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WRITING NEXT TO THE WEST: A SPATIAL CONSIDERATION OF WOMEN IN
THE AMERICAN WEST

By

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Bachelor of Arts, Colby College, Waterville, ME, 2007

Thesis

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English

Writing Next to the West: A Spatial Consideration of Women in the American West

Chairperson: David Moore

Mary Clearman Blew and Judy Blunt are contemporary women writers of the American West. Both women grew up on ranches in Montana but left in adulthood. Despite leaving, each woman maintains significant intellectual and emotional connections to the land and culture of her youth in her writing. Blew's memoir *All But the Waltz* and Blunt's memoir *Breaking Clean* reveal a friction between dependency on the land and necessary distancing from it that presents the opportunity to employ geographical analysis to the ways in which place figures into the production of identity and of these texts.

In this paper, I seek to understand the tension between attachment to place and rejection of it. Humanist geography provides a framework for understanding this tension in Blew's and Blunt's memoirs. Specifically, landscape theories and feminist critical perspectives serve as methodologies to understand the construction of hegemonic places, and can elucidate women's use of space to assert themselves in cultures where they had previously been prevented from doing so.

This project brings to the fore ways women can make themselves visible from within a history that has sought to hide them, that of the American West. Through writing Blew and Blunt validate the feminine subject as a creator of knowledge; they also contribute their unique voices to the history of the American West, thus enriching and deepening its purview. Additionally, the interdisciplinary nature of this project demonstrates the use value of literature to the understanding of space and place in a humanist geography context.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Chapter One: Identity of Place: The Landscape of the Myth of the West	4
2.1 Textual Background	4
2.2 The Historical Myth of the West	5
2.3 Geography: A Primer	13
2.4 Living the Myth	16
2.5 Reading the Cultural Landscape	23
2.6 Theorizing Gender and Space	33
2.7 Transgressive Performativity	40
3. Chapter Two: Place and Identity: Rewriting to Reinscribe	54
3.1 Interstice	54
3.2 Feminine Subjecthood	55
3.3 Becoming a Subject	60
3.4 Text As Paradoxical Space	67
4. Conclusion	72
4.1 Summation	72
4.2 Implications	73
4.3 Limitations and Projections	75
5. Works Consulted	77

1. Introduction

This project was born in the land of the West. As a transplant to this state, upon my arrival I was immediately captivated by the landscape of western Montana. Thinking through my own deep connection to this place, I could not help but wonder what might the experience of it be for someone who was of this land. To answer this question I turned to texts; I read a variety of non-fiction, poetry, and novels by all manner of Western writers, searching for definitive account of the West that might explain the connection I felt to the land. I found instead that I was seeking a Romanticized version of reality; I had fallen prey to the Myth of the West like many before me.

I came to realize that there is no definitive account of what “Montana” is, and similarly there is no definitive Montanan text. There are, however, many texts that are Montanan, each depicting a different, yet equally valid understanding of what this designation indicates. In fact, it has been the project of writers of the “New West” to represent the panoply of voices that make up the contemporary American West, as well as to rectify past silences and omissions. This realization changed my expectations of what Western literature could be and could accomplish.

Through my readings, I eventually arrived at what would become the informant texts for this project. Mary Clearman Blew’s *All But the Waltz* and Judy Blunt’s *Breaking Clean* are memoirs of women who were born and raised on small family ranches following in the homesteading tradition. Yet, these memoirs challenge in significant ways what it means for a text to be regionally Western or Montanan. Both memoirs are written by highly educated university instructors; Blew no longer even lives in Montana. However, each book depicts a woman profoundly connected to the Montana landscape and enchanted by the more enigmatic aspects of the Myth of the West, yet deeply conflicted by the Myth’s constraints. This conflict points to one

paradox that is characteristic of American Western women's identity development in the 20th century: to be simultaneously committed to the landscape and alienated from it.

The tension between past and present, and between attachment and rejection of place characterizes these memoirs; this tension is a site for negotiation in both texts.¹ The cultures Blew and Blunt were raised in prescribed certain roles for them as women to which both women could not and would not conform. As adults, both women left their communities in hopes of exercising a greater degree of agency in the development of self. Yet the specter of past landscapes remains with them. Both texts work through the complex relationship between identity, culture, and landscape from a postmodern feminist perspective.

My research question for this project asks how Blew's and Blunt's memoirs challenge the traditional position of women in masculinist cultures, such as that found in ranching communities of Montana, and what strategies do the writers offer as a way to validate women in these places. I want to know how one makes peace with a place, both its land and its culture, by which one is simultaneously defined and rejected. I believe that these texts offer attempts to reframe the culture of the Myth of the West in a way that accommodates complex, self-determining women, which in turn contributes importantly to the history of the American West.

Because the nature of my inquiry and the memoirs themselves are place-specific, I turned to geography to search for answers to my questions. Geography is a science devoted to understanding the link between the phenomena of the living world and their physical locations on Earth. There are two primary branches within the discipline of geography: physical and human. Physical geographers study the way natural processes are impacted by the unique features of a given location: features such as geology, climate, topography, or ecology. Human

¹ It is important to acknowledge that Blew's and Blunt's texts are distinct projects from one another, and I have no intention of conflating the two. However, the overlaps that occur between these projects prove productive for comparison in the present discussion.

geographers study the relationship between a given physical environment and the human experience of it. Through an analysis of this relationship, it is possible to trace material manifestations of ideology in lived experience.

My own work has been informed by several different humanist geographical approaches. In chapter one I have used theories of landscape to demonstrate the influence of historical context on the cultural field in which Blew and Blunt are raised. This section delineates some of the contextual factors which create a landscape, as well as the ways in which individuals remake landscapes through their engagement with it. Particular attention has been paid to the gendered nature of these spaces. Chapter two draws on feminist theorists such as Theresa De Lauretis and Gillian Rose to explore how Blew's and Blunt's feminine identities informed their experience of place. I offer reflexivity and Rose's theory of paradoxical space as strategies used by Blew and Blunt to reconcile the tension between their cultures and their identities. Together, these chapters demonstrate the mutual influence of internal and external geographies to construct (and reconstruct) experience and a sense of self.

Together Mary Clearman Blew's *All But the Waltz* and Judy Blunt's *Breaking Clean* together demonstrate the extraordinary capacity of literature to represent reality not as it *is* but as it *feels*, and arrive at a world that is understood through emotional resonance. Blew and Blunt reveal this world to us, invite us in, and show us another way to know what is true and another way to understand what it means to be Montanan.

2. Chapter One: Identity of Place: The Landscape of the Myth of the West

2.1 Textual Background

Blew and Blunt both write from and about their experiences as women in Montana ranching communities. Together their texts depict two unique yet overlapping realities which, in speaking back to a hegemony that attempted to obscure them, broaden and complicate understandings of the history and culture of the American West.

Mary Clearman Blew had said that Montana is “invented” (“Bone Deep” 40). Her observation refers to the multiplicity of representations and depictions of “Montana” in popular culture and in popular imagination. One term frequently used to discuss what Blew sees as Montana’s invention is the “Myth of the West.” The Myth of the American West is an oversimplification of the complex and varied geographies and cultures extant in the western United States, but is also an imagined geography that permeates the history and culture of the geographical American West.

Blew grew up in a ranching community in Fergus County, Montana in the Judith Basin, the same land that her family had lived on for four generations. As depicted in her 1991 memoir *All But the Waltz*, the culture of this place in the mid-20th century when Blew was a child and young adult, is steeped in the Myth of the West, and depicted as deeply masculinist² and restrictively patriarchal. Blew felt limited by the prescribed roles women were expected to fill and felt that subjecthood and self-determination were denied her in this place because of her

² Gillian Rose has adopted the term “masculinist” from Michèle Le Doeuff to describe the discipline of geography as “work which, while claiming to be exhaustive, forgets about women’s existence and concerns itself only with the positions of men” (qtd. in Rose 4). In this discussion the term can be understood more broadly as an epistemology or ideology that excludes women or limits their ability to self-represent.

gender. Such is the climate out of which Blew writes as well as the culture she illustrates in her text.

Judy Blunt's 2002 memoir *Breaking Clean* depicts her childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood spent in a ranching community in the northeast part of Montana, outside of Malta in Phillips County. Blunt describes a landscape that is "harsh and wild and distant," quite in the image of the mythic West (3). Despite characterizing her own story as "embedded in stories of the land," this feeling is at odds with the limitations Blunt feels imposed on her by the masculinist culture of her community (12).

I posit that a consideration of geography in these texts elucidates the connection between the geographical location and the culture of Blew's and Blunt's communities that may help account for their experiences in it. Specifically, my discussion will explicate theories of landscape to map and analyze material experiences of ideology that results from imposed metanarratives in a particular location. I will demonstrate how culture can shape a landscape and in turn how landscape can shape identity both through participation and through subversion. This mapping will take shape through the historical context of the Myth of the West and its manifestations in Blew's and Blunt's memoirs.

2.2 The Historical Myth of the West

What is commonly referred to as the Myth of the West originated in a Romantic nationalistic world-view of progress of the United States across the North American continent. Although the Myth was sedimented by many years of historical accounts and fictional representations, historian Frederick Jackson Turner is most frequently credited with establishing the American West and its frontier characteristics as defining the whole of the United States in

his 1893 landmark essay (and later book) “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” For Turner the frontier is the line of settlement that marked US westward expansion, what he called the “meeting point between savagery and civilization” (1). In this essay, Turner emphasizes the contact zone of the frontier as *the* source of a uniquely American character, which had already been romanticized and adopted by the country. By explaining US progress in terms of the frontier, Turner reoriented the collective American gaze towards the western part of the continent, establishing an open space for imagination while simultaneously filling in some of that imaginative space with his own view of the “frontier,” a perspective that was informed by an already established conception of the “West.”

Turner’s essay made several important yet deeply problematic claims. For example his essay asserts that as the frontier extended westward, former frontier zones developed into “higher social organization,” thus imposing a teleology of progress; that the land of west of the Mississippi River was “free,” effectively eliminating any previous inhabitants or claims to land ownership from the “frontier” space; and finally that a specific set of characteristics embodied in the frontier zone of the American West could and did stand in for a totalizing American identity. Although Turner did not invent the frontier or its characteristics, he did codify generally accepted notions of the West. For example, Turner linked “conditions of frontier life” and specific intellectual traits using specious geographical-determinist logic, yet we still use his language to describe the West today (16). To wit:

That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and

exuberance which comes with freedom – these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier. (Turner 16)

This passage does not include necessarily negative imagery, yet it makes an assertion that these traits are at once determined by the existence of a frontier space and are applicable to any individual in this space as well as essentially anywhere else in the U.S. Turner's image of a rugged-individual frontiersman is reproduced frequently enough in histories of the West and in popular media that most Americans are able to conjure up an image of this individual. The characteristics Turner identifies in this passage have become so deeply associated with the American West, that such a representation – the unrefined yeoman, who is good with his hands, and possesses an unshakable sense of right and wrong – has come to stand in for all (white male) inhabitants of the American West. By codifying the frontier and its attendant characteristics, Turner reified a persuasive and compelling imagined geography³ that would transcend its mythic status to become a mechanism of structuring the landscape of the West, and of controlling behavior within that landscape.

In many ways, Turner was simply reflecting conventional beliefs of his era. The vision and image of the West put forth in his essay were not his alone, and can be found in legislation that came to literally shape the Western landscape. Specifically, the Homestead Act of 1862 declared that all U.S. citizens were entitled to 160 acres of “unappropriated public lands” west of the Mississippi River provided they first filed claims in the area of settlement (“Statutes at Large”). The Homestead Act presumed that such lands were “free” for the taking. Historian

³ Edward Said in the essay “Invention, Memory, and Place,” defines “imaginative geography” as “the invention and construction of a geographical space called the Orient, for instance, with scant attention paid to the actuality of the geography and its inhabitants” (181). In my discussion, the term imagined geography has less specific geographical references and less overtly political connotations, and instead refers to the imposition of images and ideas onto a place irrespective of the material experience of it.

Joseph Kinsey Howard remarks in his text *Montana: High, Wide, and Handsome*, the act “was in line with American tradition that the land belonged to the people and should be distributed for individual settlement” (170). Of course, this tradition only applied to white Americans who were financially able to relocate, and also betrays a sense of entitlement that underpinned nationalistic rhetoric and policy which enabled the recolonization of such lands. This act is one example of the literal codification of the assumptions put forth in Turner’s essay. However, the lived experience that resulted from such legislation diverges from this ideal in important ways.

More practically, the Homestead Act and its promise of free land functioned as “encouragement to the depressed Eastern industrial worker, to provide an ‘escape valve’ for the Eastern economy, and as an answer to the Westerner’s constant demand for land” (Toole 232-233). The initial act did little to draw people westward, and in fact, the deluge of “honeyockers” and homesteaders did not arrive until the first decade of 20th century when the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 was passed. The act increased the land allotted to each homesteader from 160 to 320 acres and increased the time period allowed to prove up from three to five years. These addendums made for a more enticing prospect, but it was not until the railroads got into the business of selling the Myth of the West that would-be farmers began arriving in droves.

Montana historians Howard and K. Ross Toole credit James J. Hill, owner of The Great Northern Railroad, with cultivating a myth of his own in order to draw potential rail line patrons to Montana. Hill’s company “poured out thousands and thousands of brochures and tracts telling of the richness of Montana’s soil and salubriousness of its climate” (Toole 234). Hill even hired “agricultural experts” to attest to the potential for growing in eastern Montana. Other railroad companies soon followed his lead, setting up their own soil experiment stations and publicizing the Montana landscape (Toole 235). In 1914 Montana received 20,662 homestead entries – a

number “nearly seven times the annual average of the first decade of the century” for all of the West (Howard 177). The homesteaders’ arrival forever changed the physical and culture landscapes of Montana:

The log cabin, tent, and teepee town of the open range, with its Indians, dogs, horses, and saloons, was displaced by the hideous ‘shack town’ of the honeyocker: a one-street, one-side-of-the-street ‘business section,’ stores with dirty showcases and third-rate goods with unfamiliar brands, soda fountain without charged water, firetrap movie theater. By day the angry sun blazed upon the treeless, dusty street; by night the town lay dead and cold and insignificant under the great sky while howling coyotes circled it and sometimes slunk into its alleys to fight the dogs nosing its garbage. (Howard 192)

Howard’s palpable disapproval notwithstanding, this passage conveys the change that took place as more and more people settled the prairies of Montana. Rather than individual inhabitants few and far between, the homesteaders attempted to establish small commercial and social centers, reminiscent of their eastern counterparts but on a very different terrain. Yet, perhaps the most lasting impact of the homesteaders resulted from their misguided agricultural endeavors.

The homesteaders had been persuaded by the promise of rain and rich soil, and the first years after the population boom confirmed this promise, but by June 1919, which was the driest month in Montana’s recorded history, most of the state had already endured several seasons of drought (Howard 197). The drop in wheat production resulted in a net loss of \$50,000,000 for Montana and the wheat farmers (Toole 236). Winds followed the drought, sweeping away inches of topsoil, freed from Earth by the “deep furrow” tilling methods encouraged by Hill’s “experts” (Howard 202). Life for the homesteader was not easy to begin with because of isolation and harsh winters, but adverse growing conditions made survival even more challenging. Eventually,

half of all the farmers in Montana lost their land (Toole 238). “And yet, incredibly enough, there were those who stuck it out. They were still on the land when the rain came again in the mid-twenties and when the drought came again in 1929 and when the rains came again in 1939. They are still there in some places today” (Toole 238). Those who were able to prove up on their land wore their survival like a badge of honor.

Ironically, the persistence and endurance of those who stayed in Montana has perhaps done more to propagate the Myth of the West than James Hill ever could: “From the tragedy and hardship of the era of the open range [the Montanan] somehow makes romance” (Toole 243). The homestead era, though blighted by death and foreclosure, has been subsumed by the Myth of the West as further proof of the characteristics described in Turner’s essay.

The Homestead Acts could only have been created under the assumption that the United States owned the land of the West, and that no one inhabited this area, in order to lay claim to it. Those individuals who took advantage of this legal colonization project shared such an assumption. Moreover, these individuals were further persuaded by other falsehoods about Montana’s climate and soil. Thus Montana’s first major population influx was built upon an inaccurate imagined geography. Once arriving, homesteaders soon discovered the incongruities between the myth they had bought into and their new reality. Their farming practices caused massive erosion of topsoil and their shack towns peppered the topography. Those who remained survived by adapting to their surroundings, and their endurance has come to be seen as a testament to the rugged individualism and perseverance of the Westerner.

Homesteading, then, provides historical and cultural context to the development of Montana’s landscape through its example of how cultural forces can shape the physical landscape through inhabitants’ participation in ideology. Both Blew’s and Blunt’s predecessors

came to Montana under the impetus of the Homesteading Acts. The familial and community cultures into which these women were born were in many ways defined by the history of homesteading, as we shall see in the following sections.

There are other assumptions underlying Turner's frontier hypothesis that have had lasting impacts on the culture of the West as well. For example, Native Americans on the other side of the frontier's meeting point of "savagery and civilization" are not included in his definition of American progress, and so their vanquishing and disappearance are presumed (Turner 1). Thus, the myth of the vanishing Indian was also codified. As feminist historian Glenda Riley points out, Turner's thesis also obscures women, as the frontier and expansion of the United States are characterized as a uniquely "male phenomen[a]" (216). Riley intimates that this void enabled the propagation of "mythologized western women" who could complement the rugged individualist male (225): "Because no women existed in the historian's West, shapers of popular culture supplied interpretations that fell into two types: images based on traditional beliefs regarding American women and those derived from more modern conceptions of women" (225). Western women, then, were either Victorian-era victims of the harsh climate and hard work, who were chained to their housework, or unruly cowgirls and empowered heroines imbued with revisionist 20th century values (Riley 226). Neither depiction of women is informed by the experiences of individual women, however.

Historian Susan Armitage also recognizes two categories that seem to characterize all depictions of western women: "women in families and single women who were members of larger women's groups with definite occupation (schoolteachers, nuns, prostitutes)" (384). Again, this history indicates an assumption that women conformed to one of only a few types. Women were either part of a family unit or one among many within a wider, predetermined

group of women. Individual women are largely absent from historical accounts of the West, and are rarely featured as protagonists or active subjects. Turner's essay and other writings left a void in the study of women's history. Reductive and stereotypical images have filled that void, and have since come to define women in the West.

Codification of the Myth of West and its characteristics solidified the Myth as historical fact, combined with legislation and events that were built upon the Myth and propagated it. As demonstrated through the example of homesteading, those living in the West readily integrated the Myth into their lives despite discrepancies between the Myth and lived reality. In his essay "Montana: or The End of Jean-Jacques Rousseau," historian Leslie Fiedler outlines the evolution of culture in the American West in response to its mythic image. According to Fiedler, survival was the main concern for early frontier inhabitants; explorers and settlers were content to simply live and did not analyze how their reality compared to the Romantic "dream" of the West, a dream that was akin to Turner's vision (Fiedler 14). Fiedler asserts that culture in the frontier developed with a paradoxical yet dogmatic adherence to the mythic "dream" of itself despite inhabitants' awareness of discontinuities with their reality. This is where Blew and Blunt find themselves: caught between the myth and reality of their western lives.

All But the Waltz and *Breaking Clean* are born out of a friction between the Myth of the West as it has been codified by Turner and reified in the women's post-homestead communities, and their own experiences as women who do not conform to the Myth. Blew's and Blunt's memoirs illustrate the inability of their cultures to accommodate the identities and desires of individuated women. Masculinism and enforced gender stereotypes are two characteristics that arose from the Myth of the West which came to structure the landscape Blew and Blunt grew up in, and which both women rebel against in their writing. In the next section, I will introduce

geography as a critical framework for understanding how the values espoused by Turner's essay translated into culture and practice as depicted in Blew's and Blunt's texts.

2.3 Geography: A Primer

Geographical theories emplace Blew's and Blunt's memoirs by grounding their narratives in the context of their respective ranching communities and by mapping these women's experiences and senses of place on particular locations. As described in the introduction, geography can provide a variety of methodologies to understanding the relationship between humans and their location in the world. In this section, I will look specifically at landscape as an approach to analyzing the manifestation of the Western mythos in Blew's and Blunt's communities. Mapping the landscape of these communities through mobility and performativity can elucidate some of the values and codes governing behavior in this place. Before arriving at that discussion, however, I first want to explicate some pertinent geographical concepts.

Eminent humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan explains that "space and place are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted. When we think about them, however, they may assume unexpected meaning and raise questions we have not thought to ask" (Tuan 3). Space and place and words we use constantly in our everyday vernacular, but are also foundational concepts within geographical discourse. Careful attention to the uses of and responses to space and place can illuminate important issues pertaining to human experience of the world. Geographer Tim Cresswell, a former student of Tuan's, defines space and place in the following manner: "Spaces have area and volumes. Places have space between them" ("Place" 8). Space exists physically, but is conceived of by its void or lack. Places are generally thought of as spaces which have been imbued with meaning by people; they are discernable locations

that have been ascribed significance. These terms can also take on more figurative connotations that refer to conceptual relations or positions, which I will revisit in the second chapter.

In a humanist geographical approach, which I am undertaking, experience of space and place provides the basis for analysis. “Sense of place” is one way of describing an individual’s experience of spaces and places. The phrase “sense of place” refers to the emotional responses a person has to a location. Humanist geographers want to know how a person defines a sense of place, and what the implications of that emotional response are. Tuan identifies the importance of sense of place because of the progression “from inchoate feelings for space and fleeting discernments of [them] in nature to their public and material reification” (17). Out of our senses of place, we create structures and meaning that give our feelings material form.

In the essay “Place and Identity: A Sense of Place,” feminist geographer Gillian Rose suggests that senses of place enable us to link identity and place: “One way in which identity is connected to a particular place is by a feeling that you belong to that place. It’s a place in which you feel comfortable, or at home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place” (“Place and Identity” 89). Rose asserts that the feeling of belonging can give one a sense of self when one identifies positively with a place, conversely, this feeling can also be used to define oneself in opposition to another place or person. Senses of place such as the feeling of belonging can illuminate the boundaries of a place, such as demarcations where certain people feel “in” and where others are made to feel “out” of place. Used as a tool for demarcation and differentiation, “Senses of place, then, can be seen as a result of underlying structures of power such as colonialism and imperialism” (“Place and Identity” 100). Masculinism, similarly, is an underlying structure of power at work in the American West. Mapping where women feel a positive sense of place and where negative associations can reveal

ways in which this underlying power structure has come to bear on the landscape of the West and by extension has come to inform women's sense of identity in this place.

Landscape is another foundational concept in the discipline of geography. Along with space and place, landscape is a central focus for study and theorizing and has been subjected to many interpretations over time. Perhaps the most encompassing explanation of landscape comes from historian Alan Baker in his book *Geography and History*. Baker explains that geographical landscape discourse "is concerned with the visible appearance of surfaces of the earth; it recognizes the landscapes as being cultural constructions and also cultural representations realized in imagination, in literary forms, in art or on the ground itself" (112). Baker's definition accounts for both inhabited landscape and representations of landscape, both of which signify cultural values that can construct physical space or color imagined spaces.

The Myth of the West is an ideology that came to structure space and place in the western United States by inscribing predetermined characteristics and values to the landscape, irrespective of that land. An assertion of an empty space in the West is one way the myth literally structured the land: no one lived in the great expanse, and so it was up for grabs. The Homestead Acts reinforced and legitimated this assumption, and enabled the presumably unproblematic settlement of the West by Easterners. Thus, the experience of the West by Native Americans was drastically changed through the codification of mythic elements of the West. The omission of women was similarly inscribed onto the land, as the imagined geography of the West emphasized male-centered action and conflict, which obscured women's roles in managing the homes and families that also populated the West. The experience of place depicted by Blew and Blunt in their memoirs conveys a pervasive and oppressive masculinist culture derived from the Myth of the West.

2.4 Living the Myth

Blew and Blunt were raised in families and communities heavily influenced by the homesteading history. Both women's predecessors came to Montana as part of the homestead rush one way or another. Blew's paternal great-grandfather, Abraham Hogeland came to the territory from Pennsylvania in 1882 as a surveyor for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Through his travels, Abraham decided on a small piece of land in Fergus County, Montana: "Family legend confirms his love for the basin – how he first surveyed it for the railroad and, having seen no better country between Pennsylvania and Montana, decided to make it his. He filed homestead papers on a sheltered valley at the mouth of Spring Creek and built the cabin on the slope where his next seven children were born" (Blew 29). The land served Abraham well, as it was close to water and enabled him to prove up. Almost forty years later, Blew's father bought the ranch back from Abraham's estate; this is the home in Blew's earliest memories.

Blunt's grandparents were a part of the biggest wave of homesteaders, they arrived from various points around the country at the turn of the century: "Within a few years of each other, each from his or her own direction, my grandparents crossed the border into Montana as young adults, took up homesteads independently of one another, met, married and stayed, rooted and grounded, through the great exodus of settlers that followed" (18). These histories are significant not only for Blew and Blunt, but within the greater history of Montana. So many settlers and homesteaders did not make it, that Blew's and Blunt's families are numbered among the lucky few to remain. In telling their family histories, both Blew and Blunt betray a sense of pride for their heritage: "Their legacy is a hardheaded independence still visible in the fourth and fifth generations of Montana-born children, and a restlessness that crops up every now and again, like the occasional head of red hair" (Blunt 18-19). Out of this history comes not only a deep

reverence for the land, a keen awareness of Montana's environmental might, but, perhaps most importantly, a cultural sensibility built upon perseverance and survival.

Survival is not the same as success, however, and despite remaining on the very same land as their forebears for generations, Blew's and Blunt's immediate families struggle themselves to survive; both women grew up knowing how to "do without." As inheritors of this homesteading tradition, many of the practices Blew's and Blunt's families participate in are directly built upon that history and that attitude, despite economic, industrial, technological, and cultural changes. Inability to relinquish values of the homesteading era proved to be both challenging and detrimental to those in Blew's and Blunt's texts most resistant to change.

The landscape in which Blew and Blunt spent their childhoods changed little since their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents lived and worked it. The home space remained isolated and austere because of its geographical remoteness and harsh conditions. And women's duties were confined to the domestic space while men's work kept them outside until mealtime or the end of the workday.

From a child's perspective, Blew recalls her mother's hard work to make the home function: "She lugged the armloads of wood and buckets of water and slops and ashes that came with cooking and washing and ironing in a kitchen with a wood range and no plumbing; she provided the endless starchy meals of roast meat and potatoes and gravy; she kept salads on her table and fresh or home-canned vegetables at a time when iceberg lettuce was a town affectation" (168). Blew's mother, Doris, was well acquainted with hardship from her own childhood and youth on a homestead and as an adult during the depression. Blew recalls her mother as a tireless worker, who always provided for her family as best she could given financial constraints.

In the most detailed description of her childhood home, Blew describes the great lengths her mother went to in making the space more than simply functional:

During the good years, when cattle prices were high enough to pay the year's bills and a little extra, my mother bought wallpaper out of a catalog and stuck it to her lumpy walls. She enameled her kitchen white, and she sewed narrow strips of cloth she called 'drapes' to hang at the sides of her windows. She bought a stiff tight cylinder of linoleum at Sears, Roebuck in town and hauled it home in the back of the pickup and unrolled it in a shiny flowered oblong in the middle of her splintery front room floor. Occasionally I would find her sitting in her front room on her 'davenport,' which she had saved for and bought used, her lap full of sewing and her forehead relaxed out of its knot. For a moment there was her room around her as she wanted it to look: the clutter subdued, the new linoleum mopped and quivering under the chair legs that held down its corners, the tension of the opposing floral patterns of wallpaper, drapes, and slipcovers held in brief, illusory harmony by the force of her vision. (173-4)

There was never much money or time for flourishes in Blew's family home, but Doris did what she was able to with limited resources to remake her domestic space in a way that exceeded the meager conditions of her own youth and young adulthood. Decorations were perhaps the only way Doris was able to transcend beyond the limitations of her homesteading heritage and lifestyle. Moreover, these flourishes are in some ways a challenge to the tedious work that characterized the homestead domestic space. Similarly understated adornments characterize Blunt's family home space, "Our little home on the prairie was not charming, though by homestead standards, it was livable and remained relatively unchanged until we kids were grown and gone" (21). Blunt describes the physical layout of her childhood home in great detail:

From the outside, we entered a rough enclosed porch, passing between a row of muddy overshoes and couple days' worth of split wood to the kitchen door. Over that threshold, linoleum cabbage flowers bloomed through the house, shades of maroon and green fading to black where the color had worn away in traffic lanes and doorways. In one corner of the kitchen built-in benches seated two sides of the square kitchen table, one step from the double-oven cookstove, one step from the wash-basin, one step from the woodstove we stoked with white cottonwood logs [...] The dark-red linoleum covering the countertops peeped through its own covering of gallon milk jars crockery and pots that wouldn't fit in the narrow cupboards. Small islands of work space around the sink and stove filled and cleared a dozen times a day. My sisters and I slept just off the kitchen in one nine-by-nine room outfitted with a foldaway cot and a set of World War II army bunks. Two similar rooms crouched under the low eaves off the living room for my brothers and my parents. The girls' room shared a wall with another stamp-sized square that just fit a wringer washing machine, a claw-foot bathtub and the red iron pitcher pump where we got our household water. (21-2)

Blunt's description uses rapid-fire language that emphasizes the economy of space that characterized her family's home. Relational descriptions reinforce this notion through the repetition of how close things were to one another and which walls touched. Moreover, she takes care to include the appliances and workspaces most important to a typical domestic routine. The home, then, is understood as a cramped, busy, and industrious place. This is not a place suited to leisure.

For both Blew and Blunt, the home space is not a site of relaxation, rather these spaces are thoroughly characterized by the never-ending process of running and maintaining a home. It

is little wonder, then, that both women recall fondly – and in much greater depth – childhood experiences that took place outside of this space, away from the domestic duties that awaited them as adult women in this cultural tradition.

The interior of the home was characterized by the routine, yet chaotic, processes of household maintenance, and is a space that has largely been omitted from the Myth of the West, save for occasional images of the home as a site of respite from the harsh elements. In contrast, the landscape that lay just beyond the threshold of the home represents Turner's hypothesized frontier. The activities taking place outside the home held romance and mystique imbued by the Myth of the West, and thus these spaces and activities carried a cultural capital that the domestic sphere did not. As children, Blew and Blunt endeavor to participate in the largely male-dominated spaces outside the home, where they find a sense of freedom and mobility that is apparently lacking in their claustrophobic, busy home spaces. The gender division of these spaces, however, becomes increasingly problematic as Blew and Blunt grow up in their post-homestead communities.

In telling recollections, Blew and Blunt both provide anecdotes which demonstrate a cultural preference for masculine characteristics as well as their own. These brief stories at once illustrate the prioritization of maleness in their communities, and to some degree account for the de-emphasis on the home space observed throughout Blew's and Blunt's texts.

Blew's early memories are steeped in nostalgia for an Old West full of rowdy cowboys and rugged ranchers making it on unforgiving land. This is not her own nostalgia, however, but that of her family and wider community. She remembers as a child, being captivated by men's bravado: "I hung on the back of my father's chair, listening. I preferred the men's stories; they were much more thrilling, more fully narrated and action-packed, than the elliptical, encoded talk

of the women” (Blew 110). The men tell stories that bolster the myth of their land and position themselves as heroes. Blew’s childhood attraction to the men’s stories seems innocent enough; they are more entertaining to a child than women’s subtle conversations. However, she does not realize until she is an adult that her admiration of the men was a way of participating in the propagation of the Myth of the West through an omission and silencing of women’s voices.

The men’s stories were overt, driven by heroics and therefore more interesting and more worthwhile to listen in on, thus making it more valuable and more visible than matters concerning women. Yet, Blew adds in reflection, “One simple, elementary difficulty with the women’s talk took me years to comprehend. What they wanted to talk about couldn’t be discussed in front of children” (110). Women’s stories had to be veiled for discretion, but Blew’s realization also demonstrates the invisibility of women within her community’s cultural landscape. Women’s conversations and stories were communicated covertly rather than broadcast to a wide audience. Silencing and obscuring in this way is one method of devaluing women, a devaluation that even Blew did not come to understand until she was an adult woman in this community.

Blew’s example seems almost surreptitious in comparison with the blatant messages of masculinist preference Blunt received as a child. In one passage, Blunt recalls assisting her grandfather in culling an unruly cat population. Her grandfather set aside the female cats to be killed, while keeping the males: “I knew how to sort boy kittens from girl kittens. I understood all the reasons for thinning out litters [...] But no one would tell me why the limit was on girl cats” (90). Asking her grandfather as much, Blunt does not get a satisfying response. He agrees that it would probably be just as effective to kill the male cats. Yet, the conversation ends there.

In speaking back to this recollection, Blunt describes the incident as part of a much wider pattern within her culture:

I knew this injustice wasn't limited to cats. Our ranching community applauded the birth of stud colts, bull calves and boy babies. We celebrated the manly man for doing the work of two men and the little woman for whipping up man-sized meals. And when television followed electricity to our community in the early sixties, the outside view it gave me confirmed my suspicions. I got from television names for what I already knew, an adult world neatly divided into Marshal Dillons and Miss Kittys. (90)

Perceptively, Blunt understands the gendered imbalance of this pattern even as a child. Her community overtly valorizes masculine attributes: strength, largeness, and virility. The received message was that masculine qualities and even male sexuality were more important and provided more valuable services to the community than those qualities associated with women. Moreover, this local pattern was reinforced by popular culture.

In both of these examples, Blew and Blunt describe ways in which assumptions underpinning Turner's frontier hypothesis came to define their experiences in place, specifically the valorization of masculine identities and attributes through the gender encoding of bodies and space. Space is encoded by the values of a place, and operates as a method of regulating how people participate in it. Public space is coded as masculine because men are able to openly demonstrate their gender; moreover this public demonstration is culturally celebrated. In contrast, women are confined to private spaces such as the home, which are in turn coded as feminine. Domestic space and work is devalued by this culture, and so Blew and Blunt pursue experiences beyond the home space in order to participate in the Myth of the West. Yet as the women grow up and are themselves coded as feminine, resisting the domestic space becomes

increasingly different. Through a use of geographical landscape theories, the values conveyed in the accounts above can be mapped through the regulation of space in and around the home, which will elucidate the impact of landscape on the development of identity for Blew and Blunt.

2.5. Reading the Cultural Landscape

Attention to landscape is one way of making visible the boundaries that Gillian Rose suggests result from underlying ideological structures. These boundaries and the regulations they impose on behavior are the material manifestations of the ideology governing a place. We saw a brief glimpse of this in the textual examples discussed above. But before returning to Blew and Blunt, I want to explain landscape as a theoretical concept more thoroughly.

Like space and place, landscape is a term that is widely used in everyday speech. The word has many connotations ranging from an artistic genre to simply indicating the view before one's eyes. However, landscape is also an elemental, and enduring, focus of geographical analysis.

Carl Sauer is credited with introducing the term landscape into American geographical discourse. His use of the term and methodological approach to landscape was phenomenological in nature, meaning that his epistemology was rooted in empirical observation or experiential interactions with a landscape. He believed that landscape was made up of associations of forms, which could be understood through a morphological analysis of the disparate parts independent of one another. Sauer himself was drawing on older German geographical literature which defined a landscape as a particular location "whose characteristics were distinct from those of its neighbors: it had natural and cultural boundaries and thus could be mapped as well as painted"

(Baker 111). This definition led Sauer to a static conception of landscape as a thing fixed in place and unconnected to its surroundings.

Sauer has also been credited with making the distinction between a natural landscape and a cultural landscape within the American geographical tradition. He suggests that the difference between the two is that the former is “an area largely or wholly untouched by human hands and the latter being that landscape as transformed by human activity and attitudes” (Baker 110). This distinction and Sauer’s early influence held sway over landscape theory for many years.

Although, later geographers would assert that, like Baker, even those landscapes observed from a distance, which Sauer would call “natural,” have been influenced by the gaze of the observer.

John Wylie begins his book *Landscape* by stating that landscape is defined by tensions. Specifically, a tension between “sensuous immersion and detached observation” (1). He asks, “Is landscape the world we are living *in*, or a scene we are looking *at*, from afar?” (Wylie 2) Throughout his discussion of the various critical approaches to landscape, Wylie does not offer any resolution, merely an acknowledgement of this tension and its persistence throughout the history of landscape theory. Later geographers still debate, but have generally help to opinion that landscape is an inhabited space; one such geographer is J.B. Jackson.

Jackson focused on domiciles as an “elementary unit” in understanding landscape, and while much of his studies have focused on built spaces, his overall approach to landscape was that it should be understood as “a place for living and working, to be judged in terms of those living and working there” (Baker 118). With Jackson came the general agreement that landscapes “are *symbolic*: landscapes reflect the societies responsible for creating and maintaining them” and reflect a human desire to shape the earth according to human values

(Baker 118). This approach to landscape is much more dynamic than Sauer's, as landscape for Jackson is something that is always being made and remade by those who live in it.

This notion of making and remaking landscape is particularly applicable to a discussion of cultural landscapes. Cultural landscape makes social, economic, and other relations material. Several cultural geographers, each in their own words, have asserted that ideological values and relations are "embedded in spatial arrangements and visual signs" that compose a landscape (Duncan 231). Marxist cultural geographer Don Mitchell asks, "What is landscape, after all, but an *imposition* of power: power made concrete in the bricks, mortar, stones, tar, and lumber of a city, town, village, or rural setting – or on canvas or photo-stock?" (123). Those who are in power have the ability to structure a landscape materially as well as define the meaning of elements within it through both inhabitation and, according to Cosgrove, by their view of it as well. For Mitchell, as well as other geographers, material landscape is effectively a reification of hegemony. In this vein, visual media theorist W.J.T. Mitchell describes landscape as:

...an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent human inventions. Landscape thus has a double role with respect to something like ideology [...] It naturalizes a cultural and social construction representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operations by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site. (qtd. in Mitchell 113-4)

In this passage Mitchell explains that the effects of landscape are two-fold: the dynamics of power and ideology are always at work in the creation of landscape, but also in the experience of it. This quote also intimates that by accepting our landscape as an unwavering given, we ignore and thus implicate ourselves in naturalizing its underlying power structures.

However, through the influence of poststructuralist thought, geographers came to understand that landscape does not have a fixed meaning, and meaning is made by those who have the ability to either reinforce or subvert the landscape because of their alternative positions. Landscapes themselves are constantly being made and remade, and so too are the meanings of them.

Poststructuralists hold the view that a sign or symbol has infinite meanings, which has led the way for alternative readings and alternative meanings of landscape. Of particular note are feminist theories of landscape, which call into question the gendering of space and patriarchal structures that make this possible. Feminist geographer Gillian Rose's work engages this questioning as her interest is in destabilizing a universally masculine construction of landscape. In her book *Feminism and Geography*, Rose criticizes geography for not marking male perspectives that have come to construct and represent landscape exclusively. The chapter entitled "Looking at Landscape: The Uneasy Pleasures of Power" problematizes, more specifically, the unmarked gaze of geographers that does not question its position as male, a position which tends not to take gendered experience of landscape into account. Her project is to reveal what is considered an "objective" point of view to be a uniquely male perspective. Ultimately, Rose's work allows for more gendered interpretations of landscape to add to the plethora of approaches already at work, but also allows for even more specialized interpretations of landscape.

James and Nancy Duncan suggest that discourse analysis is the most effective way to analyze meaning in landscapes. "Our object of study is not the landscape per se, but the social-political relations that, although inextricably bound to the landscape, are not visible to the eye" (Duncan 239). Instead of considering the land itself, it is perhaps more relevant to observe the

way that the landscape is represented or mediated through the perspective and responses of individuals within it, which can perhaps account for the alternative perspective Rose seeks to represent.

In order to perform critical work with the concept of landscape, Duncan and Duncan suggest thinking of landscape as a text. This metaphor makes the landscape “readable,” so to speak. Drawing from literary theorists such as Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, geographers have approached landscape as a kind of discourse, which in turn can be understood as “a systematic set of statements (written or verbal), or, more generally, of signs (the implicit and explicit messages in any type of text)” (Mitchell 142). Characteristics and representations of landscape are readable and can be contextualized within a wider framework. Don Mitchell explains that, “a ‘discursive formation’ is the regularized, organized, routinized system of signs that exists in any particular time or place,” and discursive analysis facilitates the mapping of these formations (signs and symbols) (142). By “reading” signs and meanings of the landscape, we can learn about the cultural values that established such formations, as well as the ways in which these values can be undermined.

I turn now to examples of mobility and visibility in *All But the Waltz* and *Breaking Clean* as demonstrative of discursive formations in order to understand how aspects of the Myth of the West became refracted in the lives of women in rural Western America. By mapping Blew’s and Blunt’s access or denial of access and senses of place that gave the landscape meaning, I seek to expose gender inequalities which structure the cultural landscapes in which Blew and Blunt lived.

Mobility is one way in which the experience of cultural landscape can be made visible as a discursive formation in *All But the Waltz* and *Breaking Clean*, can be analyzed, and thus

demonstrates cultural values inherited from the image of the West codified by Turner. By mobility I mean the various spaces and places which Blew and Blunt are allowed to occupy, both literally and figuratively. This access changes over time, and becomes more limited as the women grow from childhood into adulthood, a shift that also encodes their bodies as feminine in a masculinist culture. Adolescence is a significant turning point for both women, as they come to terms with their gendered bodies. As grown women, when they've become wives and mothers, Blew and Blunt feel frustrated by their gender roles and their perceived lack of mobility. Perhaps in contrast to that sense of restriction and containment, both women remember fondly and generously the perceived freedom of mobility they enjoyed as children. In the present section, I will consider Blew's and Blunt's changing level of mobility as they grow up in these landscapes.

Tacitly or not, space around the homestead and family farm was deeply coded according to gender. As briefly mentioned in the previous section, the house itself and the domestic sphere it encompassed was a traditionally feminine space, as such domestic work was similarly coded feminine. And while Blew and Blunt remember their mothers as doyennes of this space, historians Susan Armitage and Glenda Riley attest to the fact that women, their spaces, and their work has been largely omitted (until recent years) from historical accounts of the American West and so these spaces are marked by silence and invisibility. In contrast, the physical space surrounding the home is characterized by the presence of men. The barn and fields beyond the kitchen garden of the homestead is where the rancher, the cowboy, and the hired men perform their work. Such space *is* the frontier and has been thoroughly historicized and mythologized. Beyond the home is a highly visible and public masculine space. Access and performance in these spaces was generally regulated according to gender. Women's roles focused on running

and maintaining the domestic space, while men were meant to keep the outdoor spaces in working order.

Blew's and Blunt's recollections of childhood indicate that prior to adolescence, they are more free from gender roles than they feel themselves to be as adults. It is possible to see a correlation between gender roles and the responsibilities that come with adulthood, so that childhood appears more idyllic in comparison. While a strict comparison between the experience of gender as a child and as an adult is not a perfect one, it is important for the purpose of this project to consider how Blew and Blunt perceive and depict their childhood with respect to gender because such a consideration offers insight into their rebellion from gender norms later in life.

Childhood for Blew and Blunt is characterized by a strong desire to occupy masculine spaces and perform men's work; prior to adolescence each woman is able, to a degree, to do so. Mobility and access to the outdoors, particularly on horseback, figures prominently in childhood memories as an illustration of freedom from domestic space and work. For Blew, seeking masculine-coded spaces was an attempt to fulfill her role as her "father's son," and for Blunt it was an attempt to elude relegation to the perceived inferior position of woman.

Blew is one of three daughters to her father Jack Hogeland. "Perhaps because he had no son, he raised his daughters as though we were boys," and as the eldest, Blew received the bulk of such training (49). As a child, Blew was not resistant, though. Instead, she was pleased to have access to her father's space, as well as to be able to contribute to the work being done on the ranch: "He started working cattle with me when I was seven. I knew less about it than the dog did. 'Ride over across that coulee and haze down that old roan-faced cow with her calf,' he might order as we rode, just as he would order Joe Murray" (Blew 49-50). In this passage, Blew

receives training to perform her father's work of raising cattle and her father treats her as he would a grown man.

For Blew, what is most valuable to her about this experience is that she is granted access to her father's work, and treated to stories of his former glory. The work he does and his past experiences fit perfectly with the image of a cowboy propagated by the Myth of the West. Blew helps with that work, and is treated to songs, lessons about roping, and stories of her father's rodeo years as they ride together: "My heart pounded to think of my father with a contestant's number pinned to the back of his shirt, riding in front of a grandstand while the roar went up..." (Blew 51). She is enthralled by his glamour, and feels special to have been allowed to work with him; Blew buys into the Myth, and her positive experience leaves it unproblematized.

As a child Blunt also has the freedom to subvert gender roles, although she does so in imaginative space, arranging for herself to occupy a preferential position:

I reached for the role of the gunslinging marshal. If the twins and I played house after our baby days, we played wagon train, trekking cross-country to the stockyard and building a little soddy out of bales. [...] When we played people, we played men at war: cowboys and Indians, cattle ranchers and shepherders, sheriff and bad guys. We rescued womenfolk regularly, roles we saved for the battered baby dolls, but even a forked stick with a rag dress could wring its hands in a pinch. (Blunt 90)

Like Blew, Blunt was drawn to the heroics and action of men's adventures. Blunt and her siblings engaged in childhood games that embodied the privilege they saw as belonging to the adult men of their community. Even in child's play, women are denigrated; their stereotypical roles fulfilled by inanimate objects. The children have no interest in occupying women's roles because doing so means being a passive character, one who could not act on her own accord and

was essentially immobile without the aid of the “men.” With children’s innocence, Blunt and her siblings enact the hierarchy inherent in a masculinist culture and effectively reinforce the subjugation of women. The children enact the cultural landscape of their community.

As Blunt moves closer to adolescence and adulthood, mobility becomes increasingly symbolic (perhaps nostalgically) of her childhood freedoms, which starkly contrasts what lies ahead for her as a woman. In her last summer before high school and the first summer of her menstruation, Blunt clings to the freedom of childhood as she nears a more definitive gender encoding of her body:

Summer vacation stretched behind us, weeks we lived horseback and out of yelling distance from the house [...] Walking with forced casualness toward the barn, we marked the milestones by increasing our speed. Past the front gate, the clothesline, the chicken house, alert for the slam of the screen door and a voice rising in the heat behind us. Out of sight but still in yelling distance, we raced through the barn grabbing bridles and a bucket of oats, then out the wide rolling door to the horse pasture, to freedom. (142)

Blunt and her younger sister Gail escape into the hills beyond their property after morning chores are done, with their mother still at home. Doing so, the girls flee domestic work and seek the outdoors, a space that is associated with freedom but off-limits to women. Tellingly, though, Blunt associates this freedom directly with childhood as she compulsively seeks the sensation of being horseback in the face of her physical and social progression towards womanhood. After this summer Blunt is never afforded the same mobility again.

These brief examples are significant for two reasons. The first is that Blew and Blunt, as adult writers, depict a nostalgic view of freedom and mobility in their childhood. Secondly, that with this freedom, both women sought out masculine spaces. For both women, there is a

presumption that male space and male roles as preferential, which is a received cultural message. Blew feels privileged to be admitted into her father's space and participate in his personal myth. Blunt values the freedom her mobility grants her, which she sees as terminating with the advent of her physical maturity. Each woman associates positive emotional responses with these spaces, which in turn conveys the internalization of mythic characteristics of the American West's physical and cultural landscape.

James and Nancy Duncan explain that, "Cultural landscapes play a central role in the practices and performances of place-based social identities, community values and social distinction" (237). I have attempted to demonstrate that the particular historical and geographical contexts of these communities at a regional level came to define local cultural landscapes. From Blew's and Blunt's experiences, we can see a social distinction being made between male and female gendered bodies and work, we can also observe the stirrings of awareness that the community values masculine- more than feminine-coded work or attributes. As Blew's and Blunt's childhood observations indicate, the cultural landscape of their communities is structured by an underlying masculinist ideology. As children, Blew and Blunt are still forming social identities, and since they are not strictly bound by gender distinctions they have not yet arrived as an understanding of themselves as less valuable and less mobile members of their communities because of their gender. Identifying such biases in the landscape is important as we begin to recognize landscape as a crucial contributor to the development of identity. This link is explained by Gillian Rose in the essay "Place and Identity":

Identity is how we make sense of ourselves, and geographers, anthropologists and sociologists, among others, have argued that the meanings given to a place may be so strong that they become a central part of the identity of the people experiencing them.

[...] [Identity] refers to lived experiences and all the subjective feelings associated with everyday consciousness, but it also suggests that such experiences and feelings are embedded in wider sets of social relations. (88)

Blew and Blunt are both deeply connected to the landscape of their youth, not only in their childhood adherence to its cultural values, but also in the happiness and freedom each woman derives from her participation in the physical landscape. The places of their youth have indeed become central to their identities. As both women's development of identity is hampered by her identification with the landscape, this bond is tested. Blunt's fears and resistance to growing up forecast both the impeding gender coding and irreconcilability of individual identity and cultural values. In the next section, I will discuss examples of Blew and Blunt as adult women in which each continues to seek mobility by transgressing the landscape of her more defined gender role.

2.6 Theorizing Gender and Space

The cultures described by Blew and Blunt in their memoirs that are associated with ranching communities of Fergus and Philips Counties, Montana respectively, are depicted as patriarchal and masculinist. Blew and Blunt each depicts a culture in which gender roles are strictly enforced, and in which attributes and space coded as masculine are valorized. Within this culture, moreover, women's performance of gender was limited to a few sanctioned stereotypes of Woman that conformed to the narrative of the American West as briefly mentioned in the previous sections. A woman could be a wife and mother, a schoolmarm, a prostitute, or, less frequently, a rancher herself and often this role was occupied only out of necessity. Such stereotypes deprived women of their subjectivity by requiring them to conform to two-

dimensional images that upheld certain values of the Myth of the West. In this way, the ideology underpinning the American West denies female self-determination.

Blew and Blunt each recognized in themselves and in other adult women in their communities attributes that both challenged and complicated the roles designated for them in these places. The roles these women were assigned did not express their individuality nor were they fulfilling in terms of the work performed or its perceived cultural value. Blew and Blunt illustrate the existence of women as complex and plural human beings in defiance of cultural imposition of a universalizing image of Woman.

The project of dividing Woman from women, of de-essentializing feminine identity, and of giving individual women the ability to self-define has been undertaken by several feminist theorists in the past few decades. Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis are two such theorists whose works seek to differentiate gender and identity in service of asserting a subjective feminine position.

Judith Butler's work on gender performativity in texts such as *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* revolutionized the way we understand the link between gender and identity. In the essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," Butler suggests that the characteristics we designate as male or female are based on a binary construction of gender that does not reflect inherent attributes of the physical body, but rather are socially constructed traits solidified through repetition over time. Thus an individual *is* not a man or a woman, but performs in ways that have been culturally assigned male or female. Butler makes an analogy between the discrete but consistent acts that create gender and the notion of theatrical performances, hence the term performativity (155). However, performativity is different from a theatrical performance in that performativity refers to actions performed unconsciously that have been sedimented over

time so as to become naturalized as gender. Butler's theory is significant for its rejection of biological determinism and the assertion of gender as a social construct.

The premise of Butler's theory substantiates inklings both Blew and Blunt felt as young women: that their female biology did not account for the complexity of their identities. Both women were confused and angered by the restrictions imposed on them because of their gender, and recognized that their internal senses of self did not match culturally prescribed female identities. As described in the previous section, although Blew and Blunt were not overtly coded as female from a young age both women became aware of a disjoint between the role of women they witnessed in the adults around them and their own respective capacities and desires to occupy such a role. As an adolescent, Blunt attempts to make sense of performativity from a child's perspective:

By the time I hit twelve a couple of years later, I had given up questioning why it was different to be a girl and fought to separate the biological fact of being female from the roles that went with the plumbing. I had no quarrel with the God-given facts. I was fascinated with babies and birth, curious about sex, in love with James Arness and the young Clint Eastwood. The roles went like this: Every rancher who stepped out the door scratching a full belly through a clean shirt had a partner who was willing to stay indoors and wash another load. (95)

Blunt makes a distinction that aligns with Butler's assertion that sex and gender are not causally related. The young Blunt experienced hormonal changes that are often associated with female physiology, such as an interest in children and heterosexual desire for boys, and she seems to accept this part of herself. However, she does not want to concede that staying indoors to cook and launder her husband's shirts should follow from biology in the same way.

Blew is first introduced to the concept of gender as a child when her mother comments on her physical development:

‘Mary’s getting a butt on her just like a girl,’ she remarked one night as I climbed out of the tub. Alarmed, I craned my neck to see what had changed about my eight-year-old buttocks.

‘Next thing, you’ll be mooning in the mirror and wanting to pluck your eyebrows like the rest of ‘em.,’ she said. [...]

I could not find a way through the contradiction. One the one hand, I was a boy (except that I also was a bookworm), and my chores were always in the barns and corrals, never the kitchen. *You don’t know how to cook on a wood stove?* my mother-in-law was to cry in disbelief. *And you grew up on a ranch?* (Blew 171)

Like Blunt, Blew subtly juxtaposes her childhood mobility and spatial fluidity with the assumptions of her as an adult woman in order to demonstrate the incongruity she feels between her internal sense of self and what she is expected to be. These two vignettes demonstrate the emotional, lived experience of what Butler theorized: that biological sex did not determine one’s internal identity, and that embodying “gender” is in fact an act of conforming to external social codes.

While understanding gender as a performance has allowed for the de-naturalizing of gender binaries and heteronormativity, the implications of Butler’s theory extend far beyond a discussion of gender alone⁴. The seismic effect of performance theory can be linked to a variety

⁴ Yet, there are problematic consequences of Butler’s theory, namely that all facets of identity are performative, which effectively denies subjects any agency in the creation and expression of identity. While this aspect of Butler’s theory is intriguing and raises important questions, for the purpose of the discussion at hand I am less interested in the issues surrounding the construction of gender and more concerned with the implications of the division between

of disciplines. Performativity frees the development of identity from its markers such as gender, race, sexual orientation, or class, many of which had previously been considered biologically determined. Thus Butler's theory enabled identity studies to engage in more comprehensive inquiries into how and why power structures construct and maintain identity markers. Another fruitful result of this theory has been increased critical attention to the ways in which individuals subvert their prescribed roles through transgressive performance.

Geography, too, has appropriated performativity as a methodology for understanding space on an intimate scale. In order to see how Butler's theory translates to a geographical analysis it must be acknowledged that performativity rests on an assumption of the materiality of the body:

The 'I' that is its body is, of necessity, a mode of embodying, and the 'what' that it embodies is possibilities. But here again the grammar of the formulation misleads, for the possibilities that are embodied are not fundamentally exterior or antecedent to the process of embodying itself. As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body *is* a historical situation [...] and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation. (Butler 156)

The term "possibilities" in this passage refers to the expressions of the "I" that make meaning or what the "I" can materially become. However, the expression of the "I" embodies its historical and cultural context, and can thus be limited by it. The embodiment of historical and cultural contexts allows the body to be theorized as a space, and thus expressible in geographical

gender and identity and the possibilities it opens up for the reconstruction of a female subject position.

discourse. Geographer Elin Diamond explains that, “When performativity materializes in that risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing (a reiteration of norms) and a thing done (discursive conventions that frame our interpretations), between someone’s body and the conventions of embodiment, we have access to cultural meanings and critique” (qtd. in Nash 661). The body is a site whose experience, mobility, and functions can be analyzed to illuminate the context in which it exists, and can help map a landscape by emphasizing boundaries and norms within it.

Nancy and James Duncan suggest that Butler’s work in performativity is a more consciously subjective and thus more egalitarian approach to interpreting landscapes. Performativity translates to landscape in that the discursive signs and symbols we look to in landscape to make meaning are enacted by the body, and thus become dislodged from stable meaning. Discursive formations take on new meanings in light of Butler’s theory: “Conventions are enacted through repeated bodily and discursive practices. These conventions appear natural and necessary, even though they take shape through such repeated performances. Repeated (albeit each time somewhat different) readings of cultural productions such as landscapes produce new realities” (Duncan 233). The physical body, then, through performance and performative acts creates new meanings from a given space, thus engendering new landscapes.

Tim Cresswell suggests that the most effective way to understand such landscapes is through a consideration of transgressive acts; his book *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* treats this very notion. Cresswell explains that when an act is seen as “out-of-place,” or when behavior defies social norms, the act calls attention to whatever “authority” regulates what is and is not appropriate in a particular context (8):

One way to illustrate the relations between place and behavior is to look at those behaviors that are judged as inappropriate in a particular location – literally as actions out of place. It is when such actions occur, I argue, that the everyday, commonsense relationships between place and behavior become obvious and underlined. The labeling of actions as inappropriate in the context of a particular place serves as evidence for the always already existing normative geography. (10)

Transgression serves to illuminate the ideology or hegemony that governs a particular place. In this text, Cresswell plays with a double meaning of the word “place”: by looking at acts that are judged as being figuratively “out of place,” we are able to draw conclusions about the literal place in which such transgressions occur. Thus Cresswell demonstrates how “geography and ideology intersect” (3).

Transgressive acts that defy expectations of gender roles have the potential to elucidate the assumptions of normative gender performance in the context of Blew’s and Blunt’s ranching communities, and will thus help to explain how the ideology of this place as described above is mapped onto the experience of adult women in it. The project here expands on the previous discussion of landscape, and shifts the focus from access to limitation. As Blew and Blunt become adults and gain more responsibility within their communities, the physical and cultural landscape accessible to them becomes sharply restricted and restrictive. The conversation has shifted, also, from a discussion of the external factors creating landscape to the internal reaction to it.

In the next section, I will explore examples of transgressive performances of landscape by Blew and Blunt as a mode of resistance with the intention to subvert repressive cultural norms. Through performance acts that transgress cultural boundaries, Blew and Blunt at once

call attention to the landscape structured by such boundaries and enact new meanings within it. As I will demonstrate, although executed in different ways, the following examples depict women who wish to resist “vanishing into the station of woman, wife and mother,” while remaining in their communities (Blunt 147). These acts challenge the masculinist ideology at work in these communities, and ultimately serve to destabilize the hegemony of these places.

2.7 Transgressive Performativity

By the time Mary Clearman Blew was a young woman, it was not uncommon for women to attend university even in rural Montana, but generally higher education was only acceptable as long as it led to a career that fit within the confines of prescribed gender roles. Blew’s mother, two aunts, and maternal grandmother had all attended two-year schools and attained teaching certifications. Being a teacher required a skill set uncannily similar to that of a wife and mother, including childcare, upkeep of the schoolhouse, and instilling behavioral norms in pupils. Moreover, it was generally understood that women only worked as teachers as a means to finding a husband or as an alternative to marriage. If a woman was not married with children, it was acceptable for her to be a spinster teacher, which in turn afforded her a small degree of mobility otherwise unattainable for single women in this culture. Teaching and the pursuit of education to become a teacher conformed to accepted behaviors for women in Fergus County. This behavior also mandated the categorization of women into an approved gender stereotype: the schoolmarm.

For young women in this place, to teach was to perform gender well. Yet, this performance came with constraints: only unmarried women could teach, and only as a means to an end. Blew’s maternal grandmother Mary Welch and her mother’s sisters Imogene and Sylva

tacitly accepted that teaching was a natural career path for women, but each performed the role in manner that subtly subverts the restrictions of that occupation in this place. Mary taught as a married woman with several children in order to alleviate financial strain, leaving her husband alone to “batch” on the family ranch. Sylva and Imogene left Montana to pursue opportunities elsewhere, and were thus no longer subject to the same constraints as women who remained in the Montana community. Within Blew’s familial culture education is highly valued for the economic stability it afforded the Welch women. But the ready acceptance of education also opened a space for Blew to enact her own subversions.

Pursuing a college degree for the love of education and self-fulfillment is an act through which Blew transgresses the boundaries of gender established by her community. Blew sees in education the possibility for self-determination and self-definition. Blew seeks to invent her self in the pattern of the strong women that came before her, but in a mold of her own:

So I’ve been accepting my grandmother’s money under false pretenses. I’m not going to spend my life teaching around Fergus County the way she did, the way my mother would have if she hadn’t married my father. I’ve married my husband under false pretenses, too [...] But, subversive as a foundling in a fairy tale, I have tried to explain none of my new aspirations to my mother or grandmother or, least of all, my husband and his parents, who are mightily distressed as it is by my borrowing money for my own education. (Blew 165)

In the passage above, Blew acknowledges that her actions were founded on a subversive impetus. Blew’s newfound objective to complete four years of college and perhaps to become a higher education instructor, exceeded the role that was previously demarcated for her. Education should only be in service of financial stability but as a married woman studying for her own

gains, Blew deliberately engaged in behavior that she knew challenged cultural norms, defying the role assigned to her as a wife in this community.

At the heart of this conflict is more than financial stability or career options. For Blew, defying her gender role in this manner was an attempt to self-define: at stake is "...the question of teaching certificate over quest for identity, the importance of my husband's future over mine, the relentless struggle with the in-laws over what is most mine, my self" (166). To stay within the acceptable bounds of her gender role and to continue to participate in the performativity of her gender as defined in this culture, would mean denying the self. And yet, all of this conflict comes into even more stark relief in Blew's most open act of defiance: the continued pursuit of education despite becoming pregnant and giving birth to her first child.

At eighteen, only two months after getting married, Blew finds herself pregnant. In this respect, her performance is in keeping with expectations of her as an adult woman. Yet Blew has no intentions of succumbing to the role. "'Well!!!' My mother-in-law's voice carols over the miles. 'I guess this is finally the end of college for you!'" (Blew 164). Such responses demonstrate how Blew's choice to continue in her schoolwork was transgressive. Cultural norms dictated that Blew should give up school, stay home with the baby, and have more children, all while her husband finished his own education.

Despite pressure from members of her community, such as her in-laws, Blew refuses to give up her transgressive aspirations. Blew's position is at odds with her community and her family. At some point, for Blew, the conflict shifts to a choice between her son's future and her own:

Basically, she has two choices.

One, she can invest all her hopes for her own future in this sleeping scrap. *Son, it was always my dream to climb to the stars. Now the tears of joy spring at the sight of you with your college diploma...*

Even at eighteen, this lilylicking is enough to make her sick.

Or two, she can abandon the baby and the husband and become really successful and really evil. This is the more attractive version of the plot, but she doesn't really believe in it. Nobody she knows has tried it. It seems as out of reach from ordinary daylight Montana as Joan Crawford or the Duchess of Windsor or the moon [...]

What then? What choice is left to her? (Blew 177-8)

The first of two options Blew lays out for herself is consistent with culturally defined expectations of her as a woman, mother, and wife. The second option is characteristic of a transgressive performance act that would vilify her and necessitate her complete departure from the community. Blew was torn between her right to pursue an independent identity and attain a college degree or fulfilling the role ascribed to her by her culture and community. She does not want to have to choose between her own education and that of her male family members. Blew decided to remain in school; choosing to pursue education even after having a child was Blew's transgressive performance that subverted limitations of her role as a woman in this place.

If she had maintained the role ascribed to her by giving up her education in order to support her husband and son, Blew would have embodied the cultural valorization of men's roles. Doing so would have also undermined her belief that women were equally entitled to education as men and equally entitled to seek out an individual identity. Choosing education over familial obligations demonstrates Blew's unwillingness to accept the cultural value that women must be defined by their identity as a wife or a mother.

The conflicts that arose between Blew and her family demonstrate how Blew's choice renders her out of place. The assumption was that as a married woman with a baby, she has no need of an education and should not pursue a career as a teacher because there was no reason to do so. Women were not overtly denied access to education, but educating women was done under the assumption that the end result would fit neatly into a certain type of feminine role, like a schoolmarm, as a way to pass time before meeting a husband, or in extreme cases as a last resort to maintain financial solvency. These parameters leave no room for Blew to express her desires as a person distinct from the expectations of her gender role.

Instead Blew chose to pursue education because it was an expression of her internal desire to know and inquire; Blew's transgressive act is merely an expression of self. Through her performance acts – expressing dissatisfaction with her pregnancy and continuing to attend classes after the birth of her son – Blew asserts herself as an individual divorced from her gender role. Doing so raises the ire of her community, indicating that for a woman to act on her own behalf and to not put the goals of the men in her life before her own is designated as “bad behavior.” In this example, Blew's transgression calls attention to the norms of her cultural landscape, specifically demonstrated by her mother-in-law. But Blew's transgressive act serves to shift the cultural landscape because her act redefined the role ascribed to women, thus challenging what it meant to be a woman in this landscape.

Blunt's transgressive performance acts call attention to the omission of women from the landscape of the West. Unlike Blew whose model of women were those who chose a gendered career path, Blunt observes women who transcend the space of the home in order to work in male-dominated areas like the barn or the fields. Growing up nearly two decades after Blew, Blunt's image of women perhaps reflects changing economics and social mores. However, Blunt's dissatisfaction with women's

roles is not a matter of mobility. Instead Blunt is frustrated by the lack of recognition women received for their work in these spaces. Even when performing valorized, masculine-coded tasks, women's contributions are not valued in the same way as men's contributions. Blunt's own performative transgressions make visible women's contributions so as to be recognized and valued in the community. In order to understand Blunt's transgression, we must look at the model of women against which Blunt resisted.

The image of women Blunt grew up with was by no means weak or ineffectual, but was an image that garnered no public acknowledgement of worth; a woman's role in the community was not valued, and Blunt had no desire to occupy such a position. "The roles went like this: Every rancher who stepped out the door scratching a full belly through a clean shirt had a partner who was willing to stay indoors and wash another load. 'Someone to make the mess, and someone to clean it up,' as my mother put it" (Blunt 95). A woman's proper place in this community is ostensibly in the home, her chores being spatially centered around the home: cooking, cleaning, child rearing, and occasionally maintaining a kitchen garden. Behaviorally a woman's place is positioned silently next to or behind her husband, supporting him regardless of his shortcomings.

Blunt's childhood impression of her mother is one of a staunch, strict, and constantly preoccupied woman. Yet in her authorial reflections, Blunt is sensitive to the complexities of her mother's role in the family and in the wider ranching culture. As an adult, Blunt sees in her mother an ideal example of how to belong to this community as a woman while maintaining a sense of self-worth outside that gender role. Blunt groups her mother in with other women in her culture who seemed to exhibit a sense of identity but were still acceptable within the bounds of the culture:

I grew up admiring a community of women whose strength and capacity for work I have yet to

see equaled, true partners in the labor of farming and ranching. Where the occasional man fell short, whether drunken and reckless or merely selfish and careless, his wife maneuvered carefully to make up the deficit. [...] In public she held steadfastly to the role of silent partner. I saw this quiet endurance as a choice women made, one that made them secretly superior. Men did not drop what they were doing to tend to women's work, nor did anyone imagine they might. Only women did it all. (153-4)

In this passage, Blunt indicates that women's capacity to "do it all" is the most admirable way of occupying their roles in community. Blunt sees a successful renegotiation of women's roles in the "quiet endurance" of a woman compensating for her errant husband.

Even though the women Blunt admired were able and entitled by deed and ownership to exert influence in the workings of their ranch, to do so openly would mean stepping out of their places and therefore committing a reprehensible transgression. The community would have been disturbed by this transgression because it disrupted a strict division of labor, chores, and responsibility. Blunt's observation that "to be accused of 'wearing the pants' remained the worst form of insult" speaks to this point (153). Women are actually performing acts that fall outside their demarcated gender role, but do so silently and invisibly. Blunt admires in equal measure the capacity of women to do both women's and men's work, as well as their ability to do so without needing recognition.

In these women and in her mother Blunt sees a manageable and realistic way of occupying the role assigned to her without compromising the things she holds dear, mobility and a share of the pride that comes with performing community-valued work. Still, this model does not completely diminish her resistance to the role. Blunt describes her transition into womanhood as a process filled with dread, fear, resistance, and rage. She envisions the prospect of becoming a grown woman as akin to death: "At thirteen I stood where the world I knew ended, imagining no future beyond my ordained leap into the

abyss at my toe tips, vanishing into the station of woman, wife and mother...” (Blunt 146-7). She sees the role marked for her as a woman taking precedence over her sense of individual identity. However, it is not until her own marriage that this becomes truly problematic for Blunt.

Blunt falls into the station of woman and wife at the age of eighteen when marriage initiates her as an adult member of the community. Similar to Blew, Blunt finds herself as a young bride who is expected to perform her gender role according to certain rules and regulations dictated by her cultural landscape. Marriage did not provide the sense of belonging Blunt sought from childhood nor the negotiation of women’s place that she admired in her mother and other adult women. She imagined a marriage partnership to be “an arrangement that often rewarded a woman’s strength and independence” (Blunt 231). However Blunt married into a very different situation, perhaps symptomatic of a changing economy and a new industrial age in agriculture.

From the outset Blunt’s role as a ranch wife on her husband John’s property was characterized by a series of battles between Blunt, who was trying to establish a comfortable place for herself in a new location, and her husband, in-laws, and hired men who maintained order the way they know how, according to “an ancient patriarchal model [...] the father and son became the president and vice president, Mom was named secretary, and all generations worked for the common good of the ranch” (Blunt 230). The implications of this system were such that instead of a ranch co-owner like her mother, Blunt became the daughter-in-law of a ranching corporation. This distinction meant that no matter how hard she worked or how much she invested personally into her husband’s ranch operations, she “would never own a square foot of land, a bushel of oats or a bum calf in [her] own name” (Blunt 291). As such, she was forever

confined to the role of wife and mother, chained to the home space and denied ownership or rights to the land she worked.

After some initial confrontations with her in-laws as she figured out the rules that governed this place, Blunt settled into her new house and her new role. Having spent time riding her horse around the property, she even began to fall in love with the landscape of her new home. Yet she never completely settled into the role assigned to her, and she continued to chafe against the restrictions placed on her. Blunt resisted confinement in a variety of ways: by asserting her dominance over her new home despite intrusions by her mother-in-law, by smoking surreptitiously despite being forbidden by her father-in-law, and by helping out in the barn whenever possible. The roles on the ranch went something like this: “Where the hired men were concerned, John played the ‘good cop’ role to Frank’s ‘bad cop,’ and could generally keep everybody working happily, as long as I didn’t jump in and piss someone off. It was a basic rule: wives didn’t give orders” (Blunt 283). Blunt would not play this role, however: “It wasn’t that I didn’t get it. I flat refused to” (283). Her lack of complicity was not a matter of misunderstanding, as her husband was wont to assume; it was a matter of refusing to give up her self-determination. Blunt would not conform to the expectations placed on her out of principle, and because doing so would mean wasting a set of skills honed throughout her life.

Assisting with calving is one example of Blunt’s transgressive behavior that was found particularly abhorrent by her husband, John, and father-in-law, Frank, and which best demonstrates the conflict over visibility surrounding Blunt’s role as a ranch wife in this place. Blunt was affronted by the manner in which the men on the ranch handle the birth of calves. “Most ranchers I knew pulled calves in the early stages of labor rather than lose sleep or waste daylight. They treated birth like a disease that was cured by quick action” (Blunt 283).

Conversely Blunt “had this theory of birth as a natural process that worked best at nature’s own speed,” informed by her own experience calving in the past and giving birth herself (284).

Although her husband did not stop Blunt from helping in the barn, her father-in-law was another story: “The sight of me with a cow brought him loping across the barnyard. It made him crazy. Had I followed a common ranch wife custom, I would have checked the heifers and fetched the men immediately if I found one calving” (Blunt 282). Frank’s objection to Blunt’s hands-on assistance with the heifers is antithetical to his conception of what a ranch wife does, but more closely follows the model of a ranch wife that Blunt grew up with.

Like Frank, for the hired men a woman in the calving shed was neither common nor acceptable. On one occasion, Blunt attempts to assist calving alongside the hired men. Having brought heifers into the barn for observation before they were ready to give birth, Blunt returns to the house briefly, and then comes back to the barn to find that one of the men had calved too early, resulting in the cow’s prolapsed uterus. She chastised him, but that was not the end of the episode: “...when he complained that I had ‘spoken up’ to him, I got no support beyond another worn lecture about trying to boss the hired men. ‘You might be dead right, but they’re not going to take orders from you,’ John reminded me for possibly the tenth time. His voiced matched the sag of his shoulders, forever the mediator, and hating it” (Blunt 283). This passage conveys what is at the heart of Blunt’s objections to the role designated for her by this new community: she must remain invisible.

Blunt’s husband was permissive about her forays into the barn because “free help is free help,” but it is also worth noting that his permissiveness only existed within the context of their intimate and private relationship. John was on her side when they were alone, and supported her self-determination to an extent. But in front of hired men or his own father John was much less

accommodating of his wife's transgressions. The difference was a matter of visibility. Blunt was able to express herself with more freedom when that self-expression was contained, only visible in private, feminine-coded spaces such as the house or her bedroom, where many of these conversations took place. Though, when Blunt attempted to publicly expand her role as ranch wife outside in the barnyard or in front of others, she became visible to the wider community, thus transgressing her role and earning rebuke. She was allowed to transgress as long as such challenges take place privately, hidden from the public.

Until she was a wife and mother herself, Blunt never questioned the visibility of women's work. As a child and young woman, Blunt admired the silent strength of the adult women around her. She romanticized their ability to "do it all" and to maintain unwavering adherence to their husbands without questioning the sacrifices made by those women. Having one's name on the ranch deed was one form of visibility and offered at least a modicum of control and acknowledgement in the workings of the ranch. Blunt's community tolerated this kind of private visibility. Physically helping in the barn, though, was another story. As a wife herself, Blunt finds extremely dissatisfying the fact that her contributions were eclipsed by those of her husband. The admonishments Blunt faced were targeted at her making visible the work women do outside the home. Her transgressive acts were exactly that, transgressive, because these acts made visible what Blunt always knew women to do, albeit invisibly.

Even though Blunt was granted relative freedom in private, this was not freedom at all, and eventually the restrictions placed on her became too much to bear. Like Blew, the heart Blunt's resistance is a fight over the right to self-define and express oneself freely and the right to assert agency in a place where women are traditionally denied such ability. After more than a

decade, also like Blew, Blunt left her marriage and community in search of a space and place in which she could exercise totally mobility and autonomy.

As Cresswell explained, these transgressive acts illustrate normative behaviors of a certain place, so that from the examples above facilitate a better sense of where the demarcation lies between acceptable and unacceptable behavior of women according to the masculinist landscape of the West. The cultural landscape, informed by Turner's mythos and described by these women, is shown to be limiting and oppressive. Blew and Blunt were both confronted by members of their communities who wanted to contain them, fit them into a mold of what a woman "should" be that would conform to the cultural landscape. Both women undertook transgressive performative acts in hopes of creating new roles and new places for themselves within their communities. As Butler describes, repetition solidifies and normalizes a performance so it becomes performativity rather than individual acts. However, Blew's and Blunt's self-identified roles never ceased to be understood as transgressive by their communities. As such the women were never able to "belong" or feel "in place" as adult women in the geography and culture of their childhoods, resulting in their respective departures from these oppressive landscapes.

Theories of landscape reveal that ranching communities of the American West were not uncontested spaces, and structured by highly masculinist ideologies. Blew and Blunt chafe in the roles designated for them by their landscape, and so enacted an alternative landscape through transgressive performances, which opened up the possibility for a more comprehensive acknowledgement of people who did not conform to the long-standing imagined geography of the West.

While both Blew and Blunt admired women in their communities who challenged gender roles in subtle ways, these foremothers did not go far enough to assert themselves as self-determining feminine subjects. Blew's grandmother and aunts may have achieved a level of autonomy and mobility unusual for women at their time and in their region, but were only able to do this by fashioning themselves after a gendered stereotype accepted within their community, that of the rural schoolmarm. When Blew attempted to build on this mode in order to fulfill personal goals, she was rebuffed by her community and encouraged to give up her goals in favor of her husband's and son's needs and desires.

The women in Blunt's community were admirable for their ability to perform men's work as well as women's work and to move fluidly between that boundary. However, this fluidity is performed invisibly; there is no public acknowledgement of women's contributions to the success of her husband's farm or ranch. Blunt's attempt to make this visible, to put into practice skills she had mastered from childhood, exposed her to admonishments from her community as well. Although she possessed skills and knowledge valuable to the success of a ranch, as a woman she could neither contribute visibly to the workings of her husband's ranch nor was she appreciated for her contributions. Each woman was made to either fit into a type or to remain invisible, both situations denied free self-expression or self-determination.

Each in her own way, Blew and Blunt attempted to transgress accepted gender roles in their communities while continuing to participate in those communities. Both women were met with resistance and efforts to replace them in their "proper" roles. Ultimately, however, neither woman was able to successfully negotiate a performance of self that was acceptable to their cultures. This mode of resistance was ineffectual to change the roles of women in this place, and neither Blew nor Blunt was able to change the culture that was actively working against her.

After several years of struggling to find a way to belong that was both personally satisfying and acceptable to the community without success, both women chose to leave their marriages, their communities, and the landscapes of their youth and young adulthood in pursuit of a place to feel “in-place.”

The examples of Blew and Blunt’s transgressions highlights their attempts to assert a self-determined identity as well as an attempt to redefine women’s roles overall within their communities. The challenges each met in this endeavor illustrate the limitations of transgressive performance acts in that, ultimately, these acts are still subject to external factors such as hegemony. Such performances do not engender a place or space in which women have complete self-determination and agency over the self. In the next section I will explore the possibility that this space exists literally in the text.

3.0 Chapter Two: Place and Identity: Rewriting to Reinscribe

3.1 Interstice

The first chapter of this thesis dealt with the identity of a place and how historical and geographical contexts align to create a physical and cultural landscape. The terms space and place were used in keeping with an understanding of place as a location imbued with meaning, and space as what exists between places. In some respects, one might call this a material or external construction of the notions of space and place, as they refer to physical location.

Throughout the second chapter, space and place take on different connotations. Specifically, I am drawing on Yi-Fu Tuan and humanist geography's focus on individual, emotional experiences of space and place. The first chapter considered how culture can shape the landscape one inhabits, now I will look to internal effects of cultural contexts. Space and place in this section are more descriptive of the perception of one's position in a cultural context. For example, "I felt out of place," or "It was not her place to say that," are phrases which describe feelings or emotional responses to the relational position of one person to another or of an individual within a community.

In shifting the focus and terminology of this discussion, I turn from an external spatial analysis to an analysis of internal spatial experience. Rather than being a binary, though, this shift is an organic progression. As demonstrated in the first chapter, external contexts can inform culture, which can in turn influence the development of identity; therefore individual perception of culture is rooted in place. The conception of place as a position and space as an opening for the creation of a new position guides the present discussion. I am looking at the experience of two women living in particular locations and the negotiations of space and place undertaken to reposition themselves within their cultures.

3.2 Feminine Subjectivity

In the essay “The Technology of Gender,” Teresa de Lauretis’ discussion begins from the position that gender is a constructed representation and not an intrinsic attribute. In this piece, de Lauretis primarily takes issue with the persistence of sexual difference as a premise for feminist theorists. She argues that theories of women’s experience that are based on sexual difference remain limited in two important ways. First, sexual difference presumes universal gender identity, and thus falls back into the trap of biological determinism that Butler worked so hard to get away from. Second, the discourse of sexual difference is part and parcel of masculinist epistemologies, and thus continues to contain feminism within the context of male-dominated ideologies (De Lauretis 2).

De Lauretis’ critique of feminist theories based on sexual difference is a starting point from which to find a methodology or theory that rectifies the limitations she sees in these theories. To do so, she calls for feminist theory to engage its “radical epistemological potential,” meaning to imagine a subject “not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted,” a subject whose gender identity derives from race, class, as well as sex (De Lauretis 2). De Lauretis calls this “the subject of feminism,” which she imagines exists “at the same time inside *and* outside the ideology of gender, and [is] conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision” (10). In order to defy the limitations of current theory, the feminine subject must exist simultaneously inside and outside of ideology and hegemony in a space de Lauretis calls “elsewhere” (25).

Neither Butler nor de Lauretis suggests that gender is irrelevant, but both women posit that the way we have historically thought about gender has limited the capacity to account for the “complex, contradictory” lived experiences of individual women. In each of their works, these

theorists identify ways in which current theories are unable to account for that lived experience. My purpose in outlining the projects of Butler and de Lauretis is to at once give us a common language with which to discuss the issue of identity in relation to gender, but also to illuminate the inheritance and the premises on which later feminist theorists build their own arguments and suggestions for filling this void, for enabling the reconstruction of self by women.

Feminist geographer Gillian Rose takes up where Butler and de Lauretis leave off, bringing the discussion of gender into the realm of the spatial. Rose's influential text *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* demonstrates the historical disregard of women by her discipline. Similar in aim to Butler and de Lauretis, Rose's text delineates the limitations of geographical epistemology to account for the experience of women. Rose also identifies biological determinism and binary gender as hindrances to a genuine representation of women by women in her field.

The book concludes with a chapter entitled "The Politics of Paradoxical Space" in which Rose offers a methodology for engaging de Lauretis' subject of feminism in practice. Specifically, Rose focuses on heterogeneity and self-representation of the female subject as challenges to masculinism and as loci for her own methodology of feminist resistance. As a geographer, Rose is able to put into spatialized, material experience de Lauretis' notion of "elsewhere." Rose calls this "paradoxical space," which is a position characterized by oscillation between two positions or a simultaneous occupation of them, such as inside and outside. While de Lauretis' theory stops short at the abstract assertion of "elsewhere," Rose perceives this "plurilocality" as a material experience that can be observed and analyzed, such as in her example of black maids working in white homes: "it is a location from which the credibility of the master subject can be undermined" (151, 152). The following passage provides several ways

that Rose sees the existence of paradoxical space as subversive to traditional geographical epistemology:

I have already suggested how some of the founding antinomies of Western geographical thought are negated by this feminist subjectivity: its embodiment which overcomes the distinction between mind and body; its refusal to distinguish between real and metaphorical space; its refusal to separate experience and emotion from the interpretation of places. All these threaten the polarities which structure dominant geographical imagination. They fragment the dead weight of masculinist space and rupture its exclusions. Above all, they allow for the possibility of a different kind of space through which difference is tolerated rather than erased. (155)

Here Rose has listed a series of ways in which the female experience of space deconstructs binaries previously thought of as true within geographical thought. Mind and body, real and metaphorical, and experience and place are all collapsed by the feminine subject so as to break down a hegemonic and exclusionary epistemology. "Elsewhere," then, provides a position from which the female subject can create a new geographical imagination or knowledge outside of these antinomies. An elsewhere space engages "the passage from sociality to subjectivity, from symbolic systems to individual perception, or from cultural representations to self-representation" which enables us and Rose to identify women acting as feminine subjects (19).

For Rose, paradoxical, elsewhere spaces open up the possibility of a new geographical imagination that acknowledges female subjectivities. This is in keeping with the project of her book: a reconsideration of how geography as a discipline theorizes and studies women. Although Rose is most interested in how de Laetis' theories can help to broaden the scope of

geographical knowledge, her notion of a paradoxical space and its use value in undermining masculinist epistemology is also applicable when considered on a smaller, more localized scale.

I posit that Mary Clearman Blew's and Judy Blunt's memoirs are examples of paradoxical space which engender a female subjectivity outside the masculinist hegemony derived from the mythos of the American West. These texts engender such a space by collapsing binaries that uphold masculinist epistemology, which in turn facilitates the creation of a self-determined female subject who exists simultaneously in and out of place. It is also possible and useful to think about the texts themselves as functioning on two levels spatially: first, there is the imagined geography created within the text as a narrative of a place; secondly, the act of writing establishes the text itself as space to theorize.

In another section of her text, *Feminism and Geography*, Rose emphasizes the importance of theorists' transparent positionality. In a discussion of time-geography, one methodology within the discipline which deals with spatial-temporal environments and their limitations, Rose presents one of her most significant critiques of geography as a discipline. Rose takes issue with the assumption of a neutral or universal subject as the producer of knowledge:

Their masculine consciousness peers into the world, denying its own positionality, mapping its spaces in the same manner in which Western white male bodies explored, recorded, surveyed an appropriated spaces from the sixteenth century onwards: from disembodied location free from sexual attack or racist violence. Space for them is everywhere; nowhere is too threatening or too different for them to go. (39)

In this tradition the masculine gaze has been universalized so that its perspective is understood as the only perspective, despite limited mobility inherent in alternate subject positions. By asserting itself as a universal point of view this position denies all other subject positions. As producers of

knowledge, or “Master Subjects” in Rose’s terminology, the epistemology used by geographers is based on a privileged position and a view that space is unproblematic. Rose explains that in this way, geographical epistemology denies the Other the ability to produce geographical knowledge. As stated above, the overarching projects of her text are to rectify that oversight, to attempt to find ways of enabling those in marginalized subject positions to create geographical knowledge, and to encourage her discipline to validate such knowledge.

One antidote to naturalizing or universalizing a white masculine subject, or Master Subject, is an attempt at conscious reflexivity⁵ by an author. Rose offers reflexivity as one trope humanist geographers used to counteract time-geographers’ universal perspective. Humanist geographers, as introduced earlier in this discussion, are concerned with an individual’s sense of place. The practice of reflexivity has served to abet the individuated experience of place that humanist geographers relied on as a source of knowledge: “No wonder then that the point of humanistic geographers’ reflexivity was not to contextualize and limit their claims to knowledge, but to strengthen their claims to truth. The effect of self-reflection undertaken by humanist geography was to increase the unmarked authority of the geographer’s account” (Rose 50). Rose critiques humanist geographers for continuing to use reflexivity to accomplish precisely what she found so disconcerting about time-geographers’ epistemology: to validate an “unmarked,” or universalized, subject position of the men who practiced human geography. Yet such misuse does not preclude a useful deployment of reflexivity. If not used in service of universalizing an author’s experience, self-reflection can “function to contextualize [one’s] knowledge,” thus productively explicating the author’s unique subjectivity (Rose 49).

⁵ In this context reflexivity means the inclusion of the author and her assumptions in her engagement with the world.

It is this latter employment of reflexivity that Blew and Blunt engage in from the outset of their texts. Both women are transparent about their positions, agendas, and the sources of their knowledge. In doing so, neither woman attempts to strengthen her claim to truth, as Rose suggests humanist geographers did. Instead, these transparencies and acknowledgements of positionality provide a contextualization of the claims of experience that each author makes.

3.3 Becoming a Subject

Throughout *All But the Waltz*, Blew derives her knowledge from memory. Although other sources are integrated into the text, such as conversations with family members and letters from her great grandfather, memory functions as the primary epistemology and Blew's way of knowing the world around her. The text opens as Blew stands on the side of a highway, looking at a structure in the distance:

I know from experience that if I were to keep driving over the cattle guard and follow the gravel road through the sage and alkali to the log house, I would find the windows gone and the door sagging and the floor rotting away. But from here the house looks hardly changed from the summer of my earliest memories, the summer before I was three, when I lived in that log house on the lower Judith with my mother and father and grandmother and my grandmother's boyfriend, Bill. (3)

In this passage, knowledge derived from past experience trumps knowledge derived from sight. The house looks like it did decades earlier, but Blew *knows* that the building is barely standing because it is so in her memory. True, there is a matter of distance at work; standing across a field does not lend the same insights it does on closer inspection. Yet, the important part of this passage is that Blew trusts her memory to inform what she knows to be true. Such an

epistemology will persist throughout the text, but with some qualifications imposed by Blew herself.

The remainder of the first chapter is dedicated to a dim memory of Blew as a child riding in a truck with Bill and Grammy through stormy weather in search of a sow and her piglets, which were discovered stranded on a pinnacle in the overflowing Judith River. Upon mentioning the story to her father many years later, Blew is told that the story is not and never was real. She is rebuffed; despite the image being indelibly seared in her mind and having a sharp memory of her emotions at the time, Blew is confronted with the “verity” of the situation. Her father’s “logic settled on [her] like an awakening in ordinary daylight. Of course a sow could not lead nine or ten suckling pigs up those sheer fifteen-foot crumbling dirt sides...” (Blew 7). Blew uses the word “logic” to characterize her father’s epistemology. He knows the story is not true because factually the pigs never existed and would not have been able to end up in a situation like that which Blew remembers. For her father there is only one kind of truth and it is arrived at through reason and verifiability. Blew’s father’s logic is the logic of the Myth of the West, and the only validated logic of her cultural community.

As an adult, Blew comes to terms with the fact that her sow was a dream. Yet, Blew also comes to accept the reality of her story in a new sense: “What I remember is far less trustworthy than the story I tell about it. The possibility for connection lies in story. Whether or not I dreamed her, the sow in the river is my story. She is what I have saved, up there on her pinnacle where the river roils” (10-11). Honoring her dream as reality sets Blew apart from the world around her, literally and figuratively. She positions herself as an agent or Master Subject, capable of creating knowledge by valuing her own experiences. Moreover, Blew is forthright about her position and the particular epistemology she will employ throughout her text.

And still she qualifies her position by admitting that memory is not entirely trustworthy. Despite apparently believing in the primacy of memory as a way to know, Blew questions the reliability of memory as an episteme: “My memories seem to me as treacherous as the river. [...] How can I trust memory, which slips and wobbles and grinds its erratic furrows like a bald-tired truck fighting for traction on a wet gumbo road?” (4) Blew’s admission of the limitations inherent in memory solidifies the ambiguity of Blew’s knowledge: “As memory saves, discards, retrieves, fails to retrieve, its logic may well be analogous to the river’s inexorable search for the lowest ground. The trivial and the profound roil like leaves to the surface. Every ripple is suspect” (10). As a compromise or a solution to this unreliability, she converts memory into the more concrete representation of experience found in stories. The ephemerality and ambiguities of memory or dreams can be situated through narrative, which creates “a connection between outer and inner landscape” (9). Thus stories can make memories more “real,” to bring the subjective experience of place into context and conversation with the external reality of it. Stories reconcile Blew’s own epistemology of memory and the epistemology of the world around her.

Blew has not just given herself a way out or a justification for the inaccuracy of memory, but she has introduced a different way of knowing what is “true.” The emotional truth of her memories takes precedence over the factual verity of the events that she recounts. In many ways, Blew’s reflexivity is precisely what the humanist geographers presumed themselves to be doing: she contextualizes her source of knowledge in a very specific position and location. Blew’s text is an account of one woman’s experience in a particular place; inherent in this project is the subjective rendering of physical, intellectual and emotional responses to external factors. She does not suggest that her way of knowing positions her as an objective recorder, but rather the

opposite. Acknowledgement of the ambiguity and omissions of memory prevents Blew from making any claims to universality or exhaustive knowledge. She is firmly rooted in her own subject position from which she creates a way of knowing her place.

Instead of memory, per se, Blunt's text operates according to an epistemology of storytelling. Within the particular context of Blunt's family and the ranching community in which she lived as a child and young woman, stories helped to define the community through the creation of a collective narrative which became the cultural history of this place. Blunt recalls, "...the summer I was four I spoke my first good story and was born into my community, into the collective memory of my family, into a mythology that grew more real to me than fact" (219). For Blunt, the mythology born out of storytelling – however it colored or distorted reality – carried the weight of emotional truth. Thus, the epistemology in Blunt's particular community is based on stories deliberately crafted to reinforce a particular mythology. A storyteller may exert agency over the creation of knowledge by molding lived experiences into a narrative, but this agency is limited by an imposed and predetermined teleology.

Blunt first understands storytelling as way of creating communal knowledge and of reinforcing cultural mores:

Stories are the lessons of a year or a decade or a life broken into chunks you can swallow. But the heart of a story lies in the act of telling, the passing on. Listening to stories, I learned what was worth saying and what need not be spoken aloud; I learned how we remember and whom we remembered and why; how facts are shaped or colored or forgotten. (244)

Blunt imagines that stories have the power to connect spatially and temporally disparate events in a coherent narrative that makes those events meaningful. Blunt perceives, though, that

medium is more important than the message. In fact, Blunt's observation above might suggest that the medium *is* the message within her community; the act of storytelling creates a narrative as much as the content of the story does. The rhetorical decisions made by a storyteller, such as inclusions and omissions, are what actually make up the body of communal knowledge in Blunt's culture. Moreover, such decisions are decidedly not objective, and so the stories that unfurl are products of a subjective position. "In the telling, stories appear to unfold one event at a time. We master them like songs, listening for keys and common themes, learning the clear notes that best connect beginning to end. Stories are contrived. In real time, life is less a song than a competition of sounds..." (Blunt 178-9). The process of narrativizing reality shapes or colors the events that are recounted, often in a way that achieves particular ends, but this process is a self-conscious one for Blunt herself.

Eventually Blunt becomes disenchanted with the narrative formula that shapes her communal knowledge and identity:

Stories of the homesteaders were the stuff of my childhood. What they told were big storms, the births and deaths, the clever or outrageous or humorous. No one talked about what was important, the way they made it day-to-day, season-to-season. Did they, too, settle for small victories in the face of overwhelming odds? Were they happy? (244)

Homesteading is the historical origin of her community, the triumphs of those who survived and the tragedies of those who failed serve to underpin the values of the present community Blunt lives in. However, the content of this history is of a certain kind: only "major" events are recounted and passed down through the years. The events that shape this inherited narrative are selected because they conform to a model, a model which positions the storytellers as descendants of heroes who lived a series of epic events, as heirs to the Myth of the West.

Blunt notes that mundane and everyday events are omitted from these stories and thus from the collective knowledge of community. As such, as a new wife, Blunt realizes that such omissions have left her floundering: “If ‘ranch wife’ was a job, I’d spent my entire life in training, surely. But never had I felt more childlike and more alone than I had in these first months of being a ranch wife. It seemed I had learned nothing” (244). Collective memory in this place did not include the experiences of wives, thus the skills necessary to perform the job of ranch wife were not a part of Blunt’s own body of knowledge. Blunt’s story, therefore, is not a part of the collective memory, or a part of the mythology she knew to be truer than fact.

In Blunt’s community, storytelling is a validated way of knowing, and serves as the episteme in this place. Blunt recognizes from an early age that the creation of a story out of real events is an exercise in subjecthood: one who tells a story has the power to craft truth. Blunt’s observation of this power demonstrates her own reflexivity as a storyteller, even if self-reflection is lacking in other storytellers in her community. She is conscientious of the power of the storyteller to include, exclude, or reframe according to subjective inclination. Thus, when Blunt comes to realize that significant aspects of her own lived experience are not accounted for within the collective memory and body of knowledge produced by her community through storytelling, she undertakes to rectify this oversight. By telling her own story, she connects the disparate events of her experience to include the mundane, day-to-day repetition that is a ranch wife’s life into the larger narrative of the American West. *Breaking Clean* is Blunt’s story. In the creation of the text, Blunt has exercised her agency to produce knowledge and to contribute to the collective memory of her community. Importantly, this is done with an awareness and an assertion of the creative, subjective decisions she makes as a storyteller.

In describing their positions, both Blew and Blunt simultaneously impose limitations on their own abilities to know and convey complete faith in the ambiguity of their knowledge. Neither is claiming absolute truth, instead, reflexivity destabilizes such a notion. Reflexivity is not used in these examples to demonstrate the objectivity of Blew and Blunt's authorial positions, but rather to demonstrate their profound subjectivity. Each writer has created her own truth, her own sense of geographical knowledge that is borne from memory incomplete and from oral histories past down through generations. While the texts may not contain objective truths, both depict the emotional, experiential truth of women in place. Ambiguities are left open-ended and unproblematized because that is what feels real to these women; the texts are a depiction of subjective reality that stands in opposition to a mythic narrative which did not include them. Perhaps most importantly, each writer is transparent about her position and about the alternative epistemology guiding the creation of her story. Moreover, the transparent acknowledgement of positionality does not preclude other narratives of place, but instead introduces the possibility of multiple subject positions. Blew and Blunt do not seek to drown out other voices but to add theirs to a growing chorus.

As it is used by Blew and Blunt, reflexivity provides these women with a different epistemology than that which they were subjected to within their communities. In creating a different way of knowing the world and a new way of creating geographical knowledge, both women exercise agency in the creation, as well as set up a context within which they can continue to exercise agency and act as master subjects. Thus the text itself is a space in which these women are free to act as agents from outside their inherited cultures.

Yet neither Blew nor Blunt is wholly outside her community and culture. The different epistemologies outlined in each text and their self-aware subjectivity positions each woman as an

agent. It is possible to spatialize that subject position in light of the restraints imposed by the cultures Blew and Blunt write about in order to understand the implications of this position. In the next section I will revisit Gillian Rose's theory of paradoxical space which suggests that for the feminine subject to truly have agency, women must occupy a conceptual "elsewhere" space.

3.4 Text As Paradoxical Space

"...[T]here is a dream of elsewhere against which hegemonic space is perceived as oppressive. There is a desire for whatever is beyond the invisible but powerful limits to hegemonic imaginations" (Rose 149). Elsewhere is a space created by paradoxical space, either by oscillating between the two poles, alternately acting as a Master Subject (or Self) and the Other, or by existing in a state of being the Self and Other concurrently.

I posit that the act of writing, of creating a narrative based on subjective truth, engenders a paradoxical space that effectively deconstructs Self and Other through an oscillation between being in place and being out of place. Thus Blew and Blunt create a paradoxical space within their texts. By acting simultaneously as a knowledge-producing Self, the narrator, and as a marginalized Other within a patriarchal community, the protagonist, Blew and Blunt each deconstruct the binary between Self and Other. Throughout the texts, this double occupancy is demonstrated through non-linear narratives.

Non-linearity in the texts compresses time by juxtaposing events that occurred at extremely disparate points in time, but which are presented as concurrent in one space, the imagined geography created by the texts. Both texts are organized thematically rather than chronologically. Such a method of organization speaks to the alternative epistemologies which control both Blew's and Blunt's way of understanding the world around them. Deliberate

juxtaposition of similar events in Blew's grandmother's, mother's and her own life connects and emphasizes the emotional overlap of the women's experiences. Rather than a logic of chronology, these texts are guided by a logic of emotional resonance, and thus events are reorganized into a story that conveys the subjective truth of Blew's and Blunt's lives, echoing the epistemology of emotional truth that informs the texts, and deemphasizing narrative events that support the Myth of the West.

A second effect of non-linear narrative is that switching back and forth between time periods means switching between an authorial role of exposition and one of reflection. In oscillating between these two modes, the authors break down the binary between past and present, moving fluidly back and forth between the two. It is possible to spatialize this discussion of the expository and reflective modes of narration in order to demonstrate how a compression of space also allows Blew and Blunt to deconstruct the distinction between Self and Other. In the expository mode, each author assumes the position of the Other as a woman in place in a community that marginalizes her identity. These passages are told from the perspective of the women in place, and thus occupy the imagined geography of that place (and time). At times this is further emphasized through the use of a first-person narrator and present-tense verbs.

However, as reflective narrators, Blew and Blunt act as Self's; they act as creators of knowledge who deliberately and intentionally craft their stories according to their subjective epistemologies, and who can call attention to particular events while omitting others. The reflective mode shows Blew and Blunt speaking from their positions outside of place from a more contemporary time period in a kind of exile. As their narratives are told from outside the community but depict themselves situated in place, Blew and Blunt each act simultaneously as Self and Other in the creation of their memoirs. Oscillating between modes creates within the

text an imaginary space in which the women can exist as both former members and as exiles of their communities. This is paradoxical space and the elsewhere which Rose imagined.

The point of paradoxical space is not just semantic or theoretical gymnastics, however. Rose envisions that this space can have material consequences. In deconstructing the Self/Other binary textually, Blew and Blunt also deconstruct the relationship between Self and Other in the context of their Montana ranching communities. This is precisely the result Rose hoped for. Rose sought representations of women that exceeded hegemonic limitations. However, she recognized that any marginalized Other bears residual effects of that hegemony.

Both Blew and Blunt were compelled as young adults to depart from their communities in reaction to cultures they felt limited their ability to self-define and which disregarded their contributions to the community. Leaving Fergus and Philips Counties, respectively, Blew and Blunt found professional and personal opportunities that helped them better fulfill their internal senses of identity. Yet, a person's identity cannot be so easily reduced. When they leave, both women continue to bear an indelible mark of the land.

Speaking from the present, Blew stands in front of her family's former homestead. Although she left the community more than a decade prior, Blew still feels deeply connected to the geography of her past: "I am bone deep in landscape. In this dome of sky and river and undeflected sunlight, in this illusion of timelessness, I can almost feel my body, blood, and breath in the broken line of bluffs and the pervasive scent of ripening sweet clover and dust, almost feel the sagging fence line of ancient cedar posts stapled across my vitals" (Blew 7). The connection Blew describes here is visceral. She identifies internally with the terrain; it is a part of her, despite her not being a part of it any longer.

Blunt also conveys a deep attachment to her community as a part of that landscape: “Like my parents and grandparents, I was born and trained to live there. I could rope and ride and jockey a John Deere as well as my brothers, but being female, I also learned to bake bread and can vegetables and reserve my opinion when the men were talking” (4). This passage speaks to the persistence of a cultural landscape to influence individuals; not only vistas of a physical landscape linger, but skills and knowledge remain as well. Moreover, this passage also recalls the different gendered experiences of place and the limitations of being a woman in this place. Blunt is proud to have done and still be able to do all of these things. Although she may no longer rope or ride, this is still a part of her identity.

Blew and Blunt are complex women; they cannot be defined by their patriarchal communities, nor wholly in opposition to it. They cannot live in these places, but they carry aspects of those cultures within them. Neither fits perfectly into a stereotypical mold of Western Woman, nor do they reject all presumptions of gender identity. Through an assertion of a self-reflexive and transparent authorial position, both women develop an alternative epistemology to the traditional masculinist modes of knowledge production characteristic of their communities, thus enacting agency and subjecthood. Within their textual representations, the compression of time and space produces a paradoxical space that deconstructs the binary of past and present as well as that of being in and out of place.

The act of writing, then, is an ultimate expression of the feminine subject. Within the texts, Blew and Blunt each creates an imagined geography governed by her own subjective epistemology within which past and present, and being in-place and in exile, fluidly intermingle. Both writers are effectively producers of geographical knowledge and with their power to make knowledge they arrive at a so-called paradoxical space which has the capacity to accurately

account for the complexity of their individual identities. Such a paradoxical space does not presume to supplant the material geography of their communities, but rather is a counterpart to the masculinist narrative of ranching communities of the American West. As such, the texts exist as artifacts and testaments to the existence of contradictory, controversial, “uppity” women within the history of the American West, thus enriching this history.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Summation

The Myth of the West was born in the land of the West itself; so too were Mary Clearman Blew and Judy Blunt. They are children of the children of homesteaders, who had proved up on the harsh Montana land and who enacted the characteristics that came to define their culture. Although they were raised in a landscape and culture steeped in mythology, Blew and Blunt refused to let anyone else tell their stories.

Chapter one describes the historical context of the propagation of the Myth of the West that came to define the region and its people. The Myth originated in the imagined geography of settlers as an open space with good soil, plenty of rain, and no inhabitants. Early American literature and other popular media expanded on this image, firmly establishing it in the collective national imagination. Historian Frederick Jackson Turner and his contemporaries codified this image as well as certain characteristics of the “frontier.” As the frontier progressed westward and finally “closed,” the mythic image of the West solidified, structuring the physical and cultural landscapes as it became reified in everyday life.

Theories of landscape enable the mapping of the ideology underpinning the Myth of the West in Blew’s and Blunt’s childhood experiences. Analysis of the discursive formations of landscape demonstrates that the external geography of a place can reflect deep-seated cultural values, which can in turn come to define or limit the internal development of self by those who are marginalized by ideology. As children, although they are permitted access to male-coded behavior and spaces, Blew and Blunt discover that as female-gendered bodies, they are restricted to certain spaces and places. Yet the external physical limitations placed on them diverge significantly from their internal senses of belonging and of self. Blew and Blunt engage in

transgressive performances of space, which similarly call attention to cultural values derived from the Myth of the West. Through these performative acts and the analysis of landscape in chapter one, there is an attempt to bridge the gap between internal and external geographies. The external experience of spaces and places has internal consequences; in the case of Blew and Blunt these consequences manifest as frustration with limitation based on gender.

In response, Blew and Blunt create a space in which they are able to satisfy two significant, yet conflicting, desires with respect to their relationship to place: they each write a book. In doing so, both women are able to honor their connection to the landscape and their adherence to the Myth of the West as an important aspect of their identity formation, yet they are also able to eschew the more problematic aspects of the Myth as writers positioned in a geographical and temporal space outside of the Mythic context. Gillian Rose's theorizing of paradoxical space helps to identify the memoirs as embodiments of this space, which by their existence deconstruct the notion of Womanhood in the history of the American West.

4.2 Implications

The American West has been historicized as a place devoid of all but the most rugged individualistic white males. This vision was codified at the expense of all other images and actors that compose the region and culture. By the time Blew and Blunt were adult women, there were still limited ways women were permitted to participate in their culture; this was a residual effect of Turner's vision. Although more recently historians have made significant efforts and moves towards inclusion, there are still gaps in our knowledge of women in this geographical place and within this culture. In their memoirs Blew and Blunt depict a variety of women who

lived over several generations and who defied conventional apprehensions of Western women. This contribution alone begins to address the omissions made by historians in the past.

As writers, creators of knowledge, and agents of their own self-determination, Blew and Blunt can now be added to the annals of Western history on their own terms. The goal of paradoxical space in their texts is to assert feminine subjecthood in order to speak from outside of hegemonic limitations while still acknowledging its influence. The effect of this space within Blew's and Blunt's particular historical and cultural contexts is to identify a new breed of Western women. Such women are identifiable only by their highly subjective positions and assertion of place-based identity. Blew's and Blunt's texts confirm the existence of what I previously called "complex and contradictory" women living in the American West. As a paradoxical space, the texts assert that it is possible to balance a deep-rooted identification with place and a necessary liberation from it. By attempting such a balance, Blew and Blunt offer up paradoxical space as a methodology for others to assert their agency outside of hegemony while maintaining important links to it. In this way, these memoirs function as feminist texts, adding feminist perspective to the canon of Western American literature while simultaneously contributing a place-based and regionally specific voice to the growing body of feminist texts.

All But the Waltz and *Breaking Clean* are memoirs written by two women who find themselves in the paradoxical position of being at once profoundly connected to and inspired by their landscapes and communities, yet deeply frustrated and saddened by the limitations placed on them by the patriarchal ideology that structures those same landscapes and communities. In writing these text, Blew and Blunt do not attempt to resolve this paradox, but to immerse themselves in it. They do not remain rooted, yet neither do they exist in a total exile; instead Blew and Blunt have positioned themselves at once inside and outside of place. Blew's and

Blunt's texts do not eclipse stories of the past, but contribute new narratives with which to move forward; they are not rewriting the Myth of the West, but writing alongside it.

4.3 Limitations and Projections

An inherent challenge in attempting to combine theories and methodologies of two disciplines is doing a poor job of managing both. I worry about doing either justice, and one wonders at the balance needed to explicate and illustrate each. I am not the first to apply geographical methodology to literature, but I may be the first to assert that the text is itself an imaginative space to be theorized. Most geographers consider representations of space and place within a text or the material geography of a text's production. Such a lack of precedence does not assuage my fears. As I conclude this project, I am keenly aware of some limitations in my work.

As a student of literature, my grasp of geographical theories is not complete. In chapter one I sought to explicate the evolution of ideology becoming emotional experience by way of structuring cultural landscapes which regulate behavior in a place. In addition to limited proficiency with such methodology, a further challenge to my attempts at mapping this evolution is the recursive nature of the cultural reification of ideology. In other words, once codified the Myth of the West was imposed on the landscape by outsiders, but was also willfully taken up by inhabitants as well, further solidifying the Myth as a marker of the landscape. Blew's and Blunt's attachment to place may be considered as an effect of this recursive development.

As mentioned above, the lack of precedence for my specific engagement of geography and literature together is at once troublesome and invigorating. The prospect of bringing together two disciplines in a way that can mutually open up new avenues for analysis and research is exciting. However, I am concerned about the application of paradoxical space to the texts

themselves as relying too heavily on discursive formations and not enough on material experience of the texts. For all intents and purposes, the geography contained within the text is entirely imagined by one subjective individual and, it could be argued, bears no relation to the historical or cultural context it presumes to depict. Were time and scope unlimited, I would explore in much greater depth these aspects of the concluding argument.

While perhaps complicating the project at hand, the limitations identified above also lead me to questions for further investigation. For example, how does one chart recursive cultural sedimentations? Is it possible to distinguish the material production and context of a text from the imagined geography it depicts? And finally, how can we theorize the writerly imagination as a space or the producer of places? These are important questions and cannot be easily dismissed; I believe this project to be a starting point from which to engage with these and other important issues surrounding female subjecthood, particularly in the context of the American West.

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