries to deflect the guilt he feels as a participant in civilized culture with the explanation that his actions are merely the result of circumstance. Iapi, too, feels guilty for his role as an interpreter in helping to broker a costly peace between his tribe and the government agents.

"The Silent Eaters" concludes with a chapter on Sitting Bull's last hours. Iapi characterizes him as embracing death and quotes him as saying, "The happy hunting grounds are near" (266). He speculates: "It would not seem strange to me if he had decided never to be taken from his people alive," as if Sitting Bull welcomes his own fated death (271). After briefly presenting a hazy account of Sitting Bull's murder at the hands of the tribal police, Iapi elegizes his chief:

Civilization marches above his face, but the heel of the oppressor cannot wear from the record of his race the name of "Ta-tank-yo-tanka," The Sitting Bull.

He epitomized the epic, tragic story of my kind. His life spanned the gulf between the days of our freedom and the death of every custom native to us. He

saw the invader come and he watched the buffalo disappear. Within the half century of his conscious life he witnessed greater changes and comprehended more of my tribe's tragic history than any other red man. (273-274)

The focus on Sitting Bull's death buries him in the primeval past. To conquer civilization only through death hardly seems like a victory.

Lee Clark Mitchell, in *Witnesses to a Vanishing America*, includes Hamlin Garland in his list of nineteenth-century American authors who served as witnesses to a "quickly passing" frontier (87). Mitchell's study examines various artistic representations of the vanishing wilderness, frontier, and Indians to argue that preservation, in images and writing, became especially important in this age of frenetic change. Garland's protagonists provide a clear vantage point for observing change; they balance insider and outsider perspectives, allowing them the proximity to witness and the formal education to comprehend. Civilization marches on and leaves Grant and Sitting Bull in its wake. But, through assimilation, Howard and Iapi survive to bear witness to the passing of their former way of life. Their stories exhibit a particularly modern tension between nostalgia and a faith in progress, between a longing to restore the primitive wonder of youth and a sense that this perspective is irretrievable. At the end of his visit to Isleta, Garland must admit that, even in this seeming haven from the bustle of civilization, a change is underway. A Tewa boy tells him in broken English that he wants to attend the white man's school against his father's wishes and to move out of his family's mud hut. The admission prompts a philosophical musing on the universal struggle between old and new ways: "So the world-wide, life-long struggle between the new and the traditional, the young and the old goes on here in these mud walls under the wide sky as elsewhere while

the glories of moon and sun and stars fall as ever into the heart of youth breeding unrest"

(68). Whether the struggle occurs within mud walls, in a teepee, or a dreary and dilapidated farmhouse on the Wisconsin prairie, the stories end the same: the old ways seemingly vanish, leaving behind a nostalgic witness to tell the tale.

Chapter 3: Rural Vanishings: Reading the Modern Pastoral as Extinction Discourse with John T. Frederick's *Druida*

Introduction

Nostalgia so pervades our attitudes toward country life that we often fail to recognize its presence. We picture quiet, tree-lined gravel roads where everyone waves “hello” and docile cattle munch grass by the wayside. We can imagine that the potatoes on our dinner table were mined with a pitchfork by a ruddy-faced farmer in denim overalls. In our collective dreams, cherub-cheeked innocents still suck malts through straws while perched at Formica countertops in Norman Rockwell-style diners. Nostalgia, literally home *sickness*, powerfully shapes our reality. Nostalgia softens the transition from pitchfork to 12-horse power, industrial potato harvester or from road-side diner to International House of Pancakes by maintaining a comforting, timeless image of the past. There is, however, a representational violence in nostalgia insofar as it removes its subject from time and space. With its desperate preservation of an idealized past and resulting obfuscation of the present, nostalgia denies coeval status to rural persons and places, so that we see not a “real” rural person but romanticized relic. For example, we understand the sparsely populated Dakotas as a place where buffalo still roam the prairie instead of home to many of the nation’s poorest counties. Or, the tenacious mythology of small-scale family farms overshadows the reality of corporate farms and we fail to grasp the full impact of industrial agriculture on our lives.

The longing expressed through nostalgia is often, though not necessarily, for one’s own childhood. John T. Frederick’s pastoral novel *Druida* (1923) offers the unique

authorial perspective of a former Iowa farm boy turned university professor during a key historical moment in which the nation's urban population outpaced the rural for the first time. Frederick's personal longing for a lost, rural past, a yearning present in *Druida*, coincides with the increasingly urban nation's collective pining for its own rural origins. The nostalgic mood is often a post-industrialization reaction to the "loss of rural simplicity, traditional stability and cultural integration" and the ascendancy of urban, capitalist culture (Turner 152). *Druida* can be read as a failed attempt to come to terms with this loss. Like thousands of farmers' daughters across the Midwest who were attending college for the first time in the 1920s, *Druida* leaves home to study at the state normal school.¹ Although her character seems capable of adapting to her new environment, she cannot assimilate. *Druida* remains stranded outside of civilization as a nostalgic relic of a simpler time.

This rather peculiar novel follows its eponymous heroine from her birth on a farm outside of the fictional town of Stablesburg, Minnesota through her formative years in the country and finally to a state teacher's college in a nearby city. Though her childhood is marked with poverty and toil, *Druida* develops a keen intelligence and moral sense. In one character-defining episode showing her as a defender of the helpless, she protects a gopher from a gang of schoolchildren bent on drowning it out of its hole. She steals rare moments of enjoyment in solitary walks or picking flowers. She never shares in the leisure activities of her peers, except during a trip to the state fair with her neighbor, Bud. With few friends her own age, *Druida*'s closest friend is Doctor Thompson, who figures heavily in the narrative. Her supposed father, Oscar Horsefall, plays a lesser role. With

¹ "Normal school" is an old term for what are now more commonly known as "teachers' colleges."

his grotesque appearance and rude manners, he stands primarily for the degradation of unenlightened rural living. Druida's biological father, the Horsefalls' hired man, supplies the girl's cultural legacy with the literature collection that he leaves the infant before quitting the farm. Wild, dark-eyed and nature-loving, Druida's mother blends a romantic temperament gained through novel reading with the rough hands and harsh tongue that come from years of hard labor. At the suggestion of Doctor Thompson, she hosts a community lecture given by Professor Willoughby on the topic of rural ideals and the importance of higher education. The talk inspires the bookish, eighteen year-old Druida. Several months later, unable to withstand her husband's cruel treatment and desperately bored with her narrow existence, Mrs. Horsefall takes a lethal dose of gopher poison. Bud supports Druida through the tragedy by helping with the chores. Next, she decides, with the encouragement of both doctor and professor, to leave her drunk and violent supposed father and their failing farm for school in the city. The professor petitions the school's superintendent to admit Druida, appoints himself her academic advisor, and enrolls her in two of his English classes. She boards with the doctor in town while looking for work before the beginning of classes. She flourishes in her new environment, working as a cook and waitress at a boarding house, proving herself a skillful writer, and gaining popularity with her peers. At the same time, both men fall in love with her. The doctor loses his practice because of false rumors of their inappropriate relationship. Similarly mean-spirited and unfounded gossip results in the professor's firing for improper conduct with Druida, who is also dismissed from the school. She refuses the professor's marriage proposal in favor of Bud's. The novel ends with the two jilted suitors waving goodbye as the new couple embarks for the Montana frontier, where they plan to start a farm of their

own.

Modern Pastoral Vanishings

With a plot largely centered on Druida's romantic options, the novel participates in the era's larger discourse surrounding the intermingling and mixture of different groups within the nation. Specifically, it considers the possibility of integration between rural (primitive) and urban (civil) types in the young rural woman's relationships with two very civilized suitors—a doctor and a professor. This potential integration through marriage concretely represents the union between these two fundamental sides of all human nature. Integration fails as both relationships end disastrously, but this is not surprising. Nostalgic art seeks to preserve a static image of the past. Frederick cannot shelter Druida from change while committing her to what amounts to a mixed marriage with an urbanite. Nor can he return her to the family farm because, in a modern pastoral twist, that ideal has fallen. Instead, he pairs her with Bud, a childhood friend and neighbor. The narrative suspends Druida in perfect virginity, just engaged but not yet married. As it shields her from time, the narrative also projects Druida beyond “real” space into the undefined Montana frontier. The ending superficially conforms to the pastoral mode by presenting the western wilderness as a positive alternative to the viciousness of civilization. However, the fact that the alternative space is never pictured should not be overlooked; rather than following the couple into a new Eden, Frederick literally leaves them at the curb as their car pulls away. This curious ending points to the irresolvable modern pastoral dilemma.

“Pastoral” is a tricky term to pin down, as Paul Alpers demonstrates with his

critical study, *What is Pastoral?* On a most basic level, literary pastorals involve shepherds. Of course, many works without a single sheep are rightly referred to as pastoral. Following Lawrence Buell, I use the term in a more extended sense as literature that “celebrates the ethos of nature/rurality over against the ethos of the town or city” (“Pastoral Ideology Reappraised” 23). In his seminal study *The Machine and the Garden* (1964), Leo Marx discusses the nostalgia that Americans have for the countryside as a form of pastoralism. In *Druida* nostalgia links the pastoral to “extinction discourse,” the dominant rhetoric surrounding the death and decline of a race or culture (Brantlinger 2). The modernist pastoral turns wistful remembrance into a death knell by denying the opportunity for a revivifying connection with nature.

Taken out of time and space, *Druida* is effectively vanished. Extinction discourse often employs the trope of vanishing to invoke the conflicting emotions of mourning and celebration (Brantlinger 2). By the early twentieth century rural folks had become America’s newest minority, and works like *Druida* that portray rural places and individuals ought to be placed in the category of extinction discourse. When something disappears it may be said to have “vanished,” but I’m using the term in a different, slightly less literal sense. As I am employing it, “vanishing” is a representational act performed in response to a perceived loss. The loss perceived may be a “real” one, as is the case with the diminishment of the rural population at the turn of the twentieth century in America. However, the reality of the loss matters less than the explanation of that loss. In this way, “vanishing” is more of an aesthetic explanation than an historical or material event. Like the larger category of extinction discourse of which it is a part, “vanishing” is a reaction to loss. It is a particular type of nostalgic response. The device of vanishing

conveniently removes agency, portraying disappearance as natural and inevitable rather than the result of human actions. Vanishing is a particularly modern phenomenon in the sense that the passage from a less complex to a more complex state of existence is regarded as inevitable. Within this evolutionary logic, primitive peoples and practices must disappear to make way for a new, superior order. Vanishing serves the forces of progress, while also aiding in nostalgia's attempt to commemorate a lost past by preserving it like a fly in amber (or, more in keeping with the theme of nostalgia, like a lucite-encased scorpion in a southwestern gift shop). The vanished object will be remembered exactly as it was at the moment of loss.

Regardless of what Frederick thought of the rural exodus, his nostalgic posture automatically produces conservative effects. As Walter Benn Michaels argues, the narrative encounter between civilized and primitive almost always ends with a "vanishing," either through biological obliteration, assimilation, or forced migration (232). *Druida* vanishes through this last means. *Druida*'s failed assimilation and disappearance from civilized society completes a nostalgic cycle of loss and mourning that crystallizes the lost object in memory. This little known novel clearly shows the convergence between modern pastoral literature and extinction discourse. The connection *Druida* demonstrates between the rhetoric of modern pastoral and extinction discourse can help us to recognize the darker side of nostalgia lurking beneath its smiling exterior. This less benign aspect masks present violence by preserving an untouched past image. Further, situating modern pastoral literature within the category of extinction discourse enables a reading of farmers and rural types as "modern America's Others." Within this representational schema, we see farmers and rural folks, like the indigenous tribes before

them, as destined to perish not because of violence enacted upon them but owing to an inherent flaw within them.

Extinction discourse, according to Patrick Brantlinger, always invokes the dual emotions of mourning and celebration (2). These feelings, which may seem opposed, actually produce the same effect—hastening the passage of their object. Incidentally, these are the same emotions evoked by the elegy, a form often taken by both extinction discourse and the pastoral. It makes sense that both extinction discourse and the pastoral commonly assume the elegaic form since both are rhetorical strategies for coping with loss and separation. By definition “elegy” refers to a certain poetic metre or to a mournful poem, and so *Druida* is not a true elegy. The novel does, however, deal with loss. The separation most germane to my study is that suffered by both doctor and professor when *Druida* disappears from their lives.

The differing reactions of doctor and professor upon losing *Druida* signify two responses to loss as theorized by Freud: mourning and melancholia. Whereas in melancholia one cannot let go of what is lost and becomes obsessed by it, mourning ends with the mourner giving up the absent or “soon-to-be absent object” (Gross 66-67). For the doctor at least, *Druida*’s departure from the city completes the project of mourning that accompanies the loss of an individual or way of life as the bereaved gives up the lost object. The professor, as I will argue in the third section of this chapter, never makes it through melancholia to arrive at mourning. In their introduction to *Loss*, David Eng and David Kazanjian write that “melancholia results from the inability to resolve the grief and ambivalence precipitated by the loss of the loved object, place or ideal” (3). *Druida* is a beloved person that also represents a rural ideal. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud

contends that regardless of whether the lost object is a beloved person or an abstraction, the process of mourning is the same. In the doctor and professor's response to *Druida's* departure, we see Frederick struggling with how to let go of an increasingly rare way of life. He seemingly aspires after the wisdom of the aged doctor who finally realizes that he cannot keep *Druida* for himself and who says goodbye with grace. He also appears to sympathize with the professor who reluctantly lets her go only after making a fool of himself. The text itself fails to get beyond melancholic ambiguity to the resolution of grief.

Exemplary of the modern pastoral, *Druida* takes a specific philosophical approach to vanishing. Alpers contends that the modern pastoral relies upon "commemorative meditation" to mentally preserve what is disappearing (408). Alpers distinguishes modern pastoral from earlier pastoral modes in its resistance to the "elegiac desire to make the sense of absence restore, of itself, that which is gone" in favor of commemorative meditation (307). Rather than seeking to restore a lost golden age of prelapsarian innocence, modern pastoral literature is content with committing the passing state to memory. This attitude toward change is a symptom of modernity. In his essay on coping with evanescence in the modern era, David Gross reasons that memory's goal is to "prolong *psychically* what cannot be prolonged *in actuality*" rather than to "preserve intact what is disappearing" (67-68).

Thus, modern pastoral literature contains a tacit acknowledgement that what is *really* disappearing cannot be preserved. By memorializing their subjects, works like *Druida* may actually hasten the real-world disappearance that they fictionally portray. Extinction discourse, to which *Druida* belongs, is performative insofar as it acts on the

world that it subsequently describes (Brantlinger 4). For this reason, modern pastoral fictions always already serve the forces of progress and civilization. However, there are no clear winners in *Druida*'s failed integration experiment as civilization loses the regenerative promise of a wife and the primitive is evacuated into an undefined future. Within extinction discourse, "the other is lost, in disintegrating time and space, but saved in the text" (Brantlinger 5). Only the reader "wins" in this scheme, and the victory lies in the preservation of a nostalgic point of reference.

The value of rural folks within the literary marketplace lies in their difference from the mostly urban readership. Difference is what sells to a nostalgic audience eager to find earlier versions of themselves in depictions of primitive perfection. The emphasis on rural / urban difference also works within the historical context of increased immigration and tremendous anxiety over strangers in the city to allay fears of a more menacing racial and ethnic difference. Stephanie Foote makes this point in *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in 19th Century American Literature*, arguing that "the solidity of the simple 'primitive' folk of the region" is a defense against "alienation" (15). By identifying with the primitive (with the natively American rural), non-immigrant urban Americans could reconnect with their own selves. In finding themselves in the primitive, these people excluded alien others who did not share in the nation's mythical, agrarian past. Similarly, Buell contends that the pastoral offers a "means by which alienation is mediated" (23). The difference of the primitive forms a point of identification and exclusion.

The rural / urban divide is racially coded in *Druida* as Frederick associates whiteness with rural spaces and blackness with urban ones. Increasing urbanization

consequently translates into increasing racial diversity. The novel aligns the passing of a pastoral state of existence with the diminishment of white dominance. Extinction discourse collapses in on itself with anxiety over the “degeneration or even extinction of the white race” as its logical endpoint (Brantlinger 15). Extinction discourse assumes that progress requires the continual disappearance of more primitive types. Under this logic, today’s civilized types will become tomorrow’s primitives as lower-level civilized folks fall to outside competition. “Extinction discourse comes full circle,” writes Brantlinger, “with the troubling idea that the white race is ‘passing’ while one or more of the ‘colored’ races may supersede it” (191). This racial anxiety surfaces most recognizably during Druida’s visit to the state fair where a scene of racially-motivated mob violence convinces her that she does not like crowds (i.e., cities). The subsequent analysis will address the text’s association of urban spaces with a mounting black (and yellow and brown) menace.

As I have argued, notions of the primitive innocence work in the novel to consolidate white, native identity by excluding alien others, but those same notions also contribute to Druida’s expulsion from the city. A nostalgic imagination like Frederick’s regards rural characters as representatives of a lost state of former innocence. As such, their value is contingent upon their absence. If Druida were to remain in the city and adopt urban ways, she would lose her symbolic power. It is only by vanishing from the novel that she can satisfy the nostalgic yearnings of Frederick and his audience. Certainly, gender accounts for some of Druida’s difficulty in the city. However, her troubles cannot be explained by gender alone since other country girls, even foreigners, adapt to city life with “marvellous swiftness” in the novel (219). The bleak outcome of

Druida's integration experiment reveals the depth of the novel's complicity in the modern pastoral project to nostalgically preserve rural culture.

Melancholic Traces of the Author

John T. Frederick was born in 1893 in Corning, a small town in southwestern Iowa, and grew up on the farm. He drew most of his material for *Druida* from his experiences as a professor at a teacher's college in the rural community of Moorhead, Minnesota. Frederick can be understood as a conflicted figure. Torn between dueling identities as a farmer's son and a college professor, he also felt the tension between his commitment to literary regionalism and the enticing attention of the eastern literary establishment.

Frederick's hybrid identity surfaces in the novel as traces of the author are discernable in all three major characters. These traces function as melancholic sign posts guiding the reader through the author's nostalgic reaction to the loss of a golden age of unspoiled innocence. "Melancholia," according to Eng and Kazanjian, "creates a realm of traces open to signification, a hermeneutic domain of what remains of loss" (4). Frederick is most clearly Professor Willoughby, with whom he shares not only a profession but also a close physical resemblance down to the distinctive, protruding ears, large eyeglasses and rail-thin frame. He is also visible in the aged Doctor Thompson who sentimentally regrets his decision to leave the family farm for a professional trade in the city. Further, like Frederick who purchased his own large piece of undeveloped land around the time of *Druida*'s publication, the doctor leases a "wild tract" of land where he dreams of retiring. Finally, Frederick invokes his own past with *Druida*'s decision to leave the rural

countryside for school in the city. Druida earns money for school expenses by washing dishes, the same job that got Frederick through his first year at the University of Iowa. My exploration into the relationship between nostalgia and representation in *Druida* depends in part upon a focus on the aesthetic philosophies of each character and their differing attitudes toward the rural countryside.

The nostalgia Frederick displays in *Druida* is partially an “imperialist nostalgia.” The term, invented by Renato Rosaldo, refers to the act of “mourning for what one has destroyed” (*Culture and Truth* 69). Imperialist nostalgia works to assuage guilt felt by agents of empire. In Frederick’s case, the guilt is that of an English professor who corrupts the untutored innocence of simple country girls with knowledge. This idea would seem ridiculous if it were not for the abundant textual evidence supporting a reading of the professor’s character as a corrupting influence. It is the literature professor, after all, who lures Druida to the city. Novel reading, in the text’s repetition of the familiar Victorian-era argument, unfits women for domestic life. In *Druida*, Mrs. Horsefall kills herself partly because she cannot reconcile her lowly existence with the romantic fantasies stirred by her reading. Frederick underscores the theme of moral ruin through fiction by identifying Madame Bovary as Druida’s favorite heroine and with a novel the professor lends Druida. *Richard Ferveral*, the book she borrows, is about the inability of the educational system to regulate human passions. Some critics regard *Richard Ferveral* as the first modern novel in English literature for its frank discussion of contemporary sexual attitudes. Druida finds George Merideth’s novel unconvincing because she cannot relate to the characters.

The theme of virtue threatened in the city reaches its fullest expression in the

character of “Jim,” a waitress at the New Columbia who functions as Druida’s foil. Druida first encounters Jim in the New Columbia restaurant, where her and Bud go for dinner during their trip to the state fair. Druida compares herself unfavorably to the poised, neatly dressed waitress. When Druida takes a job at the restaurant almost a year later, she recognizes Jim. Sleeping in her hotel room later that evening, Druida is awakened when Jim accidentally opens her door instead of her own. She hears Jim and her male companion enter an “adjoining” room and sees “obscene shadows” reflected in the backyard (103). The implication of course is that Druida might easily fall into the same pattern of conduct. Jim is Druida’s shadow-self, a lurid reflection of what she might become. This point is reinforced when Druida returns to the New Columbia seeking work after being kicked out of school. A position is available because Jim “pulled out for the Cities” the night before with a drummer (245). The name of the restaurant suggests a new America, a place with a loosening moral code where gender lines are blurred (“Jim”) as women work and attend school outside the home. Frederick nostalgically shields Druida from this new America that coeducational colleges helped to create. By vanishing her to Montana, he saves Druida from the fate of countless Jims. In so doing he preserves an image of the good old America of his childhood.

Reading *Druida* as a Modern Pastoral

With *Druida*, Frederick explores the tension at the heart of pastoralism, what Leo Marx identifies as the “irresolvable” conflict between Art and Nature (“Pastoralism in America,” 44). The “escapist and nostalgic feeling” that Marx attributes to the pastoral impulse is discernable in *Druida* but with a difference (55). Escape is ultimately denied

to the two men who seek to connect with nature through *Druida*. Frederick tries to retrieve a lost primitive innocence but fails because his trope of vanishing reinforces the irretrievable nature of the past.

In this section, I intend to accomplish the following broad objectives: to explain how *Druida* fits the pastoral mode, show the convergence between the modern pastoral and extinction discourse focusing on the role of nostalgia, and demonstrate how an understanding of the novel as extinction discourse enables a reading of farmers as modern America's Others.

William Empson contends that a basic social situation—the meeting of “high” and “low” persons, or the sophisticate and the rustic—defines the pastoral mode. *Druida* quite literally embodies that encounter. She is the product of an affair between her mother, a coarse farmwife, and an extraordinarily cultured hired man of mysterious origins. Contradictory identities, like that of hired man and refined book lover, are a hallmark of the pastoral mode. Readers enjoy the idea of an intelligent or high-class person intentionally placed into a setting that does not seem to suit his inborn qualities (Gransden 178).

In the novel's opening scene, Brown drives a sleigh carrying the doctor through a blizzard to the Horsefall farm for *Druida*'s birth. At this point no one, including the doctor, knows that the hired man is actually *Druida*'s real father; yet, his first impression of Brown reveals a keen interest in the farmhand's genetics. Looking him over in the sleigh, the doctor notes his “high, thin nose,” “clear-cut chin,” and “clean white teeth” (3). Brown, he thinks, “did not look like a hired man” (3). The doctor learns *Druida*'s true paternity much later and reveals the secret to the eighteen year-old. “He was no hired

man,” the doctor explains to Druida, but “a man of learning, of refinement; I believe, of character. A few such men move up and down the world. Those books of yours, he left for you...you owe Oscar Horsefall nothing—nothing at all” (156). Druida is more relieved than shocked by the news of her fortunate illegitimacy. Her supposed father, Oscar Horsefall, is a violent-tempered, drunken degenerate with “manure-daubed overalls and bristly, pimped red face” (47). Frederick expresses Horsefall’s inferiority in physiological terms with “the narrow, prominent forehead, the close-set, protuberant eyes, the flat nostrils, the flabby lips and meaningless jaw” (129). Brown’s superiority is similarly framed in physiological terms. With the contrast, the text employs the genetically-based theories of evolution underlying extinction discourse. The disparity reinforces the vast difference separating the “high” and “low” extremes of the human race.

It is hard to see what a sensitive and cultured man like Brown could find to love in Mrs. Horsefall. The narrative description highlights her furious temper, large size, and the redness of her hands and face. In one particularly harsh scene, she screams at Druida for dirtying a jar with a bouquet of wildflowers that she had collected. In another, she strikes her husband on the mouth and drags him out of the room. However, after the fight she takes a restorative walk in the country. She is so moved by the sunset that her eyes light up with “exaltation” at its majesty (38). She weeps, imagining that she hears the voice of Brown, “who had taught her to see the sunset” (41). Here, it appears that her almost mystical connection to nature makes her the type of idealized, simple rustic celebrated in the pastoral. However, it is odd that she would need to be instructed in how to appreciate the sunset by an outsider. Two chapters later, we have another example of a

cultured outsider—the professor—instructing the locals on topics with which they would already be most familiar. The lecture Professor Willoughby delivers to the Farmer’s Club meeting at the Horsefall home is titled “Ideals in Country Life.” With these incidents the novel brings up issues of representation central to the pastoral by showing what happens when outside interpretations replace local ones. Alienation results when one’s own reality comes to be mediated by another. When Mrs. Horsefall experiences a sunset through an outsider’s language and perspective, she becomes detached from her own lived existence. On some level, her own fundamental connection to nature is severed. This alienation directly contributes to her suicide.

The conversation about nostalgia within literature and philosophy focuses on the issue of human alienation in both the natural and social realm (Turner 150). Druida’s association with the professor and the influence of the college environment threatens to separate her from the values of rural society. She resists the alienation that destroys her mother but she resists only by vanishing. The text fails to present a way out of the sense of modern alienation that plagues both doctor and professor. They see Druida as the antidote to their estrangement. Losing her, they lose their connection to human life.

The doctor and professor view Druida from two different perspectives. The doctor approaches her through the perspective of an old man who yearns to return to the countryside of his boyhood. The professor comprehends her through the philosophy of modern art. The novel is more about what Druida represents to them than it is about Druida. Druida is the object rather than the subject of the book bearing her name. She is a fetish, an object inspiring irrational reverence and obsessive devotion. Also a nostalgic object, she is a passive vessel into which the two male leads dump their longing.

Frederick goes to absurd lengths in order to smuggle culture into the country. The bequeathed books form Druida's paternal legacy, profoundly influencing her character. At once simple and refined, Druida perfectly fits the role of pastoral heroine. However, she could have found Keats and Hardy easily enough in a rural library. Brown's mysterious presence on the Minnesota plains is never explained. Why does Frederick press the limits of verisimilitude in order to prove the sophistication and refinement of his heroine? The text only reinforces a view of rural folks as intellectually backwards by insisting that culture must come from outside. Yet, for the most part, the novel celebrates the rural ethos.

The solution to the riddle of Druida's odd parentage lies in the pastoral mode itself. The fortunate illegitimacy exaggerates, perhaps intentionally, the union of complex and simple. Druida offers a site for the tensions between simple and complex to work themselves out. Like the shepherd of traditional pastoral who lives in the borderlands between society and nature and blends the best aspects of both, Druida is a liminal figure. The text stages the encounter between civilized and primitive on two levels: within Druida and between doctor / professor and Druida.

In his "A Note on Nostalgia," Bryan S. Turner convincingly argues for the existence of four discrete dimensions within the "nostalgic paradigm" as theorized in philosophy and literature (150-151). The novel explores issues related to the first two dimensions through Druida's relationship with the doctor. Her interactions with the professor serve to illuminate the third and fourth dimensions. The first dimensions of the nostalgic paradigm deal with personal and historical loss, whereas the final dimensions are concerned with more social aspects of loss. This framework fits my conception of the

doctor as a means for considering the relation between civilization and wildness in more personal and historical terms. The fundamental conflict for the doctor is that between city (and all that the category entails in terms of loss of innocence and alienation) and country. This framework also matches my understanding of the professor as a vehicle for presenting the antithesis between art and life.

The four dimensions of the nostalgic paradigm according to Turner are as follows:

1. The sense of historical decline or loss, departure of a golden age
2. The sense of absence or loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty
3. The sense of loss of personal freedom and autonomy with the disappearance of genuine social relationships
4. The idea of loss of simplicity, personal authenticity and emotional spontaneity

The Doctor's Druida

After her mother's suicide, Druida stays with Doctor Thompson and his housekeeper in Stablesburg for a few weeks before starting college in Riverton. During this time they form a close bond as the doctor confides the tragic details of his former life as a missionary in China (where he lost both a wife and a baby daughter) and reveals the secret of Druida's true father. The doctor also shares his pastoral dream with Druida. The doctor's nostalgia hinges upon the desire to recover his lost youth by returning to a "big tract of wild land." He associates wildness, fertility, and youth with Druida. Their relationship never becomes physical but the doctor's career is ruined when two local gossips spot the pair together in a hotel room. After that, he experiences "the complete alienation of the townspeople" (177). In the end, he declines Druida's invitation to move

to Montana with her and Bud.

Along the way to a house call in the country, the doctor reveals his dream to Druida. His description emphasizes youth and the desire to connect to the soil. As Frederick narrates:

He had been taking his rickety Ford on recent drives, since the roads had partially dried. But this afternoon he ordered a team, and they jogged slowly over the level miles toward the north-west. Everywhere discs and seeders were travelling back and forth across the vividly black fields.

‘I wish I were younger,’ the doctor told Druida wistfully. ‘I would go out and farm. If I didn’t get out in the country on drives I don’t know how I could stand it. The soil calls me. I was raised on a farm in Illinois: maybe I should have stayed there, as my father wished. But my father and mother are dead long since, the farm is sold—and I’m an old man, Druida. I did buy some land a few years back—a big tract of wild land—not paid for yet by a good way. Guess it will make me some money if I can hold it long enough. But that isn’t what I wanted—I dreamed of farming it—but I’m too old.’

Druida was silent.

The call was at a tiny farmhouse by a marshy lake. Druida watched the brown ducks dipping for food among the broken reeds, their tails up, their feet kicking to keep their heads submerged. The slow drive home was infinitely restful. The girl seemed to feel strength filling her from the fields ready for the seeding, the stainless sky, the gentle man who rode beside her. (152-153)

This passage depicts the pastoral ideal as unattainable, as belonging to a lost golden age

of youth. The doctor's "wistful[1]" tone in the second quoted paragraph signals the nostalgic quality of his musings. His fantasy is a means for coping with the loss of the childhood farm. It emphasizes a connection to the land as valuable in itself, more important than the money promised by his investment. Frederick frames the doctor's dream within an image of crop seeding and then likens Druida to a field "ready for the seeding," highlighting her fertility in contrast to the doctor's sterility.

Several pages later the doctor tells Druida that Oscar Horsefall is not her biological father. The news unleashes a powerful emotional reaction in Druida, and she clings to the doctor as he kisses her hair. When she draws towards him, the doctor sees "half-opening, a door of blinding radiance" (157). He backs away and whispers, "I think I must have loved your mother" (157). Clearly, the doctor fixates on the past in a particularly melancholy way insofar as he is not able to give it up. The "blinding radiance" is the golden promise of pastoral bliss—of primitive sexual delights—and significantly it reminds him of Druida's mother. He describes Mrs. Horsefall as possessing "the infinite capacity for life which a few women have." Then he tells Druida that she has her mother's "strength and vitality, her power of being" (157). The doctor associates life, strength and vitality with a bygone era. He prophesies that Druida will fulfill her mother's "capacity" in the future. The doctor certainly paints a grim picture of present conditions as capable of driving even an exceptionally lively woman to suicide. Behind the doctor's odd remarks is the overwhelming sense that life is elsewhere—not in the twentieth-century American city.

The parallel the narrative draws between Druida and the doctor's tract of wild land reinforces a reading of her as symbolic of wilderness. The text ascribes Druida all

the restorative properties typically attributed to wilderness in the pastoral tradition. The connection between her and the land is established through a payment that the doctor makes to Oscar Horsefall. The doctor agrees to pay Druida's expenses so that Oscar will let her attend school. The money he gives Oscar was what he had set aside to make the annual payment on his land (132). Later, the bank repossesses the land when the doctor cannot make the payment. In effect, the doctor gives up his pastoral dream to purchase Druida's freedom. The desire he had mapped onto the wild land is projected onto Druida. With her departure, the doctor loses the chance to restore a sense of personal wholeness through a revitalizing connection to nature. Letting go of Druida, he surrenders the pastoral impulse. He resigns himself to age, alienation, and decline in the city.

The doctor's tragic missionary experience in China decades earlier helps to explain the relative ease with which he refuses Druida's offer to move west with the young couple. That experience also strengthens a view of the novel as participating in the larger modern project wherein rural folks come to be represented as exotic Others. On the most simplistic level, a missionary is someone who enters into a different culture in order to convert the natives to his own worldview. Critics of such endeavors charge missionaries with a type of colonialism, destroying native culture and introducing capitalism along with religion. With the loss of his family during his missionary work, the doctor seemingly learned a valuable lesson about the perils of cultural integration. Experience taught him that different cultures ought to remain separate. In early twentieth-century America the gulf between urban and rural cultures was quickly widening to produce perspectives as markedly different as those dividing East from West. He assumes the missionary role with Druida when she first arrives in the city, instructing her in

matters of dress and proper conduct, but he soon drops it. Perhaps he senses a danger in her otherness, a threat to the would-be colonizer. After relating a lascivious banker's offer to lend her money and give her a job, the doctor tells Druida that her beauty won't be *her* undoing, implying that it will be the downfall of some urban suitor. The doctor doesn't beg Druida to remain in the city because his experience tells him that she would be better off with her own kind.

When it is time for Druida to leave for school, the doctor accompanies her on the train to Riverton and checks her into the Imperial Hotel. Two old local women see the pair through a window and rumors soon begin circulating through Stablesburg. The doctor is forced to move to Riverton where the scandal is unknown. He wastes away in increasingly cheap rooms and loses touch with Druida. The school year begins and as the doctor's influence wanes, the professor's significance increases.

The Professor's Druida

Professor Willoughby frequently let his class out early so he could speak privately with Druida about literary matters. The student and teacher entertain diametrically opposed philosophies of art. In a recurring disagreement, Willoughby champions an aesthetic philosophy that detaches art from nature. Druida argues that one must share fully in life in order to effectively understand and interpret it. Their debate over the proper relation between Art and Nature articulates a central issue of the pastoral mode. According to K.W. Gransden, the pastoral considers the chief conflict of human experience to be that "between action and withdrawal" (179). The impersonality of the (college) institution and the limits it places on Druida's freedom only strengthen her

passionate insistence on the importance of lived experience. She sees many of her female teachers repressed to the point of hysteria. When Druida and Willoughby rehash their old philosophical argument during a late night walk, they are spotted by a couple of these teachers who report her to the dean. When the professor hears of her dismissal, he walks out to the country and throws himself against the ground in a melancholy display of grief. He proposes marriage and relocation to the Twin Cities, but Druida chooses Bud instead. In the context of this failed potential union, Druida vanishes because of a difference in aesthetic judgment.

Nostalgia tinges Frederick's depiction of the school as the text critiques the impersonality and lack of freedom within the institution. In "A Note on Nostalgia," Turner maintains that bureaucracies induce nostalgia in response to the loss of individual freedom and genuine social relationships (151). With the "loss of moral coherence," he writes, "the isolated individual is increasingly exposed to the constraining social processes of modern institutionalized regulation, which gradually undermine the individual" (Turner 151). Individuality is constructed as a frightful, worry-inducing thing in the description of Druida's first day of school. The following passage emphasizes the military discipline and the cold, inhuman atmosphere of the place, prompting a memory of simpler times:

Just as Druida emerged from the resentful scrutiny of the registrar an electric bell above the office entrance jangled shrilly. Doors flew open along the half-dark corridor and troops of girls streamed out, laughing and chattering in two's and three's. Here and there a worried individual scurried away silently, bent over an armful of books...The crowds eddied toward a door near one end of the hall,

where a sign announced ‘students’ mail.’...She moved away, down the hall, and noticed Miss Bates standing in the doorway of one of the bare, dusty rooms, staring contemptuously at the crowd of girls. (209)

The school is full of scowling schoolmarms like Miss Bates, sexually repressed women who envy Druida’s unconstrained manner and natural beauty. The text nostalgically contrasts Druida’s emotional spontaneity and personal authenticity with their socially-conditioned rigidity and artificiality. These teachers are outraged by the attention the professor, a fellow urbanite and one of their own social class, pays to the simple country girl.

The city schoolteachers are so removed from the wild in nature and consequently in themselves that the loosening of social restrictions makes them temporarily insane. This hysteria surfaces during an annual spring picnic in the country. At the event the teachers are significantly described as “turning loose.” Their costumes and giddy behavior make them appear grotesque. Frederick narrates:

[One teacher] had turned his coat inside out and had crisscrossed his bald head with black lines of charcoal. He presented an incredibly gross spectacle, trotting about with his beady eyes shining, playing broad jokes with chicken bones and banana peelings. The merriment of many of the women had taken on a hysterical quality due to long repression. They ate hungrily reaching for the food. They pranced awkwardly about the hampers. (226)

This weird picnic scene contributes to the sense of incongruity between urban and rural developed throughout the novel. Druida and the professor are present at the picnic but do not share in the gaiety. Willoughby stays behind to help Druida clean up after the picnic.

While waiting for the train to town, the professor first introduces his theory of aesthetic detachment. He urges Druida to keep writing, telling her that what is “worthwhile” is “to look on at the show, to interpret, to record” (229). Highlighting the lifelessness of this approach, the narration describes the professor’s voice as “impersona[l]” and his body as “frail” (228, 229). Willoughby may not realize it, but it is Druida’s difference that attracts him.

The professor gives the most detailed articulation of his philosophy when he runs into Druida after a violin concert a few days later. During the stroll that gets her kicked out of school, he gushes about the heightened “sense of the spectacle of life” that the concert instilled in him (233). “That’s the thing that matters,” he counsels Druida is,

“...the artist’s point of view—his detachment from life which gives him sympathy and understanding. To the rest of us life is gay or tragic, sordid or enjoyable. But to him alone it is beautiful...’

‘But cannot one live—and see life too?’ asked Druida softly.

‘You cannot have your cake and eat it,’ he answered. Then more gently, ‘You cannot expend the stuff of your soul in battle, and still be above the battle looking on.’

‘But how shall one understand life without sharing it?’

‘...in the long run—nothing matters but the interpretation—the understanding.’

‘Living matters,’ urged Druida shyly.” (233)

Druida’s demure final remark abounds in what William Empson calls “comic primness.” The term refers to a common form of irony in the pastoral mode in which the apparently

innocent character says something that “open[s] up a range of critical attitudes” (Alpers 40). At this point, the student surpasses the teacher, although she had already begun to find his literary opinions “superficial” weeks earlier (219). With his cake cliché, the professor denies an integrated theory of art *and* life. He effectively claims that one cannot write about and participate in life; also that a person cannot be both social and natural. He declares a position on the big question lurking behind the narrative: Is it possible to blend the civil and natural? The text labors to offer an affirmative answer but at last it cannot, and we see Druida ferried away to the Montana frontier at the end. As he attempts to write a poem about Druida later that same night, Willoughby realizes that “his whole ideal of detachment and interpretation” was false (236). He echoes her words to himself: “Living matters” (236). While the professor finally gives up his theory of separation between art and nature, the narrative continues to reinforce the dichotomy.

Like the doctor, Professor Willoughby strongly associates Druida with earth and natural abundance. After hearing about the scandal, Willoughby searches for Druida with an uncharacteristic bellyful of whiskey and a lustful appetite:

Madly his mind reached out for some physical contact with her—failing that, for the feel of places where she had been...with a flare of passionate memory he recalled the place by the river where they had watched the sunset...her body resting on the warm earth close to his. Irresistibly he desired that place. He divined healing in the touch of that earth if he could throw himself upon it under the low-topped trees. (275)

Note how quickly he transfers his desire from the woman to the land in these lines. He finds her asleep beneath a grove of trees. Awe replaces passion as he gazes upon her

sleeping form. He whispers: “A woman, to know the pangs of birth—to give new life” (277). When she wakes to find him staring, he tells her: “I am worshipping you...the sight of you has purified me—like the holy vessels of the temple. I think you are a holy vessel, Druida, in the temple of life” (277). This understandably freaks her out. She gives him a “dazed” look and does not respond. In elevating Druida (as nature) to an object of worship, Willoughby reveals the extent of his own alienation. Whereas age prevents the doctor from marrying Druida, modern psychosis foils the professor’s chances of marriage. Despite all his talk about the importance of understanding and interpretation, the professor’s own interpretation of the reality of the natural world is deeply flawed. More than anything, the romantic perspective may be blamed for the professor’s breakdown insofar as it removes him from reality. This textual detail combined with Mrs. Horsefall’s romantically-motivated suicide forms a cogent critique of romanticism. Frederick clearly aligns himself with the cadre of naturalist authors that Druida favors: Thomas Hardy, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris. However, the (arguably) more realistic approach to rural life that Frederick takes in the novel still fails to produce a believable conclusion capable of resolving its central conflict.

Melancholy Objects and Extinction Discourse

The modern pastoral produces its own unique vanishing effect that can be understood through the photograph. Frederick’s allusion to Dreiser calls to mind the latter author’s disclaimer regarding artistic intention in *Sister Carrie* (1900).² Dreiser wrote that his novel was not “intended as a piece of literary craftsmanship, but as a *picture* of

² Dreiser, Theodore. *Sister Carrie*. 1900. New York: Signet Classic, 2000.

conditions done as simply and effectively as the English language will permit” (emphasis mine). The photograph (a type of picture) captures the “nostalgic sense of the passing of time, finitude and death” in modern cultures (Turner 150). Susan Sontag refers to photographs as “melancholy objects” for the way they transform the past into an object of sentimental regard, blurring moral distinctions and suspending historical judgments (*On Photography* 71). Seemingly following Dreiser’s critical lead, Frederick arrests Druida in a fixed image. She is pictured as “silent, wistful” and “grave” as their car pulls away (286-287). The doomed stoicism of the image recalls Edward Curtis’s early twentieth-century photographs of the “vanishing” American Indian. This is the means of mental preservation or “commemorative mediation” that Alpers associates with the modern pastoral (408).

Extinction discourse holds that the primitive vanishes because of an inherent internal flaw rather than because of external violence. Druida’s internal flaw, which establishes her as incompatible with modernity, is one of taste. She tells the professor: “I am afraid I am too much fashioned for taking part in life—to be satisfied with looking on” (229). “Fashioned” is a most telling verb; it explains Druida as shaped by the forces of heredity and environment. Thus, her character can be understood as predetermined in the direction of nature over art. She displays this preference early on, at the state fair, where she would rather look at the agricultural exhibits than the “characterless water-colours that formed the ‘art’ exhibit” (52-53). Bud notes her discerning eye for livestock and declares her a “natural judge” (52). This detail of aesthetic judgment as responsible for Druida’s fundamental incompatibility with civilization is extremely important. Aesthetic judgment is a cultural matter. Extinction discourse surrounding indigenous

tribes often attributes their downfall to culture. Such discourse holds that primitive peoples are destined to perish because their culture unfits them for modern life. This explanation obscures the broader political and economic factors at work in their decline. The cultural account also makes the remedy appear deceptively simple: take on civilized ways and you will enjoy our standard of living. The description of Druida after she speaks the line about “being much too fashioned for taking part in life—to be satisfied looking on” further supports a reading of the novel as extinction discourse. She is depicted much like one of James Fenimore Cooper’s Indians: “her face, set to the west, held a brooding quiet that arrested him. It was statuesque, fulfilled with vision” (229). Druida frequently faces west throughout the novel and her mother dies while looking westward. The text implies that there may still be space for primitive, nature-loving individuals on the edge of civilization. However, it entertains the possibility of freedom only to deny it. Her statuesque appearance already memorializes Druida, preserving her image against the passage of time.

Druida’s Bud

The pattern of objectification takes an interesting turn when Druida objectifies Bud. On a meditative country walk she distills her lover into an image. “Druida,” Frederick narrates, “imaged Bud again at work on his farm, her mind dwelling on the picture affectionately” (264). Druida takes a nostalgic approach to Bud who represents her lost childhood. This narrated impression elucidates the way in which the more primitive character is always set apart as the Other of the civilized gaze.

Without an education or much city experience, Bud is an even more primitive

version of Druida. His character is remarkably undeveloped. With his youth and lack of pretension, he presents a contrast to the doctor and professor. Like Druida, Bud represents life in the novel. Considering his proposal during the same country walk alluded to above, a “love of life swe[eps] through her like high music” (266). The couple’s first and most significant interaction occurs at the state fair, where their similarity is contrasted with the frightening difference of their surroundings. The fairgrounds serve as an exaggerated or hyper-real urban space. Fairgrounds represent the speedy encroachment of development on the rural landscape. Because of their temporary quality fairgrounds also signify an alienating lack of rootedness.

Freakish Difference

When Druida and Bud visit the fair, their first stop is a freak show. The spectacle relies upon difference. Lured into the tent by the promises of an unsavory ethnic character with “dark-eye[s]...oily hair and olive skin,” the couple comes face-to-face with something entirely different from the giant “savage of hippopotamuslike proportions” and thin bearded lady depicted on the worn banner (51). As Frederick narrates:

They found themselves ushered by an impassive negro between walls of brown canvas, and suddenly in the presence of a tubby mass of flesh, covered by a pale yellow skin. The mass shifted to disclose a shapeless face with vague yellow eyes, edged with stiffly artificial black whiskers. “Where’s the bearded lady?” Bud started to ask the negro attendant, but he had returned to the door. “Are you the whole show?” he then addressed the mass of flesh. A film of annoyance seemed

to pass over the yellow eyes, but there was no reply. It was cool and yet close in the tent. Druida shuddered and they stumbled back outside. (51)

Paying admission to a greasy brown man, led by a black man, and encountering a genderless yellow being, the young crowd enters a frightening realm of otherness. The world of the tent is one marked by unintelligibility as the senses fail; only Bud speaks, the negro usher reveals no emotion or awareness, and there is a surreal, “seem[ing]”-quality to the events rather than an absolute one. What is especially terrifying about this scene its unconscious, somnambulistic, almost nightmarish quality, indicated by the passive construction, “they found themselves” and the shapelessness of the creature’s face. Hybridity, too, characterizes the freaky space of the canvas tent. Only one freak dwells within—not the bearded woman *and* fat savage advertised outside but a strange combination of both. Perhaps not even a woman, the artificially-bearded sideshow exhibit is also not a savage. Interestingly, the freak is more recognizable to Bud as a savage than a bearded lady despite its artificial whiskers. Bud would not inquire as to the whereabouts of the bearded lady if he believed the “tubby mass of flesh” to be her. His question signals an unthinking, almost automatic readiness to label inscrutable otherness as savage. This carnivalesque confusion of race and gender introduces the fraught issues of identity and otherness that underlie the novel.

Next, Bud and Druida wander over to the horse races where a riot breaks out after a black jockey injures a white jockey during a race. Frederick narrates the riot:

Then with a crash of boards and squealing of wires the quarter-stretch fence gave way and the crowd of men surged out on the track. The negro slipped through a hole at the corner of the grandstand and ran across the fairground. The crowd

swept after him. Shouts of “Get him! Get the nigger!” Merged into an angry, incoherent roar...they crashed over the tent-ropes and through lemonade stands. Tripped by stakes, some fell and were trampled upon. Screams of women, wails of children arose in the wake of the black wave. (59-60)

The black jockey escapes the crowd’s murderous intentions, but the episode is enough to permanently prejudice Druida against the city. Twice, Frederick uses the racialized adjective “black” to describe the insidious horde of white men: at the end of the passage quoted above and when a “black mass of men” assembles around the judges’ stand to contest a previous race (58). After this incident Druida revokes her earlier comment about liking crowds.

These fair scenes add a racial dimension to the novel’s pastoral bias against urban spaces by equating urbanism with racial diversity. *Druida* portrays the presence of yellow and black characters as unsettling and conducive to violence. Extinction discourse implodes into anxiety over the potential extinction of the white race (Brantlinger 15). The creepiness of the freak show tent derives from its racial indeterminacy. In the anxious space of the tent, Druida and Bud find reassurance in their homogeneity. The horse race serves as a metaphor for competition between the races, and it suggests that non-whites will cheat in order to get ahead. The race scene enacts the loss of position as minority surpasses white. In this trope of lost position can be read nativist anxieties over the displacement of native-born Americans by racial and ethnic minorities.

Nostalgic Vision

As a vanishing figure, Druida lacks a present identity. Without substance in the

present, she effectively exists outside of time and space. Nostalgia connects Druida firmly to the past, while a pastoral impulse seeks to push her (idealized nature) into the future as a means of escape from the present. Druida is created from the “nostalgic vision” of her author. By “nostalgic vision,” I mean an aspiration for the future based upon an idealized past. Frederick’s nostalgic vision is for a sort of pastoral utopia. A vision is a kind of prophecy, and prophecies are realized outside of the text. Vision conveniently looks beyond present reality.

The traditional pastoral mode emphasizes the regenerative power of nature. In *Druida*, the regenerative promise of nature appears only as a vision—as Druida’s fantasy of her own future children. The novel repeatedly associates her with life, but it does not portray her as a mother, only as a woman who dreams of motherhood. On that same country walk discussed above, Druida’s thoughts shift from Bud to their future children:

With the clearness of a noonday vision she saw her children among the shocks of yellow wheat—clean-limbed, eager-faced—her children. Her eyes filled with happy tears. For a time she did not measure distance. She knew now that she had decided. (266)

Her vision blends her offspring with the landscape. They appear “among the shocks of yellow wheat.” The juxtaposition of “time” and “distance” in the third quoted sentence shows how the nostalgic vision misrepresents time and space. Tellingly, she chooses to ignore the “distance.” Here, distance directly refers to the length of her walk but also to the gap between her present circumstances and the fulfillment of her vision. Druida’s decision to disregard spatial and temporal distance mirrors the text’s vexed relationship to time.

In relegating the next generation to a vision, the novel fulfills the conventions of extinction discourse. The future pictured is fantastic, unreal, and indeterminate. Despite the supposed “clearness” of her vision, the narrative describes Druida’s children most ambiguously. Basic details such as the number of children and their genders are left out in favor of abstractions like “clean-limbed” and “eager-faced.” The former designation matches earlier mentions of Bud himself as “clean” and repudiates contemporary social notions of farmers as degenerate primitives. However, despite the genetic fitness and fervor attributed to the next generation, their future still feels uncertain. Druida’s inability to imagine her future concretely is symptomatic of the narrative’s nostalgic viewpoint.

Conclusion

Druida is a novel of loss. Fittingly, the final scene is one of absence. A funereal silence settles heavily upon urban landscape after Druida’s departure. The sputtering of an engine is the only sound save that of the doctor’s gentle invitation to a walk. A sense of alienation replaces the customary sacredness and community of a Sunday morning.

“Silently,” doctor and professor:

saw her cross the walk, greet Bud gravely, enter the car. The engine clattered, the little car darted away. She was gone.

Willoughby, shaken by the keen agony of the physical parting, stared motionless at the bare pavement. The doctor cleared his throat, lit a cigar, looked sidewise at him. At last he spoke gently. “Shall we go out for a little walk,” he suggested—“across the river, perhaps?” Mechanically Willoughby clutched his cap and followed, into the quiet sunlight on the deserted Sunday morning streets.

(286)

Druida's "grave" demeanor suggests a solemnity and seriousness that seems unwarranted in a freshly engaged woman about to embark on her new life. However, this description makes sense within the context of extinction discourse. Accepting her fate "gravely," Druida's somber dignity recalls that of a proud but fallen warrior who reluctantly moves west in search of open territory.

Left behind in the barren city, the doctor and professor prove even more tragic. Druida's fate is to vanish, but theirs is to bear witness to that vanishing. *Druida* shows the difficulties of achieving a proper, healthy balance between civilization and nature. The final scene depicting two hapless bachelors, one elderly and the other effeminate, establishes the city as an unproductive space without the potential to create new life. Frederick emphasizes the inhuman, machinelike quality of the city with Willoughby "mechanically" holding his cap. This bleak view of nature as inaccessible, combined with an ultimately destructive nostalgia, makes *Druida* a quintessential example of the modern pastoral.

Chapter 4: Primitive (Mis)readings in *The Grapes of Wrath*

The first bit of personal information that Tom Joad offers the prying trucker who picks him up at the beginning of the novel is that he does not write much. "I never was no hand to write, nor my old man neither," Tom explains (16). This is why, as he tells the trucker, he hasn't heard from his father in a while. And because of this, Tom doesn't know whether or not his family has been driven from their forty acres by drought and tractors, like so many other tenant farmers. Tom is annoyed with the trucker's repeated questions and snaps at him. The driver backs off the personal questions and launches into a story about a fellow trucker who made up poetry to pass the time. The guy carried a dictionary around and used big words like "proboscis." "Ever know a guy that said big words like that?" the trucker asks. Tom replies that his preacher did.

Coincidentally, Tom's preacher, the Reverend Jim Casy, is the first man he sees after leaving the truck. Casy confides that he is no longer a preacher and the two share Tom's liquor, reminiscing as they walk together to the old Joad place. Casy asks how his Pa is doing, and Tom, embarrassed, admits that he doesn't know. "Pa wasn't no hand to write for pretty, or to write for writin'. He'd sign up his name nice as anybody, an' lick his pencil. But Pa never did write no letter. He always says what he couldn't tell a fella with his mouth wasn't worth leanin' on no pencil about" (30). When they find the Joad farm abandoned, Casy again asks Tom if his parents ever wrote him. "No," Tom answers, "Like I said, they wasn't people to write. Pa could write, but he wouldn't. Didn't like to. It gave him the shivers to write. He could work out a catalogue order good as the nex' fella,

but he wouldn't write no letters just for ducks" (47). As they sift through the wreckage of the empty farmhouse, Tom spots a neighbor approaching on the road. Muley Graves explains that the Joad family was "tractor'd" off the place by the bank, and that they are staying with Tom's uncle while preparing to move west in search of work. All three men fall into conversation and Muley eventually asks Tom about his time in prison. Tom answers:

“I learned to write nice as hell. Birds an' stuff like that, too; not just word writin'. My ol' man'll be sore when he sees me whip out a bird in one stroke. Pa's gonna be mad when he sees me do that. He don't like no fancy stuff like that. He don't even like word writin'. Kinda scares 'im, I guess. Ever' time Pa seen writing, somebody took somepin away from him.” (57)

The coincidence of these three conversations on a common topic is striking. Steinbeck entertains issues of literacy from the very outset of the novel because the Joads' survival in many ways depends upon an improved literacy.

At first it appears that maybe Tom is ashamed of his Pa's illiteracy. However, the situation is complicated by the fact that Old Tom is actually terrified of writing; it gives him the "shivers." Old Tom equates the written word with dispossession ["Ever' time Pa seen writin', somebody took somepin away from him."], a practice with a solid historical analogue, especially in Oklahoma. The phrasing creates a homology between the bank foreclosure notices that sent Dustbowl farmers packing and the government-authored treaties that precipitated the removal of Indians from their native lands generations earlier. Carrol Britch and Cliff Lewis convincingly argue that Indians serve as “a graphic reminder that no culture, no blood member of a culture is granted permanence” in

Steinbeck's fiction (40). Similarly, Paul and Charlotte Hadella discuss Steinbeck's "sympathy for the dispossessed" as the basis of a "strong kinship" between the author and a later generation of Native American writers (88).

The Joads leave for new western lands based on a false written promise. The mystifying, yellow handbill that lures them to California includes intentionally vague and misleading language. The Joads' fictional western journey is far less horrific than the Trail of Tears, although Granma and Grampa are buried along the way. While treaties and federal legislation were the most fatal type of writing for Indians, land titles, loan agreements and rental contracts were the most devastating for tenant farmers like the Joads. A tenant farmer's narration of the foreclosure process in chapter five highlights the awful power of the written word. The representative voice proclaims that being born on the land, working and dying on it, "makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it" (39). This statement contrasting the abstract and intangible quality of legal documents with the physical reality of sweat and soil contains echoes of primitive wisdom. Ironically, the Joads sound very much like the Indians who were dispossessed to make way for white farmers like themselves.

Steinbeck constructs the Joads as primitive figures (Pizer 69) and establishes the association through Pa's superstitious fear of writing. However, in *Grapes* the most damning genre is not the legal document with its ability to turn folks out of their homes without their understanding. National origin myth, "the matrix of stories that justify conquest and settlement," proves the most devastating to the Joads (Dunbar-Ortiz 569). These are the stories of rugged frontiersman battling harsh weather, untamed wilderness, and Indians for the possession of the continent that they believed to be their divine right.

The semi-illiterate Joads are especially susceptible to the tales that circulate around campfires and movie reels. This inherited worldview makes Grampa's Indian-killing as acceptable and even necessary as Pa's snake slaying.¹ The family is also vulnerable to advertisements that play on the mythological American Dream of opportunity, upward mobility and success. Ma derives her conception of California as a paradise of “little white houses in among the orange trees” from a big picture printed on a promotional calendar (91, 146). An advertisement in the back of a comic book lures Rose of Sharon's husband, Connie away from his pregnant wife with the promise of profits to be gained through a correspondence course in radio repair. His willingness to abandon an unborn child for a bogus money making scheme demonstrates the delusive power of the American Dream over the uneducated migrants.

An almost superstitious distrust of the written word and the experience of dispossession align the Joads with Native Americans, even as received mythological narratives prevent the family from recognizing their historo-cultural kinship. An adherence to American myth that portrays settler farmers as the divine inheritors of a continent keeps the Joads from understanding their position as the “new barbarians” poised against the next progressive wave of civilization: industrial agriculture (225).²

These mythic narratives inform the elder Joads' attitude toward Indians, which is one of

¹ After learning that they're being turned off their land, the collective voice of the tenant farmers protests: “Grampa took up the land, and he had to kill the Indians and drive them away. And Pa was born here and he killed weeds and snakes” (39).

² I rely largely upon Louis Owens's description of “American Myth,” as: “the myth of this continent as the new Eden” (*The Grapes of Wrath Trouble in the Promised Land*, 49). My concept of “American Myth” also contains the notion of Manifest Destiny—the idea of divine sanction for the territorial expansion of the U.S., and the attitude toward Native Americans that this ideology encouraged.

possession, as shown in their collection of manufactured Indian trinkets like Grampa's "Injun" pillow and Winfield's toy "Injun" bow.

In the novel, the linkage between illiteracy and removal is expanded to include other types of bad reading that contribute to the Joads' dispossession, displacement, and subsequent destitution. Their survival depends upon identification and cooperation with fellow members of the underclass. A first step would be recognizing the common ground between themselves and the minority with which they would be most familiar because of their geographic proximity: the American Indian. Louis Owens rightly argues that Steinbeck's Indians exist only as signs and shadows ("Grampa Killed Indians"). The Joads misread these signs. Instead of seeing themselves reflected in these traces, a process Owens rightfully claims diminishes the Indian, but one that seems useful for the Joads nonetheless, they perceive only inscrutable otherness. By developing an improved cultural literacy, the Joads could apply more constructive interpretations to these shadows. The Joads, as Kathie Birat demonstrates, belong to an essentially oral culture rather than a written one.³ The migrants' tendency to "live on remembered things" is an aspect of their oral culture. The move from orality to literacy entails a different relationship to the past. The act of writing makes it possible to move beyond a reliance on "remembered things." Ma feels that her family's survival depends upon giving up "remembered things," and renouncing nostalgia. In order to survive amidst the new conditions the Joads must become shrewder readers of a variety of corporate messages and learn to approach the American myth more critically. The improved literacy that my study posits as necessary to their survival would help them shed a nostalgic attachment to

³ See "'Jus' Talkin': Orality and Narrative in *The Grapes of Wrath*."

old narratives and to work towards identification and cooperation with other displaced and disadvantaged individuals.⁴

My argument linking survival and literacy relies upon the scholarship of Owens and Birat. Owens focuses on the preponderance of American myth in *Grapes* and suggests that Steinbeck's Indians are mere shadows of white America. Birat discusses the role of orality and narrative in *Grapes*. The Native American has no reality in Steinbeck's fiction, Owens argues, but exists "purely as an index to American myth" ("Grampa Killed Snakes, Pa Killed Indians" 60). For Owens, the "American Myth" is the "myth of this continent as the new Eden and the American as the new Adam" (*The Grapes of Wrath: Trouble in the Promised Land* 49). The myth focuses on America as a paradise to be regained; a place capable of restoring a lost innocence. The American Dream, "the dream of shedding the past and starting over," is a component of this larger American myth (50). The myth sends folks like the Joads farther west in search of the promised land. Owens contends that, with *Grapes*: "Steinbeck sets out to expose the fatal dangers of the American myth of a new Eden, and to illuminate a new path toward a new consciousness of commitment rather than displacement" (55). In *Grapes*, Indians are constructed as the Joads' shadow figures. "The real Indian," writes Owens, "is finally subsumed, through the vehicle of literature, into the self-consciousness of white America that is portrayed in this novel, becoming that America's shadow and ceasing to exist in his own right" (64). The shadows or traces of Indians scattered throughout the novel

⁴A movement toward greater extra-familial cooperation is one primitive value on which the Joads' survival depends. Warren French insists that the Joads must "learn that survival depends upon their adapting to new conditions" (25). Florian Freitag builds on French's contention, adding that, in order to survive, they must replace the old concept of family first with a concept of everyone working together (108).

reveal a great deal more about the Joads than about actual Indians. Yet, the Joads themselves are too deeply immersed in myth to recognize the signs, and to read the significance of these traces.

Birat identifies the Joads' reliance on jokes, animal-based metaphors, bits of folk wisdom, and storytelling as proof that the family belongs to an "orally-based folk culture" (18). Steinbeck, she contends, created "multiple connections between the speech of his characters and the myths that shaped the American nation" (13). Birat argues that the "new world" of "commerce, anonymity and national brands" with which the Joads are faced requires that they "acquire new linguistic skills" (15). Birat maintains that the Joad family's verbal dexterity alone will not save them, that an improved literacy is necessary to their survival.

In what follows I will discuss the displacement and disappearance of the Cherokee and then the small farmer to establish both groups as vanishing Americans. The second section analyzes similarities in the extinction discourses—the rhetoric surrounding these different disappearances. The next section deals with the "shadows" of Indian presence and with the telling ways that the Joads misread these traces. Muley Graves's inability to adapt and consequent vanishing is the primary focus of the fourth section. From there, the discussion turns to a consideration of weeds as a metaphor for the Joads' survival in a tough environment. The following section considers the rejection of nostalgic narratives as a survival strategy.

Removals

In 1815, the U.S. government tricked many Cherokees into signing a treaty to

trade their lands in Tennessee and Georgia for land in Arkansas and Oklahoma (Logan). Those Cherokee who weren't fooled in 1815 were forcibly removed to eastern Oklahoma in 1838 on a route that came to be known as the Trail of Tears. Their removal was the result of another illegitimate treaty, the 1833 Treaty of New Echota. In that swindle, a small faction of unrecognized leaders of the Cherokee nation signed a removal act against the will of a vast majority of tribal members. Roughly a third of the 15,000 Cherokees who began the forced-march down the Trail of Tears died of exposure, starvation and disease along the way. This tragic event was part of a larger migration sanctioned by the 1830 Removal Act, which authorized the federal government to exchange land west of the Mississippi for land held by Indians living on the east side of the river. By 1838, 81,000 Indians had been removed west of the Mississippi with only 26,700 remaining in the east (Maddox 28).

By the 1930s, the forces of modern, industrial civilization were driving small farmers, like the Indians before them, to physical and cultural extinction. The nebulous forces of economic progress devoured the majority of the nation's small farmers in a trend extending back to the first decades of the twentieth century (Conlogue 96). As early as 1912, commentators were describing farmers as members of a vanishing race. In terms of percentages: in 1920, those living on farms comprised 29.9% of the total population; by 1940, that figure had fallen to just 23.2% (Fite 74). Much of this loss in population and land was caused by the sweeping revolution that was swiftly transforming agriculture into industry. Three factors heavily influenced this agricultural sea change: mechanization, hybrid corn and improved cattle and wheat, and increasing use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers (Fite 70-72). The number of tractors on U.S. farms

doubled between 1930 and 1940 (Conlogue 103). Increased mechanization meant that a farmer could handle three times the acreage; and as the average farm size expanded, the number of farms (and farmers) dwindled (Fite 13-14). The "substitution of capital for labor" drove much of the change on American farms (79). Farmers who could afford to buy hybrid corn, to plant improved cotton and wheat varieties, and to apply expensive chemicals did not need to expend as much labor. These innovations meant that, despite the fact that harvested cropland decreased by 38 million acres in the 1930s, production actually rose. The new industrial order required progressive mechanization, scientific technique, adequate capital, available credit, and dependable markets.

Some estimates put the number of homeless former farmers in 1940 at 500,000, but this number pales in comparison to the staggering figures of Indian displacement and even death in the years following white contact (Fite 75). One study estimates that one million Indians were living north of the Rio Grande in the early sixteenth century (Bray). By 1907, fewer than 400,000 Indians remained in North America (Stearn & Stearn). Nowhere was the violence more intense than in California, the seat of the mythical American Eden sought by the Joads. Between 1849 and 1870, the years of the gold rush, disease and warfare claimed the lives of 4,000 California Indians (Chambers). Two especially devastating events in terms of native land loss were the previously mentioned Removal Act (1838) and the Dawes Act (1887). Members of the five southeastern nations (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole) lost 25 million acres of land to white settlement under the Removal Act (Maddox). The Dawes Act transferred 90 million acres from Indian to white control. The Act, supposedly intended to promote Indian agriculture and private ownership of land, provided for the division of tribal land

into allotments for individual Indians; it also allowed "excess" lands to be opened up for white settlement and railroad development (Owens 90). Another piece of federal legislation, The Indian Appropriations Bill of 1889, opened up two million acres of Indian land in Oklahoma to white settlement. Grampa Joad may have well been among the 50,000 people who lined up to claim the unassigned territory in the nation's first land run, known as the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889.⁵ While Steinbeck does not provide the background information of their settlement in Oklahoma, historical circumstances suggest that the land they lived on was probably reserved for Indians prior to 1889.

Extinction Discourses

In including these statistics on both farmers and Indians, I mean to suggest only that the two situations are homologous in terms of significant decreases in population and land holdings. Each of these extinctions—despite the real difference in degree—generate a similar discourse. Patrick Brantlinger uses the term “extinction discourse” to describe writing surrounding the decimation of primitive races and cultures. Used to underwrite genocidal policies, support eugenics, advance Social Darwinism, and as the foundation for modern anthropology, such discourse assumes that all primitives are doomed to vanish before civilization. Most nineteenth-century literary scholars are familiar with the extinction discourse applied to Native Americans. An example can be found in an 1845 issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger* in a piece titled, "The Last of the Tribes." The writer notes that Plains Indians have started to "vanish away before the white man and before their onward march, the tribes of the red men will doubtless wither and fade away,

⁵ See Stan Hoig's *The Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889*.

as if by some resistless ordinance of nature" (Maddox 31).

Less than one hundred years later, a similarly Darwinian narrative is used to describe small, non-industrial farmers in the popular press. The editor of *American Agriculturist* magazine, E.R. Eastman, writes in 1927 that: "We have begun to see the working of the law of survival of the fittest. This law will continue to operate until there will be few left on the farms except those who know how to run a farm in the way it must be managed under modern conditions" (Danbom 136). In a 1912 *Atlantic* article, "The Passing of the Farmer," Roy Hinman Holmes forecasts: "In a comparatively short time, the farmer of to-day, who tills the land that he owns, with the help of his growing sons, will be but a national memory." Ozark folklorist Charles Mink likewise predicts the extinction of backwoods corn farmers in the Ozarks, a geographic area that includes parts of Oklahoma. In his 1945 article, "The Hillbilly Takes a Bow," he writes that the "passing" hillbilly "cannot adapt himself to our modern industrial civilization and therefore must go the way of all primitive people who stand in the way of economic progress" (Mink 42). It is this type of extinction that Ma Joad defies with the assertion: "We're the people that live. They ain't going to wipe us out. Why we're the people—we go on" (272).

Ma's statement that, "We're the people that live" implies a difference between the white Joads and the Indian tribes that were more thoroughly "wipe[d] out".⁶ However, the novel undercuts her belief in the innate superiority of whiteness by placing her family in the same dejected position as non-white migrants and subjected to a modified racism

⁶ Sarah Wald argues that this exclusive "we" reifies the novel's "racial division of American inclusion" (496).

voiced in the derogatory attitude of many Californians toward "Okies." Frank Eugene Cruz argues for the critical necessity of approaching *Grapes*'s white migrants as "marginalized, even racialized people" (62). An interchapter dramatizes the white, urban property-holders' view of the Okies as "dirty," "ignorant," "degenerate, sexual maniacs," "thieves," and "strangers" (275). The sense of white superiority that Ma maintains is just another example of her failure to read her family's situation, and her ignorance of the signs that might help the Joads better grasp the severity of their plight. Kevin Hearle maintains that, in *Grapes*, "Steinbeck has accepted the social Darwinist position that hardship strengthens a people, but he has stripped it of the discourse and of the supposed logic of white supremacy" (254). While Ma may want to believe that her whiteness exempts her from extinction, her survival actually depends upon the family's ability to let go of such racist beliefs.

Shadows

Owens claims that the Joads' journey might "finally break the grip of the westering pattern in this country, causing Americans to free themselves from the delusive quest for a New Eden and thus from the destructive process of exploitation and removal entailed in such a pattern" ("The Culpable Joads" 114). However, in order for the journey to have this redeeming effect, the Joads will need to pay better attention to the symbolic signposts along the way. According to Owens, "the Indian is of significance only as a symbol of the destructive consciousness underlying American settlement and the westering pattern" ("Grampa Killed Indians" 60). Steinbeck scatters these symbols throughout the Joads' abandoned home. Traces of Indians are also deposited at various

other points along the journey. These symbols and the Joads' reactions to them reveal the pervasiveness of the American myth and of its reality-shaping power. The reader may understand these Indian-related symbols as representing the "destructive consciousness" beneath American settlement, but the Joads still see them as trophies signifying their conquest.

The haunting presence of Indians emphasizes the irony of the Joads' situation as unsettled settlers (or displaced displacers) and as folks responsible for their own undoing. The picture of an Indian girl in the bedroom of the Joads' abandoned home is a symbolic vestige of one dying culture, displayed by the unwitting members of the latest dying culture. A label on the picture identifies the girl as "Red Wing," which is the stage name of Lilian St. Cyr, an Indian actress who was born on a Nebraska reservation in 1883. Red Wing starred in silent films between 1908 and 1924. Her most notable role was in director Cecil B. DeMille's 1914 silent western, *The Squaw Man*, the first feature-length movie filmed in Hollywood (Smith). She plays the noble Indian maiden, Nat-u-Rich. The plot centers on a white, English captain who comes to America after being falsely charged with embezzlement. Nat-u-Rich saves his life in a fight and shortly after, they marry and have a son. Eventually, proof of his innocence surfaces and he makes the tough decision to stay in America with Nat-u-Rich despite wanting a European education for his son. Reminiscent of the eponymous Indian hero of Lydia Maria Child's popular early American novel *Hobomok* (1824), Nat-u-Rich decides to disappear in order to unburden her white family. Convinced that they would be better off assimilated into European white civilization, she kills herself.

Red Wing's image suggests the influence of popular culture on the Joads'

perception of Indians. The Indian actress also inspired a 1907 folk song by Thurland Cattaway and Kerry Mills about an Indian girl who loses her beloved in battle. In the song, Red Wing watches for her lost lover by day, and keeps the campfire burning at night. Sadly, her sweetheart does not return with the rest of the Indian braves at the song's end. Thus her most famous roles play into the white fantasies of voluntary Indian disappearance and of extinction through intertribal warfare. Britch and Lewis contend that Steinbeck's Indian characters are drawn from the "image of Indians in popular legend" rather than history (39). The standard cowboys and Indians narrative, endlessly recycled in Western movies, has warped the Joads' understanding of their own place within western history. The mythic narrative bolsters the Joads' perception, articulated by Ma, that they are destined to live, while the Indian is doomed to disappear. The myth blinds them to their own marginalization. Images of exotic Indian otherness such as Red Wing's picture enable poor and marginalized folks like the Joads to consolidate their white identity. This faith in the saving power of their whiteness only hastens their descent into a life-threatening poverty.

After leaving the bedroom where the Red Wing picture hangs, Tom and Casy move to the porch, where a cat joins them. The cat leads Tom to conclude that all the neighbors must be gone, since otherwise it would have strayed to another place. The neighbors must have cleared out, Tom reasons, or else they would have ransacked the house and stripped off the lumber. This revelation reminds Tom of a story about a local man named Albert Rance who went on vacation and came back to find all of his possessions carried off by neighbors who assumed he had left for good. When he came back in a couple weeks, he went from farm to farm collecting his things. Everything was eventually returned except

for a velvet "sofa pilla" that Tom's Grampa took (48). The pillow, interestingly enough, had a "pitcher of an Injun on it" (48). Tom tells Casy the story:

“[Albert] claimed Grampa got Injun blood, that's why he wants that pitcher. Well, Grampa did get her, but he didn't give a damn about the pitcher on it. He jus' liked her. Used to pack her aroun' an' he'd put her wherever he was gonna sit. He never would give her back to Albert. Says, 'If Albert wants this pilla so bad, let him come an' get her. But he better come shootin', 'cause I'll blow his goddamn stinkin' head off if he comes messin' aroun' my pilla.' So finally Albert give up an' made Grampa a present of that pilla. It give Grampa idears, though. He took to savin' chicken feathers. Says he's gonna have a whole damn bed of feathers. But he never got no featherbed. One time Pa go mad at a skunk under the house. Pa slapped that skunk with a two-by-four, and Ma burned all Grampa's feathers so we could live in the house." He laughed. "Grampa's a tough ol' bastard. Jus' set on the Injun pilla an' says, 'Let Albert come an' get her. Why,' he says, 'I'll take that squirt and wring 'im out like a pair of drawers.'" (48)

Through this very strange story Steinbeck comments on a fraught history of white-Indian relations. The anxiety over racial purity surfaces early, both in the story and in Tom's recounting of it. Tom seems almost too eager to deny Albert's claim that his Grampa had Indian blood. His adamant disavowal signals that there may be some truth in Albert's accusation. The possibility that Grampa may have Indian blood explains the Joads' anxious obsession with their white identity. Rather than suggesting an identification with his alleged Indian ancestry, Grampa's jealous hold over the pillow only signals an attitude of possessiveness. He clings to the pilfered pillow as he clings to his homestead

that is situated on land that he very likely stole from its original Indian inhabitants.

If Grampa felt anything like kinship with Indians, he would not have had so much “fun” as a young man fighting a “bunch of Navajo” with his friend in a story Tom recalls (201). This story shows how the Joads construct Indians as adversaries in the family’s oral tradition. Tom proudly recounts the story as evidence of his Grampa’s fearlessness; “Grampa wasn’t scairt,” he tells Casy (201). The family folklore borrows from the Old West cowboys and Indians mythology. The possibility of Grampa’s Indian heritage only shows the power of such western narratives in shaping his self-image, an image that perhaps resists the biological reality.

Grapes has little to offer beyond a stereotypical view of Indians, as Owens reminds us. Steinbeck deliberately employs stereotypes derived from frontier mythology to show how they affect the Joads. Owens cites an ex-soldier's story about shooting an Indian as a prime example of the stereotype associating Indians with the earth and the transcendental, intuitive self. The former soldier's audience consists of a group of migrants assembled around a fire at a government camp. The story-teller recalls a solitary brave, standing naked on a ridge against the sun with his "arms spread out; like a cross" (314). The brave arranges himself into a gesture of sacrifice with this crucifixion-style pose. He appears to be voluntarily giving himself up for the redemption of white civilization.⁷ The captain commanded the regiment to shoot but no one wanted to fire first. The former soldier continues:

“I ain't never been so sad in my life. An' I laid my sights on his belly... Well, he jest plundered down an' rolled... An' he wasn't so big—he looked so grand—up

⁷ See Richard Slotkin’s *Regeneration Through Violence: the Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*.

there. All tore to pieces an' little. Ever see a cock pheasant, stiff and beautiful, ever' feather drawn an' painted, an' even his eyes drawn in pretty? An' bang! You pick him up—bloody an' twisted, an' you spoiled somepin better'n you; an' eaten' him don't never make it up to you, 'cause you spoiled somepin in yaself, an' you can't never fix it up.” (314)

In the central analogy, eating the pheasant does not obviate the hunter's guilt just as consuming Indian land does not entirely abate white guilt (either the literal remorse felt by this particular soldier or the collective and abstract guilt that poisons a nation). The speaker's belief that the slaughtered Indian represents something within himself reinforces Owens's point about Steinbeck's Indians merely reflecting his white characters. This notion arises from an ideology that reduces Indians to possessions, and so the slaughtered Indian belongs to the storyteller like a blasted lung. In the end, Owens contends, the storyteller, his migrant audience, and by extension the reader of *Grapes* "mourn[s] for their own loss or diminishment, not for the actual people driven from the land" ("Grampa Killed" 89). Owens's observation anticipates Renato Rosaldo's theory of imperial nostalgia. Imperial nostalgia centers on a paradox that should be familiar to both students of native American history and *Grapes'* readers: a person murders somebody and then mourns the victim; or somebody purposefully changes a way of life and then regrets that things have not remained the same as they once were. Under imperialism, writes Rosaldo, a particular type of nostalgia exists "where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed" (*Culture and Truth* 69). The posture of imperial nostalgia conceals the mourner's complicity in brutal domination. Imperial nostalgia is essentially the guilt of the hunter. The myth of the hunt, as John Lydenberg theorizes,

embodies "the awe that we feel toward that which we are unable to comprehend or master" (72). Notably, the Indian at first appears "grand" to his killer. In order to survive in the new economy, the Joads will need to get beyond this oversimplified, mythical view of the Indian Other. Birat notes that the ex-soldier's story "contains a warning about the illusion created by storytelling and its inherent exaggerations" (19). The story, according to Birat, "illustrates the power of storytelling to make people feel bigger" even as it "suggests that there are limits to storytelling as an instrument of survival" (19). The Joads must learn to tell a different story in which they do not emerge as remorseful victors over a noble but doomed race, but as fellow casualties of the relentless march of civilization. By overcoming these stereotypes embedded in the American myth, they might move closer to empathy and cooperation. In *Grapes*, the failure to establish human connections, to rely solely on individualism rather than community, can cause a person to quite literally disappear.

Vanishings

Just as Tom finishes the story of Grampa's Indian pillow, the preacher spots somebody coming through the cotton toward the house. The figure is as much an apparition as a man. "Can't see 'im for the dust he raises, Who the hell's comin' here?" says Casy (49). And Steinbeck writes, "They watched the figure approaching in the evening light, and the dust it raised was reddened by the setting sun" (49). When he gets closer, Tom recognizes the ghostly shape as the neighbor, Muley Graves. In his approach, glowing yet indistinguishable against the setting sun, Muley resembles Natty Bumppo, the epic protagonist of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking series. Leonard W.

Engel calls the character the "archetype of the rugged individual" and the "conscience for America's westward movement on a mythic level" (22). In *The Prairie* (1827), the novel that ends in Natty's death, a group of settlers encounter Natty Bumppo, silhouetted against the sun. Cooper writes:

The sun had fallen below the crest of the nearest wave of the prairie, leaving the usual rich and glowing train on its track. In the center of this flood of fiery light, a human form appeared, drawn against the gilded background... embedded, as it was, in its setting of garish light, it was impossible to distinguish its just proportions or true character. (8)

The strong resemblance between these images demonstrates Steinbeck's keen interest in, and familiarity with, American mythology.

Muley is, like Natty Bumppo, a vestige of a fast-disappearing past. Both are vanishing figures who are at last incompatible with civilization. Muley refuses to change in order to adapt to the new conditions, and he stubbornly maintains his solitude. His last name (Graves) is a not-too-subtle allusion to his impending extinction. He calls himself an "ol' graveyard ghos'" (56, 108). He rails against absentee landlords, describing them as "sonsabitches at their desks" who "jus' chopped folks in two for their margin a profit" (56). He does not have any more respect for government agents, who are complicit with the landlords (58). Muley's hatred of rich land owners is personal. He belongs to a family of former tenant farmers who have been pushed off their land. However, rather than go with them to California, he chooses to remain behind to haunt the vacant properties.

Muley is reduced from a hunter, the pursuit for which Bumppo is best known, to the position of timid prey, endlessly chased by the law for trespassing. "When you're

hunting' somepin you're a hunter, an' you're strong. Can't nobody beat a hunter," he explains to Tom and the preacher. "But when you're hunted—that's different. Somepin happens to you. You ain't strong...I been hunted now for a long time. I ain't a hunter no more" (60). The text reinforces Muley's diminished position by giving him the darting, "nervous little eyes" of the scrawny jackrabbit that he cooks for his companions.

Muley's rhetorical inversion of the categories of hunter / hunted calls attention to the "profound, wilderness relationship" between killer and slain (Engel 25). The dichotomy of hunter / hunted can also be expressed in terms of civilization / savagery. Muley's fall from hunter to hunted contributes to the larger paradigm shift within the novel as small farmers assume the degraded social status of the Indians that they once helped to conquer.

Muley's land is taken by absentee owners, and repossessed by tractor-driving employees of the banks. Corporate farming displaces Muley, but it is his decision to remain separate rather than joining his fellow migrants that finally beats him. The fading away of the individual is later emphasized when Noah Joad, another detached character without human bonds, vanishes down the Colorado River at Needles. The uncompromising individualism that once served the pioneering figure of Bumpo hinders Muley more than a century later.

By virtue of his first name, Muley serves as a reminder of changing times in agriculture. Between 1919 and 1930, the number of horses and mules on American farms declined by twenty-one percent (McWilliams 411). A 1940 speech presented at a chemurgy conference by N.R. Whitney of the Proctor and Gamble Company discusses the future of American agriculture as a business. Significantly, he connects the demise of

more traditional farmers with that of their work animals. Whitney's speech describes the trend responsible for Muley's extinction, specifically mentioning the rise in absentee ownership:

Farming in America will become more of a business and less of a way of life. That this process has long been under way is evidenced by the fact that the percentage of our population in rural areas has steadily declined, and the size of the average farm has constantly increased.... In recent years there has been a marked growth in absentee ownership with increasing dependence on professional farm management. This changing emphasis in farm ownership and management will be accentuated by the war since the demands for labor in industrial plants associated with war and the preparation for war will draw labor from the rural areas. . . . The tendency toward farming as a business will also be promoted by the intense competition that will be faced after the war by our agricultural industry. This will necessitate a lowering of production costs through the operation of larger farm units, greater mechanization, and the use of fewer people and work animals, improvement in methods of farming, in seed selection, in animal breeding, in the use of fertilizers, and in many other ways. (McWilliams 431)

Steinbeck mimics the heads of industry in deliberately linking the former tenant farmer with the mule as fellow creatures that have gone out of fashion. Stubborn as his namesake, Muley cannot leave the place where he was born. The Joads invite Muley to ride with them to California but he softly and steadfastly refuses: "No, I won't. I can't go away. I got to stay now....I ain't never going" (108). Noah, who rarely says anything at all, predicts: "You gonna die out in the fiel' someday, Muley" (108). Muley accepts this

prophesy with the noble stoicism of one of Cooper's Indians. "I know, I thought about that," he replies. As the Joads' loaded-down jalopy pulls out of the yard, Muley disappears from sight. The last thing they see before the hill cuts off their view is "Muley standing forlornly in the dooryard looking after them" (111). The will to survive is stronger in the Joads than in Muley.

Survivals

The Grapes of Wrath is a novel of survival amidst hostile circumstances. Steinbeck establishes this theme before the Joads even take to the road, with the act that lands Tom in prison four years earlier. Tom killed Herb Turnbull in a fight at a dance, but only after Herb put a knife in him. The two neighbors were so drunk that Tom doesn't know how the fight started. In fact, he liked Herb, thought he "was a nice fella" (57). Tom acted in self-defense since his own survival depended upon the murder of his opponent. Prison itself was a sort of survival training for Tom, and he miraculously emerged undamaged. The beginning of the novel pictures Tom traveling between two survival tests as he hitchhikes from prison to the abandoned family farm.

Looking down at the old Joad farm from their hilltop vantage point, Tom and Casy take in a view of desolation and disappearance. "They ain't nobody there," he tells Casy (35). As they approach Tom notices that the house has been pushed in and that cotton has been planted all the way up to the doorway. A quick perusal of the shed turns up a "rat-gnawed mule collar" and not much else, leading Tom to wistfully exclaim, "There ain't nothing left" (45). The caved-in house and the unused mule collar signal the arrival of tractors. As if to underscore this point, Tom remarks: "Why, you can't get a horse in now without he tromps the cotton" (45). The owners of the land have long since replaced

horses with tractors. The presence of the bone-dry watering trough highlights this transition from old to new farming methods. Tractors do not need watering. A narrative comment notes the absence of "the proper weeds that should grow under a trough" (46). The idea of weeds as a "proper" part of the landscape shows the importance of maintaining the wild within the civilized. By affirming the desirability of weeds, the narration critiques modern, industrial farming methods that rely upon chemicals to control weeds. Weeds were the enemy of the modern farmer, a pest to be exterminated for the good of civilization according to the scientific farming literature of the day. In this way, the modern agriculturist's attitude toward weeds resembles civilized perceptions of the savage. A bizarre discussion of weeds taken from *The New Earth: A recital of the triumphs of modern agriculture in America* (1906) illustrates this point:

The weed is the clearest type of the savage. It may in time be tamed, it may become even highly civilized by the introduction of gentler blood into its veins, it may even be utilized to give tone and strength to an overdone and effeminate race of civilized plants, but it is essentially and forever savage if left to itself. And even if it comes under the influence of civilization it will break away on the slightest provocation, and, if not held in check, will rapidly go back to its old wild, wandering ways. (114-115)

Significantly, the Joads vanish from the land along with the weeds and the horses; all exemplify disappearing primitivity. The Joads must adapt in order to survive. Their adaptation to unfavorable circumstances requires the strength and tenacity of a weed.

Weeds emerge in the very first paragraphs of *Grapes* where Steinbeck mentions the "weed colonies" that are "scattered...along the sides of the roads." Owens claims the

early reference to weeds “suggests the colonies of migrants that will soon be scattered the length of Route 66” (*Trouble in the Promised Land* 25). “Wandering” is a quality attributed to weeds in the above excerpt. The homeless Joads become unwitting wanderers, spreading themselves down the coast and in Al’s case—propagating. The mention of “blood” in the quoted passage signals racial and/or ethnic prejudice. By definition, noxious weeds are of foreign origin, and they destroy native plants.⁸ Weeds are seen as an invading force, like savages and also like the thousands of Dust Bowl migrants who are viewed as a threat by native Californians who are wary of increased job competition. “Weedpatch” is the name of the government camp where the Joads receive their warmest welcome and most hospitable treatment. Out-of-state foreigners populate the camp, their own patch of ground where they are (momentarily) safe from the exterminating efforts of the locals.

The control of weeds was a hot topic in agricultural science around the time of *Grape*’s publication. Research into chemical herbicides began in the late nineteenth century when copper salts, sodium nitrate, and iron sulfate were discovered to kill weeds in wheat and other cereals (Peterson 243). In 1940, the estimated market for herbicides amounted to \$1 ½ to \$2 million (243). Growth regulators were first conceived of as herbicides in 1941 (250). The chemical synthesis of phenoxyacetic and benzoic acids to produce a compound known as “2, 4-D” represented a huge research breakthrough, and

⁸ Definition of a “Noxious Weed” from the 1974 Federal Noxious Weed Act: Noxious Weed means any living stage, such as seeds and reproductive parts, of any parasitic or other plant of a kind, which is of foreign origin, is new to or not widely prevalent in the United States, and can directly or indirectly injure crops, other useful plants, livestock, or poultry or other interests of agriculture, including irrigation, or navigation, or the fish or wildlife resources of the United States or the public health.

was detailed in a 1941 report of the *Journal of American Chemicals* (245). In 1943, a patent was issued to E.I. Du Pont de Nemours and Company for the compound (245). Herbicide research quickly became part of the Army's biological warfare program in 1944 (247). This research was kept an official secret during the war, and only its swift conclusion prevented the Army's use of herbicide.⁹ Steinbeck himself notes the connection between agriculture and war in *Grapes* when the representative tenant-farmer voice proclaims that war will drive up the price of cotton.¹⁰ American Chemical Paint Company introduced the first commercial-scale systemic herbicide, called "Weedone" in 1945 (250). Gale Peterson suggests that the USDA's "Bibliography of Agriculture" was a useful marker for charting the explosion in herbicide's popularity in the 1940s. A search of the 1943 bibliography turns up sixty-nine articles related to weeds; by 1949, more than six hundred articles were weed-related (252). By 1960, the market for herbicides jumped to \$2 billion dollars. Steinbeck's interest in weeds reflects this trend in agriculture. Yet, rather than withering alongside more established native plants (Californians), the Joads hold on with the stubborn persistence of a weed. Significantly, they fortify themselves in a reinvigorating space called "Weedpatch."

Along with the sturdy, steadfastness of a weed, survival also involves a refusal to indulge nostalgic memories of an idealized past in order to escape a difficult present.

Nostalgia

The only one who doesn't look back at Muley as the Joads' jalopy pulls away is

⁹ The U.S. military would eventually spray the chemical "2, 4-D" over cropland in Southern Vietnam in 1962 (Peterson 253).

¹⁰ Louis Owens discusses the tenant farmers' hopes for war to drive up prices in "The Culpable Joads: Desentimentalizing *The Grapes of Wrath*."

Ma. In fact, her action of "peer[ing] straight ahead along the dirt road" represents a fundamental character trait. Unlike Muley, who stubbornly refuses to let go of the past, Ma understands the "emotional necessity" of leaving it behind (Cruz 65). Ma displays this forward-looking mentality in her decision to burn the box of family keepsakes rather than bringing it along to California. The box, which she places "gently among the coals" in the stove, contains such sentimental items as letters, clippings, and photographs (107). Cruz aptly describes this ritual burning as a "process of disremembering" and a "necessary negotiation" in order to avoid a fate similar to that which claims Muley (65). Squatting in the field with Tom and Casy that night, Muley repeatedly takes the conversation in a nostalgic direction, frequently interrupting the other men to relate an incident from his childhood. In contrast, Ma knows that her family's survival does not depend upon a well-preserved past, but on a bravely faced future. Her foresight challenges popular stereotypes of farm families as conservative and tightly bound by tradition. Roy Hinman Holmes iterates this view of farmers in a 1919 essay in the *American Journal of Sociology*, writing that: "Farmers...are rightly considered a backward people because of the constant echoing of the past in [their] ears" (701). Ma wisely understands time as a ceaseless flow that contains birth and death, and like cycles of prosperity and ruin. When the family is holed up in a boxcar facing starvation, Pa admits his tendency to "go diggin' back to a ol' time to keep from thinking" (406). Ma recalls Pa from these indulgent bouts of nostalgia. She reminds him that their life isn't over: "We ain't gonna die out. People is goin' on—changin' a little, maybe, but goin' right on" (406). In endowing Ma with an anti-nostalgic perspective, Steinbeck grasps an argument that historian William Conlogue would make a half-century later in his study of

the industrialization of agriculture. Nostalgia, Conlogue contends, "diverts attention" from the "very real dislocation" of farmers (*Working the Garden* 96). The improved literacy that this study posits as central to the Joads' survival includes a willingness to trash those nostalgic narratives that lock the family in an unproductive past.

Nostalgia, according to Michael Kammen in *Mystic Chords of Memory*, emerges in moments of cultural discontinuity, when one's identity is threatened. The representative narrative voice dramatizes this connection between dislocation and a heightened sense of nostalgia in chapter nine. The interchapter, which foreshadows Ma's burning of the family keepsakes, portrays the difficult decisions involved in packing the car for California:

“If Mary takes that doll...I got to take my Injun bow. I got to. An' this roun' stick—big as me. I might need this stick. I had this stick so long—a month, or maybe a year. I got to take it. And what's it like in California?”

The women sat among the doomed things, turning them over and looking past them and back. “This book. My father had it. He liked a book. *Pilgrim's Progress*. Used to read it. Got his name in it. And his pipe—still smells rank. And this picture—an angel. I look at that before the fust three come—didn't seem to do much good. Think we could get this china dog in? Aunt Sadie brought it from the St. Louis Fair. See? Wrote right on it. No, I guess not. Here's a letter my brother wrote the day before he died. Here's an old-time hat...”

“How can we live without our lives? How will we know it's us without our past? No. Leave it. Burn it.” (89)

Kammen characterizes the relationship between modernism and nostalgia as "perversely

symbiotic," suggesting that nostalgia is a particularly modern invention for dealing with change (300). Given this, it makes sense that nostalgia would pervade American culture in the interwar decades, the era of *Grapes'* publication. The reference to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) underscores the importance of national mythology to the migrants. The picture of an angel that one narrative persona focused on during pregnancy and possibly delivery illustrates the way that origins (literally births) are wrapped up in memories that fast acquire the status of myth, even when they prove untrustworthy; she wants to retain the picture, despite the fact that it "didn't seem to do much good." Finally, more civilized individuals often seek to co-opt the pre-modern pasts of their primitive counterparts for use in their own origin myths. The boy's attachment to his "Injun bow" in the above quoted passage exemplifies this past-theft.

Nostalgia always diminishes its object. The final narrative question can be restated as: How will we recognize ourselves without our past? It is clearly rhetorical and meant to underline the difference between a substantial present existence and an imaginary former existence. Nostalgia confuses the two. And that is why it is so easy for the folklorist to claim that "the hillbilly and his culture are slowly but surely vanishing from the American scene" (Mink 42) and so difficult to identify the last surviving hillbilly (or small farmer or Indian). Nostalgia performs a vanishing act on its object, removing it from real time and preserving it in the timeless past.

David N. Cassuto refers to Steinbeck's "abiding affection for the yeoman agricultural ideal" a type of "nostalgia" (134). However, Steinbeck's nostalgia for the yeoman ideal quickly gives way in the novel to a prophetic imagining of a new agricultural ideal, marked by cooperation rather than independence.

Collectivism

For the Joads, successful adaptation to their new environment requires the blending of civilized and primitive traits: a more refined literacy coupled with a more primitive notion of collective ownership. Steinbeck invites us to imagine a future characterized by collective ownership in *Grapes*. "Is a tractor bad?" the narrator considers:

Is the power that turns the long furrows wrong? If this tractor were ours it would be good—not mine, but ours. If our tractor turned the long furrows of our land, it would be good. Not my land, but ours. We could love that tractor then as we have loved this land when it was ours. (148)

The target of Steinbeck's protest is not industrial agriculture per se, as many critics suggest, but rather individual ownership and the capitalist dynamics of corporate farming (Miltner 297). Steinbeck's narrative voice proclaims that banks and corporations plot to keep people separate so that they will not recognize their common interest. "Only a little multiplication now, and this land, this tractor are ours," urges the narrator (148). The most revolutionary movement, he states, is the one from individual to collective—from "I to 'we'" (148). "The quality of owning," the narrator cautions, "freezes you forever into 'I,' and cuts you off forever from the 'we'" (149). As Owens insists, the lesson that the migrants must learn is "to rely on the group above and beyond the individual, and to accept responsibility for all men rather than merely the self or the family" (73).

The history books hold an important lesson for the Joads on the subjects of private property and removal. In the 1880s the federal government embarked on an extensive program to end Native Americans' collective ownership of the land by allotting parcels

of land to individual Indians; the Dawes Act was the culmination of this program (1887). It was much easier for banks, railroads, and white buyers to divest the Indians of their land once it was parceled out. The same logic applies in *Grapes* where one family is easily removed from their land by the banks but, as the narrator suggests in chapter fourteen, two families would not be so easily turned off. The narrator addresses the heads of the land companies: “For here ‘I lost my land’ is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate—‘We lost *our* land’” (148). Whether or not he realized it, Steinbeck’s language reflects that of an 1832 report from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. That report states: The Indian must “be imbued with the exalting egotism of American civilization, so that he will say ‘I’ instead of ‘We,’ and ‘This is mine,’ instead of ‘This is ours’” (Maddox 23). Thus, part of the Joads’ reeducation consists of a return to the primitive values that the custodians of civilization have struggled for over a century—with the help of a very artful rhetoric—to extinguish.

Conclusion: The Return of the (Other) Vanishing American

The notion of vanishing rural people and places has been a personal interest of mine for nearly twenty years. I can trace it back to a moment in my high school library when I discovered a slim volume of poems titled, “Wyndmere.”¹ I had never seen the name of my tiny North Dakota hometown in a published document other than the local paper or the phonebook. When I opened the book, I found that it was dedicated to Frances Talich Kučera, my great-grandmother and also, I learned, the poet’s grandmother. I was stunned. Not only had I discovered a book called “Wyndmere,” but the title was referring to *my* “Wyndmere” and it was written by a relative. No one had ever mentioned this cousin who taught college English and published poetry in Los Angeles. For a moment it all made sense, my love of language was a part of my genetic inheritance after all. I was ecstatic—until I read the back cover:

Wyndmere is a town in North Dakota where Carol Muske’s mother was born, and where she visited as a child. Muske’s grandparents are buried there, and it was where her mother met and married her father. Now almost a ghost town, Wyndmere is the source of imagery in many of these poems, as well as the idea of *Wynd-mere*. Wind-mother, both inspiration and principle of separation.

Even now, I can remember the stinging betrayal that I felt in the words: “almost a ghost town.” The arrogance of it stunned me. It had never occurred to me that I lived in a ghost town. People were *living* in Wyndmere, filling up their trucks at the gas station,

¹ Carol Muske, “Wyndmere.” Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985.

discussing crop prices, and even writing poetry. We were not ghosts. And regardless of whether it was my long-lost cousin or her publisher who wrote those words, they belonged to an outsider. While I could not articulate it at the time, this description of my hometown contained the features of extinction discourse with its focus on the graves of departed ancestors and its transformation of a vanished place into a symbol of loss.

Even though such depictions have since become familiar, they still bother me. Desolate images of abandoned farmhouses overgrown by tall grass accompany “The Emptied Prairie,” a 2008 *National Geographic* article on North Dakota.² While the whole piece reads like an elegy, the following lines are particularly striking:

That’s the rub in rural North Dakota, a sense of things ebbing, of churches being abandoned, schools shutting down, towns becoming ruins. And all this decline exists amid a seeming statistical prosperity: Oil is booming, wheat prices are at record highs, and, as the average farm size grows, the land is studded with paper millionaires living in the lonely sweep of the plains, with surrounding community gone to the wind...out on the land, the population has relentlessly bled away. So there is money and prosperity and the numbing sense that comes from living in a vanishing world.

It is true that churches and schools do stand empty. Along the railroad tracks, small rectangular signs pitched next to dilapidated grain elevators pronounce the names of long gone towns. But loaded terms like “ruins” and “vanishing” lend the article the air of salvage ethnography, with the journalist clamoring to record the death pangs of rural North Dakota before the culture disappears forever.

² See Charles Bowden, “The Emptied Prairie.” *National Geographic* (October 2008).

This was not the first time that *National Geographic* came to my homeland to chronicle an extinction. I still vividly remember the local stir created when reporters descended upon the village of McLeod in 1987 to capture images of the nation's last one-room schoolhouse before it shut its doors forever.³ The sight of the white clapboard structure fronting an unpaved Main Street made the reporter feel as if he were peering into another era. An image of the flinty schoolmarm flanked by an American flag and wistfully looking out the window into an uncertain future accompanied the piece.

As Stephanie Hawkins notes, since its late nineteenth-century inception, *National Geographic* has participated in the "local-color fascination with the primitive, producing iconic images of ordinary folk as well as of the savage and culturally exotic" (36). The magazine's force in the "popular imagination," she contends, results from its adept management of "textual and visual signifiers of cultural difference" (33). The magazine's coverage of intra-national "primitive" cultures illustrates how far the nation has progressed from its humble yet virtuous beginnings. In its obsessive focus on American extinctions, the magazine feeds the imperialist nostalgia⁴ of its audience. The reader can mourn the passage of their nation's last one-room schoolhouse before turning to an article extolling the latest technological advancement. Mourning and celebration are fused between the covers of *National Geographic* magazine.

Representations of rural "primitives," from the late nineteenth century to the present, with their emphasis on cultural difference, overlook the things that rural and urban folks share. In so doing, they replace real empathy with fetishization. An

³ "North Dakota: Hard Times on the Prairie." *National Geographic* 171.3 (March 1987).

⁴ For a discussion of "imperial nostalgia," see Renato Rosaldo.

“historical object,” the fetish is “territorialized in material space, whether in the form of a geographic locality, a marked site on the surface of the human body, or a medium of inscription or configuration defined by some portable or wearable thing.”⁵ This territorialization involves “reification” and the newly created “thing” summons an “intensely personal response from individuals” while at the same time serving as a “collective social object.”⁶ Thus, rural people and places matter less as individuals than as objects capable of eliciting a nostalgic response from their urban counterparts. The “emptied prairie” becomes a thing to be consumed by a distant readership, one fascinated by the region’s difference from their own cluttered, modern worlds.⁷

Martin Procházka argues that so-called ghost towns and objects from them, including their surviving residents, are “part of ongoing economic, aesthetic, as well as fetishistic transformations” (66). Ghost town relics possess a spectral quality that enables such imaginative transmutations. The word “ghost,” Procházka explains, connotes “something that needs a semblance of materiality to appear, but at the same time is no longer ‘real’ enough, no longer sufficiently material, no longer ‘alive.’ Most of its ‘life’ is restricted to tales of the past, or historical accounts, but it also haunts the future” (67). Largely relegated to the dustbin of history, small farmers become ghosts of a sort—shadow figures in the public imagination. Just as Indians haunt the margins of the fiction

⁵ See William Pietz’s “The Problem of the Fetish” (1985).

⁶ See Pietz

⁷ The critical argument that local fictions serve to bolster national identity is not a new one. Richard Brodhead, Stephanie Foote, Amy Kaplan, and Tom Lutz have all written persuasive studies examining the connection between regionalism and nationalism. See Brodhead’s *Cultures of Letters* (1993); Foote’s *Regional Fictions* (2001); Kaplan’s “Nation Region and Empire,” and Lutz’s *Cosmopolitan Vistas* (2004).

analyzed in this dissertation, the haunting presence of the vanished farmer makes itself felt in contemporary literature. Both sets of Vanishing Americans haunt the future as skeletons in the closet of national progress, as eerie reminders of the human costs of industrialization and corporatization.

In *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001), Louise Erdrich brilliantly portrays the haunting presence of poor prairie farmers as a group even more debased than the novel's main characters, Chippewa Indians. Erdrich's description supports a notion put forth in my dissertation: that midwestern farmers displaced Indians only to find themselves in a similar position, as casualties of modernity, a few decades later. Describing the lean years on the reservation, Erdrich writes:

In those years, a great want descended upon the nation, and the Ojibwe were no longer the only vagrant and hollow-eyed beggars on the plains. There were others. Farmers. Those who had stolen and plowed the earth were upended by the earth, buried in dust. Yet in the scrap of reservation, the lake remained, the woods, the poor cabins with no more than a streak of grease to wipe across the bread. (260)

Erdrich powerfully flips the established representational schema on its head. No longer are Indians the shadow figures of white consciousness. Instead, she uses white farmers to mirror her native characters. Erdrich, quite literally, transforms the white farmers into “others” against which she defines her Indian subjects.

There is something unmistakably ghost-like about Erdrich's “vagrant” and “hollow-eyed” plains farmers. Perhaps this is the natural literary trajectory of the vanishing farmer—to disappear entirely and reappear as a ghost. This is what happened to the Indian in literature, according to Louis Owens. “The real Indian,” writes Owens,

“is finally subsumed, through the vehicle of literature, into the self-consciousness of white America...becoming that America’s shadow and ceasing to exist in his own right” (“Grampa Killed Indians” 64). If the shadow of the Indian symbolizes the “destructive consciousness underlying American settlement” as Owens suggests, the farmer’s ghost may represent the deleterious consequences of the increasing industrialization and corporatization of America (61).

Regardless of what the spectral farmer may stand for in a specific text, my point is that literary analyses of farmers in twenty-first century literature will likely begin to look increasingly like ghost-hunts—especially if the analogy I’ve been pressing between farmers and Indians continues to hold true. As we approach the fiction, we can expect to find the farmer not in the field but in the dreams of former farm boys turned businessmen or perhaps in the antique farm equipment that decorates a faux-rustic summer home.

Literary studies grounded in deconstruction, postcolonial and race theory, and that focus on haunted liminal spaces, offer a useful model for analyzing the ghostly presence of farmers and rural folks in literature. Many of these scholars proceed from Jacques Derrida’s observation in *Specters of Marx* (1994) that a “just future” depends on our ability “to learn to live *with* ghosts” (xvii).⁸ What Derrida labels the “hauntological” domain contains that which is neither fully present nor fully absent, including the ghosts who may be the “victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism” (xix). Derrida’s notion of

⁸ Stef Craps, for example, argues that attention to Derrida’s “hauntological domain” illuminates “the traumas sustained by the formerly colonized and enslaved” (469).

haunting relates to his concept of the “trace” or the “presence-absence, that never known directly, allows everything else to be comprehended” (*Of Grammatology* 71). As my dissertation suggests, the progressive forces of capitalism have contributed to the partial extinction of the farmer class, making the vanished farmer a properly Derridean ghost. With their absent presence, textual traces of farmers illuminate the complex processes of urbanization and industrialization, and the ideologies undergirding these movements.

A useful critical framework for approaching vanishing farmers would combine Derrida’s concept of the ghostly trace with Toni Morrison’s discussion of the “shadow” in *Playing in the Dark* (1992).⁹ This dual lens supplements deconstruction with a method for approaching the otherness of the farmer. Morrison argues that, the Africanist persona functions as a “shadow—a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing” (33). The farmer, reduced to a mere shadow figure, similarly conjures the conflicting emotions of contempt and longing in American literature. Morrison’s concept of “the ghost in the machine” or the “the active, but unsummoned presences” that make themselves felt in a text ought to be applied to literary analyses of the vanished farmer (11). Derrida and Morrison remind us that ghosts, too, can speak and that there is power in spectrality.

In more contemporary fiction, mentions of farmers typically call attention to their absence rather than their presence. For example, in Fall 2011, I taught Bobbie Ann Mason’s “Shiloh” (1982) in my literary analysis course. As I was re-reading the short story to prepare for class, I came upon a passage that sent me clamoring for my

⁹ Philip Page notes the influence of deconstruction on Morrison’s writing. See “Traces of Derrida in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*.”

highlighter. The narrator describes the protagonist's perplexed reaction to the swift changes that have drastically altered his small Kentucky hometown:

Leroy can't figure out who is living in all the new houses. The farmers who used to gather around the courthouse square on Saturday afternoons to play checkers and spit tobacco juice have gone. It has been years since Leroy has thought about the farmers, and they have disappeared without his noticing. (357)

The passage is remarkable for its typicality; descriptions of vanished farmers have become a literary commonplace. The spectral presence of Mason's tobacco-spitting farmers acts as a shorthand reference to corporate development. Their absence signifies the encroachment of civilization; and Leroy's failure to notice that absence indicates the blind, indifference with which the average American accepts "progress."

This dissertation argues that farmers followed Indians as Vanishing Americans in turn of the twentieth-century literature. It appears that popular perceptions of farmers may again be shifting in a manner signaled by earlier constructions of Indians. In *The Return of the Vanishing American* (1968), Leslie Fiedler discusses the return of the repressed figure of the Indian in American literature and culture of the 1950s and 1960s. Focusing largely on Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), Fiedler argues that the unreasoning or mad quality ascribed to "savage peoples" surfaces in the fiction of the New West, where madness promises the "possibility of White transcendence" (178). Hippie youth appropriated Indian fashion as fringed suede jackets, chunky turquoise jewelry and moccasins became powerful anti-establishment statements. Natural drugs like marijuana, mushrooms, and peyote—those "gifts" from and "bridges" to the "eternally archaic" world of the Indian—became ubiquitous staples of the counter-

culture movement (175). These days, the hipsters are more likely to be cultivating urban gardens than dosing on peyote, and wearing denim overalls and red bandanas rather than beaded leather. Thanks to the burgeoning local and organic food movement, inspired in part by books like Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) and Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2008) and popular documentaries like Richard Kenner's 2008 *Food, Inc.*, small farmers are resuming their venerable position within American society. No longer connoting backwardness or degeneration, the title of "farmer" is one proudly claimed by a new generation of agrarians.¹⁰ Whether or not these new farmers will receive significant fictional treatment remains to be seen, but they are certainly the current darlings of more left-leaning, independent media.¹¹

Reading the newly hip farmer as the return of the repressed allows us to see clearly the nature of that repression, to understand what exactly has been suppressed in the collective unconscious. These primitive qualities are many of the same that we traditionally associate with Indian-ness, and include (among others): communal values, a respect for and closeness to the earth, a belief in herbal remedies, and a distrust of capitalist enterprise.

From American ideals, to vanishing figures, to ghosts, to resurrected cultural icons, representations of farmers vacillate widely over the course of U.S. cultural history. By tracking these divergent incarnations of ruralness, we can learn a great deal about our

¹⁰ Between 1998 and 2009, the number of farmer's markets (where growers sell directly to consumers) nearly doubled to 5,274 markets nationwide, according to the USDA's May 2010 report, "Local Food Systems."

¹¹ As I write this, the current issue of *Bust*, a feminist-leaning women's magazine dedicated to arts, culture, and politics, contains the cover story "Urban Farming Made Easy" featuring trendy-looking female farmers and their rooftop and backyard gardens. See Stephanie Fisher's "Dirty Girls." *Bust* 71 (October/November 2011): 46-51.

modern civilization, as it projects its anxieties and desires onto the unsuspecting figure of the small farmer.

Socially marginalized, the farmer also suffers a critical marginalization as shown by the striking dearth of literary scholarship on the subject of the farmer and rural America in general. While recent scholarship has experienced a revived interest in “elaborate[ing] the cultural contexts of urban literature,” the other half of the rural / urban dichotomy has been woefully neglected (Rachman 654). By recovering relatively unknown texts like *Zury* and *Druida* from obscurity and re-centering them as objects of analysis, we can begin to lend “sufficient nuance and sophistication” to the definition of the critically overlooked category of “rural” (Farland 912).

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