

Re-Entering Old Spaces

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*Essays on Anglo-American
Literature*

Edited by

Marija Krivokapić

and Aleksandra Nikčević-Batrićević

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INTRODUCTION

MARIJA KRIVOKAPIĆ
AND ALEKSANDRA NIKČEVIĆ-BATRIĆEVIĆ

The eleventh international conference on English language and literary studies, that took place in Montenegro in 2014, was centered around the topic of “re-entering old spaces.” The “old spaces” were taken as a metaphorical tool for reintroducing a wide range of established topics with new approaches. Space was, thus, understood as physical, mechanical, continuous, linear, i.e. measurable, as symbolic, such as religious, mythical, and literary, as subjective and relational, but also as aesthetic. It was found on maps, in architecture, on theatre stages, in books, in hearts, in one’s identity, in time, in theses and theories from Aristotelian topos to Einstein’s construct of spacetime. Therefore, the means of travel to these spaces and the forms the journeys take are also multifarious. But so are the discursive strategies and their limitations when it comes to presenting the journeys and their destinations. The contributors gathered from all over the world and presented research that is either following in the footsteps of other authors, in a literal or secondary literary journey to real geographical places, or observing the universal literary and old theoretical issues through new critical lenses. Often they are on both roads witnessing how inextricable human efforts are to find, identify, and aestheticise oneself in relation to a particular space. Their contributions to this book expose how “spaces” were created and recreated through writing and symbolical representations in general. They also show how the images of these spaces have been changing in consent to the intentions of their visitors, or they reveal that persistent and obstinate moment in a space that despite, or in spite, of the changing perspectives, itself refuses to be changed.

Thus, in his article titled “Beyond ‘the Myth of the Garden’ and Turner’s Thesis,” Artur Jaupaj discusses the myth of the American West, the frontier myth, that has been the most enlightening, debatable, violent and deceiving myth in America as it came into being with the rise of the printed word and as such, it was exploited for strictly economic reasons.

Eventually, Jaupaj elaborates, the New World mythology, revived once again after the former British colonies won their independence, depicted the West as Eden on Earth and the future of the emerging nation regardless of its apparent hostile topography and aridity. The eventual rise of the frontier hero, based on Daniel Boone's legend, kindled even further the eager Easterners' curiosity about the region they could only read or dream about. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, when the West had begun to urbanize and lose its long-held charm, it was Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902) which came to the rescue of the Western mythology by depicting a timeless and unique topography where virtue was rewarded and evil punished. However, the counter-culture revolution of the 1960s with its innovative artistic explosion, general distrust towards master narratives and media generated images, initiated a re-evaluation of Western mythology which continues even today. With this aim, Jaupaj revisits the "frontier psychology" based on Richard Slotkin's definition of the myth as "the intelligible mask of that enigma called the 'national character'."

Božica Jović, in her article "Re-visiting *Walden* in the light of H. Daniel Peck's 'The Worlding of *Walden*'" engages in a deep structural study on the meaning and the style of selected chapters from *Walden*. By adopting Peck's terminology of various oppositions that work, for both stylistic and, in default of a better word, philosophic, understanding of this masterpiece, she manages to point at the directions for future studies, since, no final resolution of either *Walden*'s style or its complex meaning is attainable for now. This fact is due neither to inadequate studies nor to the lack of the insight on the part of various critics throughout a long period, but to the fact that reading *Walden* per se constitutes a sort of discipline on its own. Therefore, Jović throws light on the possibility of making the reading of *Walden* an intellectual exercise and a pragmatic discipline in which reading and life experience merge into one.

Giuseppe Barbuscia, in "Metamorphoses of the Devil in the Works of Percy and Mary Shelley," opens his paper following the genealogy of the character of Satan, whose representation in literature has a complex history. As Barbuscia shows, medieval ideas of the Devil had little in common with the Devil that fascinated and inspired Byron, Shelley, Goethe, and many others. Dante provides a quintessential example of the beastly and horrifying way in which Satan was portrayed in the Middle Ages. Canto XXXIV, the last of his *Inferno*, is a climax of filthiness and disgust. Dante's Satan is disproportionately gigantic, with beast-like features, three horrible faces, and with no interaction with anyone, with the exception of the three damned traitors eternally chewed

in his mouths. Although there are countless variations of this idea, the underlying medieval concept remains fundamentally the same: the Medieval Satan is always strongly connoted as a non-human figure and is always in some opposition to God.

Denis Kuzmanović “re-enters” the poetry about the Great War, keeping in mind people’s regrettable and recurring inability to learn from past mistakes. Kuzmanović points out that practically every facet of this war exhibited that sentiment, not only in the historical context of 1914-1918 but also in the context of times preceding and following it. The turn of the 20th century saw the then unprecedented technological advancement, which further spurred the optimism of the Meliorist movement, i.e. the belief that human progress is historically linear. However, some poets remained mistrustful, being aware of mankind’s susceptibility to its dark impulses, and their foreboding attitudes marked a suitable contrast for the enthusiastic and patriotic poetry arising in the war’s initiation; this, in turn, contrasted the brutally realistic poetry emerging after the war’s full scale became terrifyingly apparent. Poets as diverse as Arnold, Hardy, Brooke, Grenfell, Rosenberg, Sassoon, Owen, were thus reflecting each other’s work in both congruity and ironic opposites.

Tomislav Kuna’s article “Degradation of the Human Soul in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot” confirms this notion. Kuna assumes that Eliot’s poetry, along with Ezra Pound’s and the prose of James Joyce, marks the definite beginning of the Modernist movement, which is drenched in pessimism when it comes to human life in general. It is especially notable today when Eliot’s poetry is still described as impossibly demanding, seemingly illogical, abstract, iconoclastic, revolutionary, metapoetry, etc. Kuna explains that the reason for such complex descriptions is due to the very nature of Eliot’s work, his use of demanding allusions, discontinuity of images, the objective correlative, etc. Kuna provides examples from three major works, “The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock” (1915), *The Waste Land* (1922), and “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” (1920) with the addition of some smaller poems from Eliot’s opus. Within these poems, the paralysis of the individual and (usually) his estrangement from society and his own self is made clear. In addition to the discussion on the poetry of T. S. Eliot, this paper makes references to other notable contemporaries, like Joyce, Frost, and Auden, to help make the points of the paper clearer.

In his “Defamiliarization Revisited” Robert Sullivan writes that “familiarity breeds contempt,” but that, in a deeply ironic way, this statement itself has become a cliché, because, like most clichés, it is so true. For the purpose of his article, Sullivan exploits an even better aphorism, i.e. that “familiarity breeds indifference,” and argues that it is as

a combatant against such indifference, or automatism, that art plays a crucial role. In the remainder of his paper, Sullivan elaborates on the locus classicus of Shklovsky's theory from "Art as Device" (1929), which says that to make us feel the world, we are given "the tool of art," which has a capacity of "enstranging" objects and extending the perceptual process.

Approaching "Narcissistic Religiosity in Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry*" Janko Andrijašević explains the resentment the author brought upon himself after the novel's publication in 1927. Namely, as Andrijašević argues, the clerical circles and the greater public, still under strong church influence in the late 1920s, banned the novel in several cities across the U.S.A., Scotland, and Ireland. The U.S. Post Office Department even banned the circulation of any catalogs that listed the book. The formal grounds to demonize *Elmer Gantry* were the descriptions of sexual adventures of the eponymous preacher character, and his use of inappropriate language (such as "damn" or "hell"). The true reason, however, was Lewis's exposition of the hypocrisy of members of the clergy, "the shenanigans and deceitful scheming of pompous preachers," which was a sore spot to deal with, but also a motive incessantly present in literary texts. Andrijašević proceeds in analyzing the main character's behaviour.

Vanja Vukićević-Garić revisits old texts as a form of new beginnings for the author of *Ulysses*, while drawing on Edward Said's theoretical distinction between the concept of origin and the concept of beginning in relation to creative writing and the writer's fulfillment of the process. Her paper explores some aspects of Joyce's authorial principle in *Ulysses* (1922), as reflected in the extreme intertextuality of this paradigmatic modernist text, which also, exactly in its revision of various textual discourses, reveals a somewhat postmodernist attitude towards the interaction of the past and the present.

"Lawrence and Bataille: The Notion of Sacrifice and Violence in 'The Woman Who Rode Away'," by Nina Haritatu, focuses on one of the best known of Lawrence's short pieces that is set in an old, at the same time real, spiritual and imaginary, Apachian space. The story is written in 1924 and reveals a variety of cultural, political and social influences that Lawrence's theory contains. It does not only reflect the influence of his contemporaries, but it also shows the way Lawrence anticipated future theorists, such as is the French theorist Georges Bataille, particularly in issues concerning violence, sacrifice and the final "transgression" of the human limits through death. Haritatu then elaborates how Lawrence and Bataille focus on the mystical aspect of the human nature which is neglected and suppressed by the social order and the religious dogma,

moreover how the Woman becomes the emblem of this Batailleian transgression.

“Re-enactment of Old Wounds: Hemingway, War and Gender,” by Aleksandra Žeželj Kocić, focuses on Ernest Hemingway’s specific way of tackling the topical interrelatedness of war and gender in a number of his novels and short stories. Namely, Hemingway’s (male) characters re-enact their old war-wounds through different means, while their memories of war take different forms, such as nostalgia, audience, escapism, shellshock, grotesque and nonconformity to rules. The re-enactment in question is ultimately taken to be ceaselessly performative in its constant need of asserting itself. Explicitly, as Žeželj Kocić explains, Hemingway creates temporary identities that need to be re-enacted all over again once they are staged. The very process of re-entering the old spaces of one’s identity, i.e. one’s past selves, proves solely that—a process. To this end, the primary application of Judith Butler’s theory of gender-as-performance and Bertolt Brecht’s concept of the *gestus* prove valuable in shedding new light on Hemingway’s work. The unsettling of what seems to be natural using a technique of defamiliarization denotes “the trope of performance” with its constant blurring of copies and originals. If gender is taken to mean a series of acts that are incessantly renewed and revised, as Žeželj Kocić concludes, Hemingway’s particular marriage between war and gender seems an even more exciting concept, especially when such a link is blatantly under-theorized by his critics.

“Re-Entering Totalitarian Hell in Twentieth-Century Literature: The Allegories of Power and Dehumanization in George Orwell’s *1984* and Ismail Kadare’s *The Palace of Dreams*,” by Bavjola Shatro aims to identify and analyze comparatively the role of allegory, analogy, and symbols as reference to and part of the political discourse in the twentieth-century novel, i.e. Orwell’s, as one of the classical writers of English and world literature in the twentieth century, and Kadare’s, as the main representative of Albanian literature abroad and one of the most important writers of European literature during the second half of the twentieth century.

Loran Gami’s “Violence and Evil in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*” discusses this novel’s artistic elaboration of the human potential and tendency to violence and, more generally, evil. Golding presents a chilling fable of how people, when unchecked by reasonable authority, are inclined towards evil and aggressive behaviour. The article dwells upon the reasons that give birth to violence and evil and contribute to their spread.

Aleksandra V. Jovanović revisits spaces over time, i.e. the relationship between space and mind, by focusing on British novelist Peter

Ackroyd and relying on Martin Heidegger, who, in his essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” explains how mind inhabits space in terms of a dwelling. Ackroyd understands space as being vibrant with the voices of the past. In his text, both time and space are aspects of human mind. As he reads time and history in space, his fiction exploits the tension between human and universal time. Accordingly, Ackroyd’s characters travel freely over centuries, so that the curious relationship between two versions of time is realized in space. This article shows how the ideas of Ackroyd’s characters mentally map the spaces of particular locations and how in turn they comprehend the space by their way of dwelling.

“*Measure for Measure* as an Expression of Growing Uncertainty towards Monarchy and the Divine Order” by Branko Marijanović suggests that this Shakespeare’s play can be read as an allegory of a monarchical state order which, as it was thought for a long time, was the only way of state organization which could lead to prosperity and happiness of its citizens. *Measure for Measure* is analyzed as the expression of doubt towards the ruler as a divine delegate on earth, as well as towards the corresponding world perception. Marijanović explains that Shakespeare uses the concept of the divine order as the very means of criticizing and reevaluating monarchy as the prevailing system of the state organization. This article also takes into account the very historical moment the play is set at. It is the end of the Middle Ages when the system began to be questioned both from the bottom and from the top, and when the citizens gradually started demanding more rights, larger freedoms and broader restraints upon the monarch’s power.

In their article “*Antigone* on the African Stage” Salih M. Hameed and Raad Kareem Abd-Aun explain that the African theatre has heavily relied on European dramatic conventions after the colonization of Africa. Namely, the aftermath of World War II witnessed radical changes in the African political and social structures that required new approaches to portraying them. These transformations have naturally been displayed in the literature, including drama, of the period. Consequently, the Avant-garde and the Epic traditions found their way into the heritage of African theater. African playwrights also relied on European myth for their subject matter and adapted various myths to the African stage. Thus, several African playwrights found Sophocles’ play aptly vital to vent their opposition to the modern colonization of their countries. This article gives examples of Femi Osofisan’s, Athol Fugard’s, Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s, Felix Morisseau-Leroy’s, and Sabata Sesi’s adaptations that served to expose the evils resulting from the ill managements of the systems.

Writing about “Contemporary Studies of Travel Writing,” Olivera Popović asserts that although it represents one of the oldest literary genres, the travelogue has only become the subject of academic literary and theoretical studies in recent years and through the interests of postcolonial theory in the subject matter. As Popović elaborates, in addition to providing insights into the author’s personal experience of a visited place, travelogues bear witness to the cultural, political, economic and other relations between countries, their interdependence and interests at a given historical moment. Their thematic diversity, the amount of information they offer, as well as the fact that travel literature was extremely popular during certain periods, make travelogues a valuable source for further study because travel writers, like today’s media, have shaped public opinion, expressing the dominant tastes, prejudices, and conventions of their time. Travel books have a privileged place in the thematisation of cultural differences and are especially suitable both for the analysis of the tradition of the representation of countries and for the identification of stereotypes and connotations bound to them. This feature gives them political significance because travel writers present their observations as neutral documentations. Therefore, Popović believes, it is important to pay attention to the knowledge that is woven into them, because a travelogue is always to some extent a didactic text. To this aim, Popović gives examples of travel writing and travel writing criticism about the Balkans.

“‘The Old Is Better than Any Novelty’—Literary Venice” by Ilda Erkoçi focuses on one of the oldest and most popular travel destinations in the world, the hometown of Marco Polo and adopted home of Dante Alighieri. Venice is worth visiting for many reasons, particularly for its geographical uniqueness, as a city which floats on water, and for its inexorably rich history, art and culture. As this article shows, it is also an exceptional site for literary tourism and we are introduced with a few literary walks visitors can take in the city.

We have performed numerous virtual travels in this book, and we believe that our readers will find them challenging enough to assume their own for further contributions to this expanding field in the humanities. In their numerous and distinct ways, the contributions to this particular book maintain that understanding of how spaces are conceived and conceptualised is of pronounced importance in the globalized world in which cultures are gradually losing authenticities, while their spaces—geographical, tourist, spiritual, literary, aesthetic—are as reflective of the “visitors” as they speak of the “hosts.”

BEYOND “THE MYTH OF THE GARDEN” AND TURNER’S THESIS

ARTUR JAUPAJ

The Lure of the Myth

The American West has been mythologized for its uniqueness, endless economic opportunities, and the decisive role it has played in shaping the American character and democracy. As a matter of fact, since its earliest times, Western mythology has propagandized the West as “The Garden of the World.” Despite its aridity and shortage of water, it has been a place where the rugged and resourceful individual could easily secure a life full of abundance and live happily. However, the study of the frontier myth in America should be viewed in terms of its particularities. Namely, unlike other world mythologies commonly based on oral and folk myths, the myth of the American West came into being simultaneous with the rise of the printed word: “American myths-tales of heroes in particular—frequently turn out to be the work of literary hacks or of promoters seeking to sell American real estate by mythologizing the landscape.”¹ However, the mythology about the West belonged to an earlier period, which, in fact, preceded even the discovery of the New World by Columbus:

Within the body of European myths about America were two antagonistic pre-Columbian conceptions of the West: the primitive belief in the West as the land of the sea, the sunset, death, darkness, passions, and dreams; and the counter belief in the West as the Blessed Isles, the land of life’s renewal, of rebirth, of reason and a higher reality.²

As a matter of fact, the romantic depiction of the West as the land of bliss eventually got the upper hand due to Columbus’s Eden-like description of

¹ Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown Con: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 5.

² *Ibid.*, 27.

the recently discovered lands, on the one hand, and the early settlers’ romantic and epic/heroic aspirations, on the other. English settlers, for example, embellished their descriptions with Elizabethan and Jacobean romantic and epic imagery regardless of what they encountered. Their Spanish counterparts, on the contrary, added chivalric deeds to their depictions:

[the Spanish] accounts, more obviously than the English, were shaped by the literary style and values of the romance and by the literature of chivalry—the Grail legends, *Jerusalem Delivered*, the Roland epics and *Amadis de Gaul*.³

Moreover, further exploration and the eventual settlement of the West coincided with the rise of New World myths of abundance and unrestricted freedom amidst the wilderness. As a result of the latter, Spanish explorers, unlike the English settlers’ utopist and biblical ideals of founding a religious commonwealth “succumbed” to the temptations of the recently discovered lands and cultures. The fate of the Spanish conquistador, Don Francisco Vasquez Coronado, who lost his life while searching for gold, typifies the fatality of the wilderness and the miscomprehension of the indigenous cultures.⁴

As a result, to survive culturally and spiritually amidst the vast unexplored wilderness, a re-mythologization of the West seemed inevitable. Initially, the re-mythologization was initiated by the Spanish and French Jesuits and eventually it was embraced fervently by the English Puritans and Pilgrims who made lasting and indelible marks on the topography by providing a sense of self-righteousness and belonging thus self-appropriating the land and carving it according to their immediate needs. As Slotkin argues:

Unlike the Spanish, the Pilgrims did not wish to discover and conquer Indian empires; nor were they interested in discovering an Arcadian people in an American garden, living a model of the Golden Age. What they desired above all was a tabula rasa on which they could inscribe their dream: the outline of an idealized Puritan England, a Bible commonwealth, a city on a hill exemplifying the word of God to all the world.⁵

³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

In fact, such a religious approach to the American West prevailed well into the eighteenth century when the mythologization process took a nationalistic turn after the former British colonies declared their independence. Then, the vision of Thomas Jefferson, that is, that of the West as “The Garden of the World”⁶ and the future of the nation, was highlighted as the new destiny and mythology. Furthermore, the recently won political independence paved the way for Jefferson to put into practice his long-conceived schemes of building a nation bordering the two oceans by materializing *The Louisiana Purchase* (1803) which added billions of unexplored acres to the possession of the Union. As Mark Reisner argues in *Cadillac Desert* regarding the deal with France: “Napoleon had no idea what he had sold for \$15 million, and Jefferson had no idea what he had bought.”⁷

The Louisiana Purchase was shortly followed by a number of exploring expeditions, which, instead of keeping under control the settlement or saving it for future generations as Jefferson’s intentions were, revitalized and reenacted “The Myth of the Garden.” Firstly, the Lewis & Clark expedition (1804-1806), widely accepted and labelled as “the American Epic,” intended to explore more than the flora and the fauna of the region:

The importance of Lewis and Clark expedition lay on the level of imagination: it was drama, it was the enactment of a myth that embodied the future. It gave tangible substance to what had been merely an idea, and established the image of a highway across the continent so firmly in the minds of Americans that repeated failures could not shake it.⁸

The ambiguous results of the expedition, though, discouraged the American government from further explorations for some decades. In fact, further exploration of the unknown West might have been delayed indefinitely had it not been for the abundance of beavers observed by a member of Lewis & Clark expedition, which hinted at the apparently economic possibilities of the region. As Reisner puts it: “The settlement of

⁶ See also Henry Nash Smith’s seminal work *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950) for an enlightening study regarding the American myths of the past, especially “The Myth of the Garden” and the critical shift initiated in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁷ Marc Reisner’s *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (N.Y.: Viking, 1993) provides an insightful analysis of the disappearing water of the American West and highlights the ecological dangers of the westward expansion despite the federally sponsored dams.

⁸ Henry Nash Smith, *op. cit.*, 17.

the American West owed itself, as much as anything, to a hat.”⁹ Eventually, expeditions such as the ones led by Zebulon Montgomery Pike, which explored the Southern Plains, John C. Fremont’s expedition (1843) down the Oregon Trail, and, finally, The Powell Geographic Expeditions (in 1869 and 1871)¹⁰ down the Colorado River, aimed at discovering the puzzle of the West. However, to everyone’s surprise, they all proved the dominance of arid lands in the region and forced many to believe that “the Louisiana Purchase had been a waste of \$15 million—that the whole billion acres would remain as empty as Mongolia or the Sahara.”¹¹

Further exploration and the settlement of the West coincided with the rise to power of Andrew Jackson, a follower of Jeffersonian ideals taken to the extreme in the 1830s and the revival of certain New World and American myths, promoted fervently even in Europe through the publication of de Crevecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer*, especially the one titled “What is an American,” which idealized the American farmer and topography beyond recognition. Among the prevailing myths, which dulled the logic of land-hungry Europeans and New Englanders alike, was the myth of the “sacred plow” or “Rain follows the plow” based on the erroneous yet divinely propagandized approach of pseudo-scientists of the West, such as Charles Dana Wilber who unscientifically argued that plowing the land would secure ample rainfalls.¹² Other factors, which stirred the flood of yeomanry to move west, included the Irish potato famine and a bad drought in the Ohio Valley, to name a few. However, the driving force behind the expansion and settlement remained what Alex de Tocqueville labelled the spirit of the place, that is, the monopolistic tendencies for profit:

To clear, to till, and to transform the vast uninhabited continent which is his domain, the American requires the daily support of an energetic passion; that passion can be the love of wealth; the

⁹ Marc Reisner, *op. cit.*, 19.

¹⁰ John Wesley Powell is best known for the exploring voyages down the Colorado River in the 1870s and his critical stances against the settlement and overpopulation of those arid lands despite the existence of the river. The findings of his expeditions, in fact, were not taken seriously thus leading to the ecological disasters of the twentieth century.

¹¹ Marc Reisner, *op. cit.*, 23-24.

¹² Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1979) remains the fullest analysis of the causes and effects of the Dust Bowl disaster which blew dust, due to overgrazing and overpopulation, from one part of the region to the other thus making the lives of the people living in the area unbearable.

passion for wealth is therefore not reprobated in America, and, provided it does not go beyond the bounds assigned to it for public security, it is held in honor.¹³

Tocqueville's assumption was fully realized after the introduction of the steam engine and the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, which excelled in doing "away with the Great American Desert"¹⁴ as it irrevocably conquered the vastness of the Great Plains and became the first large-scale land speculator in the history of the United States. In addition, Henry Nash Smith rightly argues that the introduction of the engine placed the farmer at the mercy of the market economy:

Yet even when such men called the advent of steam a revolutionary force, they hardly seem to have realized what drastic changes it was destined to work. The steam engine was not only to subordinate the yeoman farmer to the banker and merchant of the new Western cities; eventually it transformed him into a producer of staple crops for distant markets and thus placed him at the mercy of freight rates and of fluctuations in international commodity prices.¹⁵

Thus, it was the beaver that initiated the exploration of the American West. However, the introduction of the locomotive settled and monopolized it. In fact, such a landslide victory on the part of the railroad would have been unimaginable without the support of corrupted real estate agents, politicians, newspaper editors and demagogues of the West like William Gilpin, a successor of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian ideals carried too far:

The number-one allies of the railroads in their efforts to bring settlers to the West were politicians, newspaper editors, and territorial jingoists who were already there. No one excelled William Gilpin in this role. Gilpin, who had been a member of John C. Fremont's expedition to Oregon in 1843, was the prototypical nineteenth century Renaissance man of the American West: soldier, philosopher, orator, lawyer, geographer, governor, author, windbag, and booby. In an essay "Geopolitics with Dew on It" published in *Harper's* magazine in 1943, Bernard De Voto called Gilpin's thinking typical of what passed, in nineteenth-century America, for science:

¹³ Cited in Marc Reisner, *op.cit.*, 48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵ Henry Nash Smith, *op. cit.*, 159.

“piori, deduced, generalized, falsely systematized, and therefore wrong.” He might have added “dotty.”¹⁶

Even the Federal government and American politics in general had their own share in the promotion of the Western mythology. In fact, they played the most decisive role in carving the West by enacting the Homestead Act¹⁷ (1862), which, as it is commonly known, did more harm than good. The enactment of this law, in Henry Nash Smith’s words, was mainly based on

the belief that it would enact by statue the fee-simple empire, the agrarian utopia of hardy and virtuous yeomen, which had haunted the imaginations of writers about the West since the time of De Crevecoeur.¹⁸

As a matter of fact, the myth-driven practices, according to Reisner, made “Speculation. Water monopoly. Land monopoly. Erosion. Corruption. Catastrophe”¹⁹ a reality.

And catastrophe did strike. The disastrous winter of 1886-1887 proved fatal and almost wiped out the apparently flourishing cattle business: “Eighty-five per cent of the cattle perished on some ranches, and their carcasses lay black and stinking across the spring landscape.”²⁰ Nevertheless, the myth was hard to die. The introduction of new farming techniques, known as “dry farming,” at the turn of the twentieth century, revived the lost hopes of farmers beyond the hundredth meridian until the drought of the 1930s “turned much of the settled portion of the plains into a dust bowl and raised the question whether the region had not been seriously overpopulated.”²¹

In fact, neither the disastrous winter of 1886-87 nor the Dust Bowl disaster, which blew across the Plains nor its recurrence in the 1950s, to name a few, could eradicate the belief in “The Myth of the Garden.” The reasons vary. Henry Nash Smith, for example, argues about the irresistible power of the myth over the scientific warnings of Powell’s expeditions:

¹⁶ Marc Reisner, *op. cit.*, 39-40.

¹⁷ The Homestead Act (1862) aimed at materializing the agrarian utopia in the West by allotting 160 acres to any restless American or immigrant. As a matter of fact, the whole practice failed at most due to the diversity of aridity of the West, that is, it secured enough income only in parts of the region.

¹⁸ Henry Nash Smith, *op. cit.*, 170.

¹⁹ Marc Reisner, *op. cit.*, 43.

²⁰ Donald Worster, *op. cit.*, 83.

²¹ Henry Nash Smith, *op. cit.*, 174.

He [Powell] was asking a great deal. He was demanding that the West should submit to a rational and scientific revision of its central myth, and indeed that the nation at large should yield one of principal underpinnings of its faith in progress, in the mission of America, in manifest destiny.²²

Marc Reisner, apart from the enduring power of the myth, argues about the ecological dangers created by the federally sponsored dams:

But even as the myth of the welcoming, bountiful West was shattered, the myth of the independent yeoman farmer remained intact. With huge dams built for him at public expense, and irrigation canals, and the water sold for a quarter of a cent per ton, a price which guaranteed that little of the public's investment would ever be paid back, the West's yeoman farmer became the embodiment of the welfare state, though he was the last to recognize it. And the same Congress, which had once insisted that he didn't need federal help, was now insisting that such help be continued, at any cost. Released from a need for justification, released from logic itself, the irrigation program Powell had wanted became a monster, redoubling its efforts and increasing its wreckage both natural and economic, as it lost sight of its goal. Powell's ideal was a future in which the rivers of the American West would help create a limited bounty on that tiny fraction of the land which it made sense to irrigate. It is hard to imagine that the first explorer of the Colorado River would have welcomed a future in which there might be no rivers left at all.²³

Whereas, Richard Slotkin argues that the Jeffersonian agrarianism of the self-sufficient yeoman was distorted with the introduction of the Jacksonian farmer-speculator.²⁴ As a matter of fact, the mythology of the American West has been undergoing a thorough revision since the 1960s where the region ceased to be an ideal place for the resourceful, rugged and self-sufficient individual to prosper. At least until the 1960s when its mythology began to fade and lose its long-held appeal, the Western genre, succeeded in preserving the myth in a timeless and ever-present era where virtue was rewarded and evil punished.

²² *Ibid.*, 200.

²³ Marc Reisner, *op. cit.*, 51.

²⁴ Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*, 72-73.

Literary Mythmakers: Rise and Demise

American mythology has primarily been of a literary origin as the settlement of the New World coincided with the so-called “age of printing” and the Puritan zeal for the printed word:

Printed literature has been from the first the most important vehicle of myth in America, which sets it apart from the mythologies of the past. The colonies were founded in an age of printing, in large parts by Puritans, who were much inclined toward the writing and printing of books and pamphlets and the creating of elaborate metaphors proving the righteousness of their proceedings.²⁵

However, the literary output, since the earliest times, remained formulaic and allowed very little room for substantial innovations and alterations. Moreover, the writing process itself was mainly connected with the religious and ideological justification of the Puritans’ presence in the New World, which consisted mainly of narratives of Indian wars, captivity narratives, sermons and colonial tracts. It was the Indian captivity narrative, in fact, “the first coherent myth-literature developed in America for American audiences,”²⁶ which enjoyed particular popularity and dominated all the other kinds of narrative due to its affinity with the wilderness, the Indian, and the state of restlessness, which characterized the Puritans. Thus, the most popular captivity narrative, among many written during the colonial times, was Mary Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together with the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) which “functioned,” in Slotkin’s words,

as an archetype, creating a paradigm of personal and collective history that can be discerned as an informing structure throughout Puritan and (with modifications) in later American narrative literature.²⁷

John G. Cawelti labels it “the first highly popular Western” which “established one of the themes which could be central to the western

²⁵ Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence*, 19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 102-103.

tradition, the supposed threat of the Native Americans to the welfare and morality of white women.”²⁸

As a matter of fact, the narrative portrays the spiritual trial of Mrs. Rowlandson among the natives deprived of her family and embittered by the loss of her baby. According to Slotkin, her journey into the wilderness is a typical manifestation of the Puritan doctrine of man’s sinful nature and Providence’s redeeming intervention. What is more important, Rowlandson’s work undermines the restrictions of the captivity narrative. First of all, her redemption is not as complete as expected. Secondly, her affinity with the wilderness and the Indian severely harms the Puritans’ English and Christian identity and vaguely initiates a national and noble-Indian identity instead.²⁹

Eventually, according to Slotkin, it was Benjamin Church, an Indian fighter, Puritan, landowner, magistrate and frontiersman himself whose work *Entertaining Passages* (1716) irrevocably bridged the gap between the two cultures, that is, the English and the American Indian and the two generations: English born and American Indian born. Unlike his predecessors, Church seemed to be at home in the wilderness among the Indians whom he fights, guides and enlightens. He is no longer a Puritan victim-hero and has no personal, cultural, or religious sacrifices to make in exchange for his purified soul. On the contrary, he takes up the Indian way of life to survive in the wilderness, win the war against King Philip and free himself from the will of God to self-sufficiency.³⁰

As such, the emergence of the American hero and the shaping of his character was irretrievably linked with the Indian living in the wilderness, that is, a hero, who would embody the most outstanding characteristics of both cultures: the Indian and the Americanized English; a hero, who would be based neither on Biblical destiny nor on European/English counterparts; a hero who would conquer the wilderness single-handedly and represent the emerging philosophical, cultural, social, political and realist-revivalist tendencies of the newly ascending nation.³¹

Ultimately, according to Slotkin and Henry N. Smith, it was John Filson’s *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke* (1784),

²⁸ John Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 59. See also his other works for a better understanding of the development of the formula western: *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green: The Popular Press, 1971); *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

²⁹ Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence*, 150.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 155-156.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

initially launched as a real-estate promotion brochure, which historically established the American hero and the American myth of the frontier. As a matter of fact, Filson’s hero’s immortality and popularity were secured by a single chapter titled “The Adventures of Col. Daniel Boone,” which highlighted the adventures, business ventures and westward trips of a real frontiersman. Daniel Boone soon epitomized the archetypal hero of the American West as his narrative coincided with the post-revolutionary demand for cultural, national and self-reliant symbols and myths. Yet, Boone’s myth, despite its ambiguities, prevailed well into the nineteenth century and secured a permanent place in the realm of popular imagination. Its further developments were crystallized in the persistence of two main themes:

The Filsonian version of the frontier hero as untutored republican-philosopher and the folk vision of Boone as the mighty hunter, child of wilderness, and exemplar of values derived from sources outside Anglo-American civilization.³²

In fact, the full literary potentiality and the establishment of the American hero though could not possibly be imagined without the unique contribution of a single person: James Fennimore Cooper, a talented Eastern genteel, whose literary efforts provided the American audience with a unique Western and national hero. As Slotkin argues, “[i]t might be said of James Cooper that if he had not existed, it would have been necessary to invent him.”³³ Cooper’s main significance, among many others, lies in the creation of a real frontier hero in the tradition of Daniel Boone interchangeably called Natty Bumppo, Hawkeye, Leatherstocking, Pathfinder, and Deerslayer. Unlike his counterpart, Natty Bumppo represents the frontier hero neither as a social climber nor as a Jeffersonian “half-breed” nor as a renegade hunter or a humble yeoman. His place is in the border zone of the two opposites, that is, between the wilderness and civilization, as he is fit for neither of them due to his particular qualities of an aristocracy, chivalry, stoicism, and chastity. Thus, *Leatherstocking Tales*, written in the tradition of Sir Walter Scott’s historical romance, epitomize the Indian as a typical American figure or as a “noble savage” and portray the frontier as a constant battleground of opposites. As John Cawelti argues,

³² *Ibid.*, 311.

³³ Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 81.

Cooper makes two contributions to the mythologization of American history: he puts the Indian and the matter of racial character at the center of his consideration of moral questions, and he represents the historical process as essentially a violent one.³⁴

Eventually, *Leatherstocking Tales* would give birth to the formula western, thus, identifying a particular Western setting, characters and plot actions of chase and pursuit, to name a few. In addition, *Leatherstocking Tales* gave rise to the publication of a subliterary, commercial genre called dime novels³⁵ by mid-nineteenth century. However, unlike Cooper's social and moral ambiguities, dime novels included in their depictions not only fictional, larger-than-life heroes like Deadwood Dick, Rattlesnake Ned, and the Black Avenger but also real, experienced frontiersmen, such as Buffalo Bill Cody, Kit Carson, Wild Bill Hickok, Calamity Jane and Billy the Kid, to mention just a few, who exemplified the Wild West. In addition, the dime novel publishers, encouraged by the technological innovations, mass production and mass distribution methods developed right after the Civil War, tried to raise their financial stakes by commercializing, compartmentalizing and packaging a genre whose aim was the writing of as many novels as possible at as low a price as possible to satisfy the growing demand of eager Western readers mainly in the East. Eventually, Westerns, as the most popular type of dime novels, were standardized regarding length, tone and even content.

By the 1890s, as Turner's thesis highlighted, the official closure of the frontier had its consequences. Thus, dime novels' popularity and sales started to dwindle; their legacy began to be challenged, and the heroic exploits of larger-than-life heroes lost their long-held charm. The West itself had begun to urbanize and lose its apparent uniqueness. In fact, literary endeavours to preserve in fiction the vanishing West were led by Owen Wister, acclaimed as the "founder" of the modern Western.³⁶

³⁴ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular*, 88.

³⁵ A good study of the dime novel legacy in particular and the Western in general remains Christine Bold's *Selling the Wild West: Popular Fiction, 1980 to 1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

³⁶ The rise of the modern Western is exemplified with the publication of Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, in fact, the first attempt to depict fictionally the mythic West. Wister's work acted as the pace setter for other Westerns written in the first half of the twentieth century. For the development of the formula Western in the twentieth century see: James K. Folsom, *The American Western Novel* (New

Wister’s concerns, as a matter of fact, were matched only by Frederic Remington, the painter, who, praised the Wild West as the embodiment of true American values long forgotten in the East such as the inspiring scenery, healthfulness, masculinity, independent spirit, patriotism, democratic spirit, and free and easy ways of life. What is more important, Remington and Wister, as middlebrow Eastern artists, addressed mainly Eastern audiences and went beyond the photographic images of the West thus depicting a merging of the two halves, that is, the East and the West, in a timeless and ever present state:

First, they demonstrated the coming together of the two halves of the country, by foregrounding love stories which symbolize the meeting of the East and West and which act out the consequences of that event. Second, they created formal devices to set these plots within temporal and spatial conditions which defy change.³⁷

Wister’s timeless, reconciliatory, refined, manly, southern, violent-prone, stoic, romantic and quick-witted hero in *The Virginian* also acted as the pace-setter for a dozen of modern Westerns written in the first half of the twentieth century. As Etulain argues,

although some of the earliest literary and artistic depictions of the cowpuncher treated him as unruly and in need of a dose of refinement, when novelist Owen Wister and artist Frederic Remington became his champion in the 1890s they pictured him as a buoyant, romantic hero stripped of the excessive heroics of earlier Wild West characters but sufficiently vivacious and charming to gain large audiences.³⁸

Thus, *The Virginian* (1902), through a greenhorn Eastern narrator, highlighted the West as a battlefield where the unique American character and democratic values were fostered, the way Frederic Jackson Turner had argued some years earlier that “[i]n its emphases, as well as in its

Haven: College and University Press, 1966); Richard W. Etulain, *Re-imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996).

³⁷ Christine Bold, *Selling the Wild West: Popular fiction, 1980 to 1960*, 39.

³⁸ Richard Etulain, *Re-imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art*, xxi.

omissions, Wister's *The Virginian* is a thoroughgoing illustration of much of Turner's frontier."³⁹

As a result, during the first half of the twentieth century, the main bulk of Westerns remained committed to previous plots and character types that would occasionally turn to violent actions for the common good. The most popular Western of the 1920s and 1930s, in fact, became Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*, which, according to Slotkin, transformed the Western formula from an adolescent fantasy of the dime novel and a complex social and political allegory of Wister to a popular mythology for both grown-ups and children alike. Also, Grey added melodramatic overtones to the Western thus being the first writer to present successfully in the formula the version of the gunfighter with his particular costume, fast draw and mysterious past.⁴⁰

The Western's popularity, though, prevailed even after World War II through the distinguished works of Alan Le May, Jack Schaefer and Louis L'Amour, whose success eclipsed all the previous Western writers' sales.⁴¹ The most distinguished and revealing work of the era became *Shane* (1949) in which Schaefer depicts the West at its most imperative, transitional period right before the domestication and settlement. In addition, the novel depicts the Western hero as "a good man with a gun," even as a classical "scapegoat," who turns to violent actions in to restore normalcy and a painless passage for settlement before vanishing forever where he belongs, that is, in the popular imagination. As John G. Cawelti puts it: "In gunfighter Westerns like Jack Schaefer's *Shane*, the hero destroys the villains, but at the cost of his own relation to the new society."⁴²

Eventually, the second half of the twentieth century, as the other chapters undertake to analyze, proliferated in alternative fictional and historical representations of the West and marked the rise of a new type of Western which parodied and reversed the formula conventions for different ends. Yet, the prevalence of the classic Western until the 1960s would have been inconceivable without the crucial role played by Turner's thesis.

³⁹ John Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular*, 229-230.

⁴⁰ Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 216.

⁴¹ Christine Bold, *Selling the Wild West: Popular fiction, 1980 to 1960*, 125.

⁴² John Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique*, 79.

Beyond Turner’s Thesis

The American frontier has always represented an elusive term and topography. As such, its depiction has gone through countless re-evaluations and reconsiderations over the centuries. Nevertheless, the idea of its existence or disappearance continues to hold the Western reader under its spell for a variety of reasons, which include, above all, the aftermath impact of Turner’s thesis, in fact, the first academic attempt to analyze the importance of the frontier on the national character, democracy and beyond.

To the Puritans, the frontier consisted of the surrounding wilderness, which in itself represented the antithesis of the Puritan values. Therefore, one’s submergence and eventual survival in the wilderness proved a unique spiritual trial. After the post-revolution era, though, the concept of the frontier was loaded with idealistic and futuristic notions due to Jeffersonian agrarian myth. Thus, from a place to be avoided, unless one intended to test his/her faith during colonial times, the frontier was transformed into a glorious and ideal destination for the rugged and resourceful individualist in the nineteenth century.

In fact, the nineteenth century proved both decisive and disastrous for the Western frontier. *The Louisiana Purchase* (1803), Indian Removal Acts initiated in the 1830s, Gold Rushes, Manifest Destiny Doctrine, the Homestead Act (1862), the Railroad frontier, the Civil War, and, lastly, the census of 1890, which declared the frontier officially closed, to mention a few, irrevocably shaped the course of events. However, westward expansion would be best acclaimed for forging the American character and the democratic ideals as Fredrick Jackson Turner’s thought-provoking and apparently revolutionary paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893) expressed in a single sentence: “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development.”⁴³

Turner’s thesis was not the first attempt to call attention to the significance of the frontier; it rather brought the frontier to the forefront of American thought as Theodore Roosevelt, a historian and admirer of the West himself argued: “[Turner had put] into shape a good deal of thought that has been floating around loosely.”⁴⁴ In addition, Turner’s thesis, in

⁴³ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, edited with an introduction by Harold P. Simpson (N. Y: Frederick Ungar, 1985), 27. Henceforth all the page numbers will be shown parenthetically.

⁴⁴ Cited in Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, 29.

part a reaction to the mediocrity of Eastern academic establishment regarding the importance of the West, lies mainly in the fact that it was a premier study which rose above the traditional interpretations of the West and viewed the western experience in its complexity rather than in isolation:

Like so many pathbreaking figures, Turner first pointed out the shortcomings of previous interpretations of American history even as he argued for his frontier and later sectional/regional hypotheses. At the same time, he broke from many of his contemporaries by calling for analytical and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of the frontier.⁴⁵

Unlike Theodore Roosevelt's multivolume *The Winning of the West*, which envisioned the West through the heroic codes of the hunter, Turner's thesis also attempted to analyze even the economics and business ventures involved in the westward expansion and departed decisively from the dime novel legacy. As a result, the historian's new tools would include, "geography, geology, biology, meteorology, sociology, economics, literature, religion."⁴⁶

Hence, Turner's thesis, by irrevocably Americanizing the national values and decisively distinguishing them from their European counterparts, exerted an unparalleled impact on American letters in general well into the twentieth century. As Henry Nash Smith puts it, "[t]he 'frontier hypothesis' which he advanced on that occasion revolutionized American historiography and eventually made itself felt in economics and sociology, in literary criticism, and even in politics."⁴⁷

Firstly, Turner's notion that each generation writes the history of the past anew initiated a reconsideration of American letters and reoriented the study towards the West. Secondly, Turner's thesis, like Buffalo Bill Cody's *Wild West Shows* being performed simultaneously on the premises of the World's Columbian Exposition, considered the westward expansion as a "social evolution" where each westward step taken narrowed the gap between the two "great divides," that is, savagery and civilization.⁴⁸ It also

⁴⁵ Richard Etulain, *Re-imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art*, 32.

⁴⁶ Harold P. Simpson, "Introduction to Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Frontier in American History*" (N.Y.: Frederick Ungar, 1985), 7.

⁴⁷ Henry Nash Smith, *op. cit.*, 250.

⁴⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 34.

institutionalized America as a “composite nationality” ruled by rugged individualism and its unique democracy.

Finally, Turner’s thesis was pertained by elegiac tones as the “safety valve” had recently ceased to exist: “And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.”⁴⁹

Thus, due to the above-mentioned contributions, Turner’s thesis’ popularity remained intact and prevailed well into the twentieth century. It also became the paradigm for many more works and articles written about the West in the 1920s and 1930s. Even Frederic Logan Paxton’s Pulitzer-Prize winner *History of the American Frontier, 1763-1893* (1924), despite its minor re-evaluations, failed to depart from Turner’s frontier theory.

However, the 1930s would initiate a mounting opposition against the West as “The Garden of the World” and the publication of Walter Prescott Webb’s *The Great Plains* (1930) would reshape, not only Turner’s regionalist and sectionalist ideas by portraying the Great Plains as a separate cultural entity, but also brand the Western topography with only one word, aridity. As Richard W. Etulain argues, “Webb accomplished what no previous western historian had attempted; he clearly traced the historical development of a regional culture rather than merely describing a series of movements into the region.”⁵⁰

The second half of the twentieth century marked the emergence of new theories concerning the significance of the West. They seal the fate of Turner’s thesis itself, which had firstly brought the West to the attention of the entire nation. As such, Turner’s thesis underwent revisions based on the mid-twentieth-century’s point of view, that is, the incorporation of the neglected voices arbitrarily excluded, such as the role of the Indian and other minorities, the role of women and the family, to name a few, in shaping the western experience.

Patricia Limerick, in her well-known work *The Legacy of Conquest* (1987), which laid the foundations of the New Western Historiography, argues about the limitations of Turner’s thesis in the following way:

In fact, the apparently unifying concept of the frontier had arbitrary limits that excluded more than it contained. Turner was, to put it mildly, ethnocentric and nationalistic. English-

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁰ Richard Etulain, *Re-imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art*, 110.