

MAGNOLIAS AND MESQUITE: THE SOUTHWEST IN FICTION

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By

Donna Kay Pilcher, B.A.
(San Antonio, Texas)

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
I. SENSE OF BELONGING--TEXAS	6
II. SENSE OF BELONGING--OKLAHOMA AND NEW MEXICO TERRITORY	42
III. STRUGGLE	64
IV. EXPLOITATION	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY	100

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the world man's relationship to the land has remained lastingly significant. Drama is associated with the land: pathos, comedy, tragedy, and romance. A story needs a plot, a struggle, a conflict, and a complication, all of which the land can amply provide. Sometimes the story associated with the land is one of great love: fine, strong, and as beautiful as that of corresponding human relationships. Sometimes it is a story of escape, of bitter struggle, of desolation, and of death. But whatever its story may be, one can see in these selected Southwestern novels that Indian, Mexican, and Anglo alike are equally subject to the influence of the region in which they live. The Southwestern environment may be cruel or benignant, but it has a significant, lasting effect over them all.

The character of a country is the destiny of its people. The varied cultures of the Southwest have, each, in a particular way, been shaped by the "open" nature of their environment. In the Southwest people live much in the open, and if not actually in a rural setting, at least in a setting influenced directly by the freedom of "open

space." It is only natural that the land should play such a significant part in their lives.

The terms "Southwest" and "Southwestern writers" are somewhat vague. The Southwest is elastic, and it is not, like other sections of the country, exactly bounded.¹ Nearly everyone is aware that there is a Southwest, but few agree as to just where it is. Some will argue that it extends across the continent from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico and includes Nevada, Utah, Colorado, and Oklahoma, as well as California, Texas, and the states in between. Others will limit it to New Mexico and Arizona.² Geographically, a precise, universal definition does not exist. Generally speaking, there are, however, a number of characteristics that one can attribute to the Southwest. It is a diverse region, both culturally and physically. Not only Anglo, but Indian and Mexican cultural elements are pronounced. The area, although largely isolated and predominantly arid, has one of the most diverse landscapes in the world. Elevation changes the character of the earth,

¹Erna Fergusson, Our Southwest (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 3. Areas of the United States that would be considered more specifically bounded would be the South, the East, the Midwest, and the West Coast.

²Don W. Meinig, Southwest: Three Peoples in Geographical Change, 1600-1970 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 3.

and the Southwest elevations vary ten thousand feet or more. In a long day's journey one can travel through as many zones as if going from North Carolina to Hudson Bay and observe flora and fauna ranging from subarctic to subtropical.³ This, too, is a land that offers abundant avenues for health seekers and those searching for peace of mind from a hurried, materialistic society.⁴

Persons writing about this region are our Southwestern writers. This is a flexible term, but perhaps not as flexible as it could be, or should be. These persons write about the various stages of pioneering, Indian fighting, trail driving, and land booming, but this is only the beginning. Their topics and concerns are varied and deep. Cultural clashes and blending from a sociological approach, composition of the land as a scientific, geological study, productivity of the area in the realm of economic causes and effects, and numerous other subjects

³Harvey Fergusson, Rio Grande (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1945), pp. 5-6. (Hereinafter referred to as Fergusson, Rio Grande.) Harvey Fergusson, born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is the author of a number of books which deal with the Southwest. His major works include Wolf Song, In Those Days, Followers of the Sun, The Life of Riley, and The Conquest of Don Pedro. William Jeremiah Burke and Will D. Howe, eds., American Authors and Books, 1640-1940 (New York: Gramercy Publishing Co., 1943), p. 237. (Hereinafter referred to as Burke and Howe, American Authors and Books.)

⁴Ibid., p. x.

are covered well. Perhaps the Southwest has not yet produced any Wordsworths or Whitmans, but it can claim authors with great skill with language and grace of style with thorough insight and understanding of their literary domain.⁵ The volume, variety, and quality of work by Southwestern writers in all areas in recent years has been impressive, and the field for others is waiting and limitless, for

the very soil of the Southwest is veined with materials from which enduring literature may be fashioned. Out of this region should come what the nation has been waiting for these many years--the great American novel, the great American poem, and the great American play.⁶

The Southwestern writers included in this study are those persons writing specifically about Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Oklahoma. Because each writer emphasizes the setting and customs of a particular locality as important factors in affecting the temperament of his

⁵C. L. Sonnichsen, ed., The Southwest in Life and Literature (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1962), p. 5.

⁶Hilton Ross Greer, "Literature of the Southwest," in Prose and Poetry of America, ed. by H. Ward McGraw (Dallas: L. W. Singer Company, 1935), p. 893. (Hereinafter referred to as McGraw, Prose and Poetry in America.)

characters, their ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, the majority of the novels discussed can be classified as regional novels. John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, while emphasizing the setting and customs of Oklahoma in the early twentieth century, also shows the influence of social and economic conditions upon the characters and events. It can, therefore, be classified as a sociological novel.⁷ For additional support and emphasis of the various themes, two nonfiction works are related, Harvey Fergusson's Rio Grande and J. Frank Dobie's A Vaquero of the Brush Country. In all of these selections one gains a strong sense of man's relationship to the land and a feeling of the color and drama of the Southwest which is centuries deep.

⁷M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (3d ed.; Dallas: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971), p. 113.

C H A P T E R I

SENSE OF BELONGING

Texas

There is an innate desire and need in mankind to feel that he belongs. A sense of belonging provides for him the stability and the feeling of permanence necessary for performing the menial, and accomplishing the great, tasks of living. Without this security, man is merely a scientific organism functioning in the world, devoid of feeling and purpose. Although there are many avenues for this fulfillment, one of the most significant and powerful is a love of the earth, so basic in its compounds, so closely associated with life. Past, present, and future have merged and always will merge in the ritual of seed-time and harvest. And what could provide more security than that which has endured from the beginning of life, the beginning of time?

This sense of belonging provided through great love of and association with the earth is a major theme of many Southwestern writers. Laura Krey's⁸ brilliant

⁸Laura Krey was born December 18, 1890, in Galveston, Texas, and grew up on a plantation along the

novel, And Tell of Time, is a primary example. While the principal setting of this novel is the "bottom lands"⁹ of the Texas Brazos, the story begins with the homeward journey of war weary soldiers following the Civil War. After years of fighting, the promise of the land helped them forget the past and once more instilled in them a feeling of stability and hope. Their thoughts shifted from pain, hunger, and endless marching to seed-time and harvest. They began to think about corn, cotton, oats, and green watermelons. They began to speak of tomorrow, of the seasons, of cool water, and of home.¹⁰ Krey stated,

Brazos River. Her mother died when she was a few months old, and she grew up largely in a world of men who taught her the workings of politics and the practical management of a plantation. She wrote at an early age in Texas and later at Mary Baldwin Seminary in Staunton, Virginia. Her major works include And Tell of Time and On the Long Tide. Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, eds., Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1942), pp. 774-775. (Hereinafter referred to as Kunitz and Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors.)

⁹The "bottom lands" of the Brazos are those lands near the river level. Because of the alluvial deposit, or silt, that high waters leave on the fields, they have fertile soil that gives rich yields of cotton and other vegetation. Laura Krey, And Tell of Time (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938), p. 208. (Hereinafter referred to as Krey, And Tell of Time.)

¹⁰Ibid., p. 4.

Many of the men stooped as they walked, and, without thinking, picked up handfuls of the earth, sifting the damp soil slowly and expertly through their rough fingers. And whenever they sat to rest, their hands would begin to grope, by old habit, through wet, packed leaves to the soiled earth, so comfortable in its permanency. Slowly the sensations of warmth and moisture began to penetrate their minds. Then, as if surprised that they were still alive, that the ground still bore fruit, one after another of them would exclaim, "Why, there's still time to plant."¹¹

Cavin Darcy, a member of the Texas Fourth, was one of these men, and he was eager to get back to Locust Hill Plantation, his home on the Brazos. Working the land was the only kind of life Cavin had ever known. He had never pictured any way of living different from the one in which he was brought up, and he could not imagine being where he could not throw himself on the ground at will and feel the earth beneath him and his body moving with it.¹²

Cavin had an elemental kinship with the earth. He drew a warm contentment from the rich soil and the strength of Antaeus.¹³ After the battle of Chickamauga he lay on

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 86.

¹³Antaeus was a giant of Greek mythology who was invincible while touching the earth. When lifted into

the ground with a wounded shoulder, surrounded by dead comrades. But he never thought of dying. It would be impossible for him to die, touching the earth as he did with warm, groping, loving fingers. It was as though some magnetic current from the earth passed directly into him, a current which unified his impressions into a strong sense of life.¹⁴ He knew, without putting his thoughts into words, that the rhythm and strength beating up through the earth also flowed in his own veins. If he had been an introspective person, he would have understood long ago that he had fought in this war not to preserve slavery or states' rights, but simply in order that a man might continue to work the earth as he pleased.¹⁵

After reaching home, Cavin found that much needed to be done. With the enthusiasm that was a part of his nature, he began plowing, planting, and fertilizing. He took great pride in his plantation lands. He

the air by Heracles, he lost his power, and Heracles was able to destroy him. William Morris, ed., The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (Dallas: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), p. 55.

¹⁴Krey, And Tell of Time, pp. 163-164.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 338.

enjoyed thinking that the land under him as far as the eye could see was his own and that it would yield almost limitless vegetation. As he rode home each evening, he gazed with satisfaction upon the orchard with its peaches, oranges, sweet red pomegranates, figs, persimmons, grapes, and bananas. It was as exciting to him as having a royal flush in a tight poker game. A sense of plenty and contentment rushed over him, and he told himself for the thousandth time that the Lord never intended anybody to go hungry on the Brazos.¹⁶

He observed Lucina's¹⁷ flower garden. The snowdrops and narcissus which he had dug up in Georgia on their wedding day were thicker by far than they had been in Georgia. He looked with critical appreciation at his vegetable garden. There were green turnip tops, lettuce, carrots, beets, and beans. He thought that a man would have to be blind not to enjoy watching things grow, and

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 650-651.

¹⁷Lucina Lyttleton was a first cousin of Cavin Darcy's. Her family lived in Georgia, and on Cavin's way home from the Civil War, he stopped by to visit with them. He stayed several months, and during that time the two fell in love. They were married and returned to the Darcy plantation in Texas. Ibid., pp. 63-116, passim.

suddenly felt sorry for people who lived in the cities. They must surely lose a feeling for the earth and a sense of the Creator's great magic.¹⁸

One evening he and Lucina were sitting on the veranda, and she looked over and smiled at him. For a moment he returned her smile, and then his attention wandered off to his land and the locust blossoms strewn on the warm, moist earth. Watching the night closing down over the fields, he felt that life was strong and sweet. He was where he belonged.¹⁹ This sense of belonging was reinforced by old Judge White, a close family friend, who often came to visit. When Judge White, walked into the room one day, Cavin was figuring in his little black account book where he kept all the plantation records. The Judge remarked,

"You remind me of General Washington. Do you remember how, while he was President--even while he was in the army--he kept on making notes about his farm? It looks to me that any Southerner worth a damn don't feel natural and right off his own land."²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 651-652.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 532.

²⁰Ibid., p. 495.

Lucina, though not an indigenous product of Texas, soon felt as if she, too, were in her destined place. Traveling from Georgia to Locust Hill Plantation with Cavin, her first view of Texas was Galveston. The homes there had high, wide balconies screened with vines overlooking side gardens full of brilliant color. Rows of palms, oleanders, and grassy lanes were planted between the curbs, and lemon trees, banana plants, and deep yellow roses were everywhere. A heavy fragrance of roses, mint, and sweet lavender hung suspended in the air. She thought that there must certainly be more luxuriant growth and beauty here than at home in Georgia.²¹

On the way from Galveston to the plantation Lucina became aware of the mysterious beauty of the prairie. Tawny grass stretched endlessly, and this was broken here and there by clumps of white bois-d'arcs and scraggly pin oaks. The whole prairie seemed to be sleeping under such warm and brilliant colors as she had never seen before. It all seemed almost unearthly; she had a momentary feeling that she was on a strange, deserted planet. But despite its strangeness, this flat land seemed somehow

²¹Ibid., p. 174.

familiar and cherished, like something dimly remembered from a remote past.²² She said to Cavin,

"I know why you feel the way you do about this country. . . . It's--well, it's mysterious. It makes you shiver, like a dream that you keep dreaming over and over at night--a dream in which everything is new and strange and, yet, too, old as time."²³

After a week of travel they emerged from the open plain into a completely different region. This region was full of huge, sprawling trees heavily laden with moss and mistletoe. The soil was no longer gray, white, and sandy, but a deep, rich black, a loam so deep that its bottom had never been reached by a plow. Cavin explained that there was no better land anywhere, for the overflow of the Brazos replenished the soil. He showed her wild grapes and wild plums, dewberries, blackberries, apples, pecans, and walnuts. He began to try to tell her how the bottom lands looked in spring. The ground, he explained, would be covered with violets, mayflowers, and sweet smelling shrubs, and the magnolias, red buds, and crepe myrtles would be at their best. He then decided that there was

²²Ibid., pp. 197-198.

²³Ibid., p. 198.

no need for all of this description; she would see it all for herself in only a few months.²⁴

Lucina had always thought of the earth as a consoling friend and confidant from which she received a feeling of peace and stability. At home in Georgia during the first year of the war, many times she would go out alone into the fields. Sometimes she would lie among the oats, flat against the earth, and look straight into the clouds. For a time, her perplexities and fears would be put aside, and the war would seem remote and unreal. She would walk back to the house content and quiet, suffused with a peace like that exemplified by a restful, slow moving river.²⁵ Lucina had this same feeling at Locust Hill. Every year when the plowing was over, she was reminded of the aeons in which men had planted seed in rich soil, receiving it all back a hundredfold in due time. She told herself,

Planting and growth, sun and shadow, wind and rain, cold and warmth, had endured and would endure, regardless of any individual's brief pitiful life;

²⁴Ibid., pp. 208-211.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 96-97.

and past, present, and future would always merge in a ritual of seed-time and harvest shared by all mankind.²⁶

Thinking on this, she felt a deep, soothing calm. Like Cavin, she wondered if people who lived in cities--away from the earth, its growth, and the seasons--must not become blind and directionless, losing hope and a sense of purpose in God's great plan. She was lucky to be here, lucky to be alive.²⁷

The Darcys' love of the land along the Brazos was shared by Jeffrey Fentress²⁸ in Krey's On the Long Tide. Jeffrey had journeyed to Texas with James Long,²⁹

²⁶Ibid., p. 659.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 659-660.

²⁸Jeffrey Fentress was the son of Wayles Fentress, a cousin of Thomas Jefferson, in whose care he left his Virginia plantation, Box Hedges, while he traveled to the Southwest. Wayles was killed while he and Jeffrey were both members of Andrew Jackson's army, then fighting the Creek Indians. Jeffrey went to New Orleans where he became employed by his wealthy cousin, Hugh Galt, an influential merchant. It was in New Orleans that Jeffrey first met Long and decided to go to Texas. Laura Krey, On the Long Tide (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1940), pp. 3-17, 18-54, passim. (Hereinafter referred to as Krey, On the Long Tide.)

²⁹General James Long was a promoter of land in Texas, and he gathered three hundred volunteers and established a temporary government in Nacogdoches. He

whom he had met in New Orleans. His first view of Texas was Galveston Bay. He thought as he stood on the ship's rail that this lonely, lovely shore must exist on another planet. Jean Lafitte, the French pirate on whose vessel Jeffrey was traveling, explained to him,

"I have always loved places, never women. Places --islands. Grande Terre. Campeche--yes, all the islands I have ever seen. Sometimes at Campeche the fog floats in like silver, and then the sand is silver, too; but oftener--oh! much oftener--it is yellow, like the bright sun overhead; and, then, the Gulf is blue, blue like the dress the Madonna wears."³⁰

Long continued to employ Jeffrey in Galveston, and he settled near that city. Jeffrey's home, Point Comfort, on Shell Bayou, became a place of retreat not only for General Long, but also for other well-known, influential Texans. At Point Comfort there was an abundance of fruit, peaches, persimmons, plums, grapes, and all types of vegetables. There were flowers of innumerable varieties, and rich, blooming fields of cotton.³¹

headed the Long Expedition, 1819-1820, and was assassinated in Mexico City in 1822. His wife became known as the historic "Mother of Texas." Lester Fields Sheffy, Ima Christina Barlow, and Alyce McWilliams, Texas (Dallas: Banks Upshaw Co., 1954), p. 64.

³⁰Krey, On the Long Tide, p. 64.

³¹Ibid., p. 208.

Jeffrey often thought of how little use money was here. In these prairies and the bottom lands the Lord had provided "a perpetual mint for you to dip your hand into."³²

It was not avarice that had dictated Jeffrey's choice of the acreage he acquired. He yearned for the sensuous beauty of the earth--the slope of the wooded fields, the light shining on the pastures, the water flowing through the reeds, or the shadows on a grassy shoreline--as a man might desire the beauty of his lover. He knew that money in the bank, as compared with black land, sugar cane, corn, or cotton, was dead and sterile. Only in planting where none had sown before could man hope to leave behind some living evidence that he had once walked the earth, transforming it at his will. Sometimes he sat thinking about his holdings as one might mentally go through the pages of a photograph album. But to the day he died, accumulated funds were to him always slightly unreal, not like good, solid land that one could touch, feel, walk upon, and see in all its many forms.³³

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., pp. 466-467.

Jeffrey knew that he would probably have to fight to keep Point Comfort. Stephen F. Austin³⁴ had written to him stating that war with Mexico was inevitable. The Mexicans were in San Antonio and regardless of whether their demands were met or not, they would try to take over the country. Using military control, they intended to regulate the land business along with everything else. Jeffrey thought,

"Land speculators. . . . That's what they've taken to calling anybody that's got more than a calf pasture to his name. . . . Why, yes, in a way, I guess that's what most of us are. What man in his senses wouldn't rather own land than money? And if you did, and lived on it, and treasured it, were you apt to turn it over to anybody without a fight? Why, old Bahema knew that much."³⁵

He knew that likely the Mexicans did not know why they were fighting. They were poor, starved peons led by men no better than themselves. But he knew why he was fighting.

³⁴Stephen F. Austin took over his father's plans to colonize Texas. On June 15, 1826, Austin petitioned the Mexican president for permission to colonize land from the Lavaca River to the San Jacinto River. In 1835 he became commander of the army fighting for Texas independence. Frank W. Johnson, A History of Texas and Texans (New York: American Historical Society, 1914), pp. 7-21.

³⁵Krey, On the Long Tide, pp. 520-521.

He and all his people before him had known. Loving life with a great hunger, they had refused to yield their land or their freedom to anyone or anything.³⁶ His land would no longer be his unless victory were certain, for it was pledged now either to Guivi or to the government. Even if the settlers were victorious, things would be different. The government would have to reexamine the legality of the land grants and make numerous investigations.³⁷

In April after the fall of the Alamo and Goliad, Jeffrey returned to Point Comfort en route to Harrisburg. When he reached the front gate, he saw that the Mexican troops had not arrived. The house still stood unharmed. The peach trees, the cotton fields, and the vegetable and flower gardens were just as he had left them.³⁸ He thought suddenly,

"For this . . . a man loved a country. For all this. . . ." A man loved a country for those he had laid in its soil; for the child that was his; for the memory of how the wind blew in and the tide swept out and how the long moss swayed in the evening breeze. "For all this." And to what better end

³⁶Ibid., p. 626.

³⁷Ibid., p. 632.

³⁸Ibid., p. 619.

could he bend his years than to help create something which would live beyond himself? Was not this, in itself, a kind of immortality?³⁹

Teresa, Jeffrey's wife, was the daughter of Señor Felipe Isidro Manuelos, a Mexican official in Bexar.⁴⁰ She felt serene and content living at Point Comfort with Jeffrey. She knew that nearly everyone thought this country was raw and wild, but to her it appeared to exist in some quiet, changeless peace. She would never forget the summer nights on the Gulf after sunset. The stars would be low and luminous and the air full of the fragrance of moist earth, sweet-scented cedar, and flowers. She felt that here was a stability, an eternal permanence, incapable of being affected by change. She would not have been disappointed to learn that as long as she lived she should never see another human being other than Jeffrey or leave this lonely, lovely land.⁴¹

Cornelia Fentress, Jeffrey's sister, came to Point Comfort to live after Teresa died in childbirth. In spite of the Indians, the hard work, and the war,

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 133.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 297-298.

Cornelia was at peace here. She particularly liked the late fall. Always at this time of the year she began to experience some odd, pulsating excitement and reassuring joy at the perennial fertility of the earth. At the sight of the striped cane piled high, the crisp air, the aroma of black walnut casings, and the sight of the wild ducks flying south, she felt caught up in the perpetual turning of the earth.⁴² Like Lucina, in And Tell of Time, Cornelia felt a deep, soothing calm, for seed-time and harvest-time had endured and would endure to be shared by all mankind.

Krey, with her first-hand knowledge of plantation life and close association with the soil, vividly depicts the prolific Texas bottom lands. The characters in And Tell of Time and On the Long Tide truly believed that they were in their destined place along the Brazos. From this land they obtained strength and vitality, and in possessing a feeling of harmony with the land, they gained a firm sense of belonging and a harmonious relationship with their Creator.

⁴²Ibid., p. 562.

Jerry Llewellyn, in Dorothy Scarborough's⁴³ In the Land of Cotton, owned Greenacres, a great cotton plantation also along the Brazos. He worked hard all year, and as he admired the expanse of white bolls on foliage still green, a thrill came over him. His work and his worry were small prices to pay for this. It had been a good year, and the land would probably yield over a bale an acre.⁴⁴

Serena, or Rena as she was commonly called, shared her father's love of the land. As a child she would often pretend that she were a cotton plant, her roots growing deep into the soil. She swayed her small

⁴³Dorothy Scarborough was born in Carmel, Texas, in 1877, and was the daughter of Judge John B. Scarborough and Mary Adelaide Ellison Scarborough. She received both her B.A. and M.A. from Baylor University, in Waco, Texas. In 1917 she received a Ph.D. from Columbia, and in 1923 she was presented an honorary literary degree from Baylor, chiefly for her work in collecting mountain ballads and Negro folksongs. Her works include From a Southern Porch, In the Land of Cotton, The Wind, Impatient Griselda Can't Get a Redbird, and A Song Catcher in Southern Mountains. The Wind, first published anonymously, was made into an effective silent film tragedy starring Lillian Gish. Kunitz and Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, pp. 1238-1239.

⁴⁴Dorothy Scarborough, In the Land of Cotton (New York: Macmillan Company, 1936), p. 10. (Hereinafter referred to as Scarborough, In the Land of Cotton.)

body to and fro, and she thought she could feel the thrill of the earth's vitality running through her. She would act out each phase in the cotton cycle, planting, growth, harvesting, ginning, compressing into bales, and finally selling. She would spend hours wondering where each bale that she had personified would be sold. Rena and Phoebe Darrow, who was Rena's close friend, and Ben Wilson, whose father was a tenant farmer on the neighboring land, often played together. In the roadside along the white cotton fields and in the open spaces which were not under cultivation, the lupin bloomed, lifting its hyacinthine spikes of purple, white, and scarlet, and the fields of bluebonnets and wild mustard made the world look like a colorful patchwork quilt.⁴⁵ Rena would at these times comment on the beauty of the land by saying, "'S pretty here, now isn't it?"⁴⁶

As Rena grew older, she retained her love of the land's beauty and a sincere appreciation of it. She saw the land with the poet's eye, for its beauty, its grace, and the symbolic suggestion which it offered. When she

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 131-133.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 131.

went away to college, Baylor, in Waco, she and Ben Wilson saw each other from time to time, and on these occasions they would often take long walks and drives in the country. One spring day Rena and Ben took a long walk to the south of town. Beside the road mesquite trees leaned, emitting a faint perfume. There were cottonwoods, chinaberry trees, and liveoaks.⁴⁷ Rena saw a vacant stretch of land where bluebonnets bloomed lavishly and gave an exclamation of delight, "Oh, let's go right into it. When I see bluebonnets blooming I want to hug them to my heart."⁴⁸ They walked into the field; Rena sat down and gathered the flowers to her breast. She told Ben that at that moment she was completely happy and only wished that that moment could last forever.⁴⁹

The love that Jerry Llewellyn and Rena had for the land was shared by Ben's father, Jeff Wilson. Jeff was a tenant farmer who had experienced only few good times. His life had been one of hardships and struggle, constantly working his rented land, worrying about the

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 269.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 270.

⁴⁹Ibid.

soil, the rain, the drought, and the numerous pests that can destroy a crop in a single season. He rarely had enough money for the necessities of life and was never able to save enough to buy land of his own. Ben, after finishing college, took a job in town and moved his family there until his father, whose health had been bad for years, recovered. Ben had great difficulty in reconciling Jeff to town life. The old man pined for a farm with a pathetic homesickness.⁵⁰ He forgot all the hardships and disappointments and remembered only the good things, the thrill of seeing the fresh earth upturned behind his plow, of covering the soft seeds with soil, and of watching the young plants grow. The instinctive desire shared by every born farmer and lover of the country came back to him.⁵¹ He explained to Ben,

"Town's no fit place to live in spring and summer and fall. . . . 'S all right, maybe, in winter, so the young 'uns can go to school, but when growing time comes round I want to live in the country. . . . I want to raise cotton. . . . I ain't satisfied with an indoor job. Now that I'm feeling better, I want to farm again."⁵²

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 310.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 310-311.

After Ben's death⁵³ Jerry Llewellyn gave Jeff a small farm with just enough land that he could work himself, with help from Jerry during busy seasons. It was not so much, however, that the children would be tied to the farm. This made a new man of Jeff. Just knowing that at last he owned a piece of land gave him an energy and an enthusiasm which he had never known.

Scarborough, in The Wind, changes the setting from the Brazos bottom lands to the prairies of West Texas. Lige Hightower understood these prairies and found in them a great beauty and a significant meaning. The afternoon that he was driving Letty Mason⁵⁴ to her cousin's

⁵³Ben had traveled to Greenacres, taking a leave of absence from his job, in order to help Jerry Llewellyn. The price of cotton was at an all time low, and many people in the community believed that if the plantation owners and renters would refuse to pick and/or gin this season's crop, the prices would rise. Jerry Llewellyn knew that the cotton surplus was only one of many causes for the economic depression, and he refused to listen to the dictates of the community. He continued to pick and gin his cotton. He was warned that if he continued this policy, his fields and his gin would be burned, and it was Ben's job to operate the gin a few hours a day and guard it at night. One night three persons whom Ben recognized immediately came to burn the gin. He spoke to them, and as he turned, one of them fired a shot. Ben was hit and fell to the ground; before he could regain consciousness, the gin was burning. He came to but without enough strength to do anything. The Llewellyns found his body the next morning. Ibid., pp. 328-359, passim.

⁵⁴Letty Mason was from Virginia. Her mother had just recently died, and her pastor had written Beverly

ranch, she remarked that it was an odd feeling to be out in the open with so much space and so little protection. Lige replied that a person knew where he was when he was on the open plains, and this was really a great country once one got to know it. He continued,

"When you look at it one way, a man don't amount to a pin-point. But I'm more of a man when I'm here on the plains. Seems like I can stand up on my hind legs and look God in the face man to man, you might say, and He understands me, and I understand Him When you're out on the range long stretches by yourself, when you don't hardly see a human being, you come to know how little importance folks are."⁵⁵

Months later when Letty questioned Lige about there ever being any flowers or beauty on the prairie, he told her that the ugliness this year was a result of the drought. He then described the beauty of the plains in the spring when they had had rain. He said that in ordinary years the plains would be beautiful, like a great flower bed,

Mason, her cousin who owned a ranch near Sweetwater, asking if Letty could possibly make a home with him since there were no other relatives. Beverly had promptly replied that she was welcome, and Letty was now traveling to her new home. Dorothy Scarborough, The Wind (New York: Grosset and Dunlap Publishers, 1925), p. 19. (Hereinafter referred to as Scarborough, The Wind.)

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 53-54.

or like a giant rainbow.⁵⁶ He described bear grass, yucca, buttercups, daisies, larkspurs, honeysuckle, and wild onions, and further explained that

"Everything comes green an' blooms all at once, as if it knowed that 't wouldn't be long before the hot winds burned it up. The ground is like a gay-colored quilt with all sorts 'o flowers smilin' up at you. Makes you forget the cussed hard times of the winter, an' the northers an' the sandstorms an' everything you been through."⁵⁷

Lige was glad he was a cowpuncher with the beauty of the prairie to think about and look at during the good springs, and he hoped that someday he could make Letty see and understand the true beauty and depth of this lovely country, this country to which he so completely belonged.

Scarborough, in the two preceding novels, describes strikingly different areas of Texas, the land along the Brazos, depicted in In the Land of Cotton, and the prairies of West Texas, represented in The Wind. But she brilliantly illustrates the harmonious feeling that those with a genuine understanding of the land on which they live and work share, regardless of their geographical location.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 203-204.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 205.

Adam Fry, in Larry McMurtry's⁵⁸ Leaving Cheyenne, owned a ten thousand acre ranch in Archer County, near Wichita Falls, Texas. Adam had chosen his land well. There were creeks to the southeast and to the northwest with a river down the middle.⁵⁹ He built good tanks, kept the fences in excellent repair, and with the help of his son, Gideon, worked the stock. He often said to Gid that he thought he had a good ranch, one of the best in the entire area. He had put many years into it and a lot of hard work, but he had gotten it all back in money and satisfaction. He hoped that Gid would learn his lessons well so that someday he could manage it and keep it prosperous.⁶⁰

Adam was middle-aged; his health was poor, and he was in pain much of the time. His wife had died several

⁵⁸There is very little public knowledge on the life of Larry McMurtry. He was born June 6, 1936, in Wichita County, Texas, and spent the first eighteen years of his life in or about Archer City. He attended Rice University from September, 1954, until January, 1956, and graduated from North Texas State University in Denton, Texas, in May, 1958. He enrolled in Rice University graduate school in September, 1958, and received his M.A. in May, 1960. He taught at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth and at Rice and is now living in Waterford, Virginia.

⁵⁹Larry McMurtry, Leaving Cheyenne (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), p. 125.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 5.

years earlier, and Gid and his ranch were all that he had. Even when the pain was so terribly bad, he found a consolation in thinking about his land. He would remark,

"I got a good ranch. That's one thing that cheers me up. The best land in the country. . . . The nice thing is that I'm a damn sight nearer worn out than this country. I'd hate to get old in a worn-out country."⁶¹

Adam committed suicide after finding out that the doctors could do nothing for him. The pain was unbearable, and being physically unable to work was, for him, a fate worse than death.⁶²

Gid inherited the ranch and his father's great love of the land. Gid, subconsciously, for years had felt that he belonged on the ranch. However, he first actually became aware of it about six months before his father died. He and his good friend, Johnny McCloud, were working on a ranch in the Panhandle. Gid did not mind the work, or even the cold weather, but the homesickness almost killed him. He evaluated the situation and thought to himself,

⁶¹Ibid., p. 122.

⁶²Ibid., p. 123.

I just minded feeling like I wasn't where I belonged. Home was where I belonged, but tell that to Johnny and he would have laughed like hell. He didn't feel like he belonged to any place, and I did. . . . I couldn't get over thinking about Dad and Molly and the country and the ranch, the things I knew. The things that were mine. It wasn't that I liked being in Archer County so much--sometimes I hated it. But I was just tied up with it; whatever happened there was happening to me, even if I wasn't there to see it. The country might not be very nice and the people might be onery; but it was my country and my people, and no other country was; no other people, either. You do better staying with what's your own, even if it's hard.⁶³

Gid started home the next day.

Gid liked what he saw on the ranch; he and his dad had done a good job. He knew, too, that with his dad gone, he would have to work as never before. It was his sole responsibility, now. His first concern was buying new land. He did not want to stop with what he had inherited.⁶⁴ Johnny McCloud came back, and Gid hired him immediately. Having Johnny to do some of the work gave Gid more time to get ambitious. He explained,

and the land bug began to bite me pretty bad. I had already decided that land was something I'd never have enough of.⁶⁵

⁶³Ibid., p. 106.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 126.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 149.

He went to the bank at Wichita Falls and borrowed enough money to buy three sections that joined his property on the northwest. And this was only the beginning. Johnny told Molly⁶⁶ one day when he was visiting her that Gid was "off trying to buy him another ranch for me to take care of. Gid's plain land-crazy."⁶⁷

Gid was not "land-crazy" as Johnny stated, but he realized that land was something worth getting and worth keeping. His drive and vitality stemmed from his love of the earth. To him land was stability and permanence; it was wholesomeness and strength. All of his life he worked it. Even after he reached his sixties, he did not slow down and refused to hire anyone but Johnny on a permanent basis. After a kidney operation Gid was given strict orders from his doctor not to work the ranches.⁶⁸ Gid, like his father before him, had rather

⁶⁶Molly Taylor (White) was a good friend of both Gid's and Johnny's. They had all grown up together, and throughout their lifetimes the two men competed for Molly's affections. Molly married Eddie White, an oil field worker, who was killed in Oklahoma a few years after they were married. Molly had two children, one by Gid and one by Johnny, although she never married either of them. Ibid., pp. 20-279, passim.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 158.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 277.

die than be idle, and he kept on as before. One afternoon he and Johnny were working on one of the windmills, and Gid fell while trying to connect an overhead pipe. Johnny rushed him to the hospital in the old truck, but it was too late. Gideon Fry was dead.⁶⁹ Gid had lived a good life, though, on his beloved land, and he worked it to the last, the way he wanted.

Molly Taylor White⁷⁰ had lived on the old Taylor place all of her life. It was on a hill, and one could see for miles and miles around it. Some said this was the highest point in Archer County. When Old Man Taylor, Molly's father, was alive, the place was always a mess. The fences needed repairing, the barn needed rebuilding, the yard needed clearing.⁷¹ Gid described the place thus:

His yard looked like a slaughterhouse anyway. The old man done everything he had to do in the yard, and it showed it: there were bones and chicken heads and empty whiskey jugs and junk iron and baling wire and old shoes and pieces of plank and mule harness and horse turds and slop buckets, and I don't know

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 289.

⁷⁰See supra, n. 66, p.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 26.

what all else scattered everywhere. Molly said she tried to clean the yard up once in a while, but the old man wouldn't let her: anything that was there, he said, was there because he might need it.⁷²

After Molly's father died, she had Gid and Johnny help her with the place. They cleaned the yard, repaired the fences and the barn, and checked the stock. Molly was quite capable and with occasional help from them, she managed well. Her two sons, Jimmy and Joe, also helped when they were home, but they joined the service when World War II broke out, and both were killed. With the two boys gone, Gid and Johnny suggested that Molly move into town. She would not listen. She was where she belonged. She loved that little hill and that little farm. She had been born there; she had raised her own family there, and this was where she wanted to die. Many years before Johnny had asked her if she were curious to see the world at all. Molly had replied, "No, I'm doing just as much living right here and now as I could anywhere."⁷³ And she did.

McMurtry, in describing the Archer City area with which he was so familiar, shows that one sometimes

⁷²Ibid., pp. 26-27.

⁷³Ibid., p. 253.

becomes aware that he belongs to an area, a country, and the land when he is away from them. Gid realized this when he was many miles from Archer County. McMurtry's other characters in Leaving Cheyenne, Molly Taylor and Adam Fry, did not become aware of their love for this area and the land at any specific moment, but they genuinely shared Gid's feelings. They, too, were where they felt they must be.

J. Frank Dobie,⁷⁴ in A Vaquero of the Brush Country, writes of the Texas cowboy and his feeling for the land, specifically relating the experiences of John Ducan Young. He explains that in Southwest Texas the cowboy is referred to as a "vaquero." The word stems from "vaca," which is Spanish for cow and was originally applied only to Spanish and Mexican cowboys. However, from early days Texans have used the term without reference to nationality. These brush hands, although untutored in books, were not ignorant. They had a genuine love of

⁷⁴J. Frank Dobie was born in Live Oak County, Texas, in 1888. He has been a rancher, a traveler, a collector and writer of folklore and professor of English at The University of Texas. His major works include Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver, The Ben Lilly Legend, Coronado's Children: Tales of Lost Mines and Buried Treasures of the Southwest, Cow People, and Guide to Life and Literature of the Southwest. McGraw, Prose and Poetry of America, p. 1107.

the land and for the wide open spaces, and they learned to read the signs of the earth, the sky, and the animals with whom they worked. Their profession engendered pride, for it required skill, alertness, resourcefulness, close observation, will power, and fidelity. It took years of experience, practice, and study of nature to become a top hand. They were true artists in their field.⁷⁵

John Duncan Young described his life as a vaquero and explained some of the specific skills involved. On the roundups the wild steers would run and fight all the way. When one rebellious steer would head out of the herd for the brush, the vaquero would instantly have to use all his skill to rope the wild animal. But the good vaquero had to be much more than a good roper or rider; he had to understand the strange nature of these animals. He had to be able to water the herd so that all drank freely and fully. He had to trail the animals so that they put on weight rather than lost it; and he had to be able to make them lie down in the middle of the day. The cattle often panicked during the night; so in order to prevent a stampede, the hands slept all around the pens,

⁷⁵J. Frank Dobie, A Vaquero of the Brush Country (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1946), p. xiii.

and at any disturbance got up and sang to them. Soothing and calming these nervous creatures at such a time was a difficult and important task, for no description of the stampede of a large herd at night could convey the reality of it.⁷⁶

John Duncan Young loved this life greatly at the time he lived it, and equally as much in memory. Hearing the old-timers speak of the many sacrifices they had to make and setting themselves up as martyrs disgusted him. He explained,

I and the other happy-go-lucky cowboys of the frontier that I knew made no unusual sacrifices for the sake of posterity. I am glad that I was not born into a more mechanically comfortable and a softer cushioned age. We, like all men of all ages, were pretty much creatures of circumstance. That circumstance sometimes brought out in us endurance and fidelity almost heroic, modesty shall not prevent my admitting; but if we had not grown up with the soil between our toes, the wind in our face, the starlight in our eyes, and a peculiar and strict code of ethics in our consciousness, perhaps we might not have been able to meet the tasks that were applied.⁷⁷

Thus, Young gave credit to his life on the land and its many challenges as the impetus which fostered strength

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 15-19.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 95.

and endurance, thereby enabling him to meet the tasks of his time.

Dobie, being a rancher himself at one time, realistically describes the rangeland and gives clear explanations of the activities and skills required of the Texas cowhands. In depicting the lives of the Texas vaqueros, as exemplified by John Duncan Young, Dobie illustrates the significance of this life close to the soil in the formulation of characteristics which enabled them to fulfill their destinies.

For Jordan, "Bick " Benedict, in Edna Ferber's⁷⁸ Giant, Reata,⁷⁹ his ranch, was life; Reata was the world. Bick was the third generation of Benedicts to own Reata, and he ran his empire almost singlehandedly. He knew

⁷⁸Edna Ferber was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, on August 15, 1887. She was the daughter of Jacob Charles Ferber, a storekeeper, and Julia Neuman Ferber. Her childhood was spent largely in Appleton, Wisconsin. Her works include Dawn O'Hara Roast Beef Medium, Fanny Herself, Half Portions, So Big, Giant, Show Boat, Cimarron, A Peculiar Treasure, and Saratoga Trunk. Kunitz and Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, pp. 444-445.

⁷⁹Reata was the 2,500,000 acre ranch belonging to the Benedicts. One of the largest ranches in Texas, no place was far from their domain. Edna Ferber, Giant (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1962), p. 7. (Herein after referred to as Ferber, Giant.)

every square inch of it, every bull, every steer, and every acre of land. He had thousands of people working for him: vaqueros, veterinarians, agricultural experimentalists; but he asked no one to do what he could not do himself. He worked during the round-ups with his men, riding, roping, and branding. In this activity he found an exciting challenge and a powerful exhilaration.⁸⁰ Every bit of money Bick gained from the ranch he put back into it. He experimented with new breeds of cattle; he worked at improving the various grasses, and he sought better, more advanced methods of ranching.⁸¹

Bick himself realized that he could never love anything, or anyone, the way he did his land. One day after Leslie,⁸² his wife, had been on the ranch only a short time, Bick took her on a tour of Reata. He explained,

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 173-174.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 169-170.

⁸²Leslie Lynnton Benedict was living in Virginia on a small farm with her family. Her father, Dr. Horace Lynnton, had a beautiful horse, My Mistake, that Bick heard about while in Washington on business. He went to the farm to look at the animal and was so impressed that he bought her. Leslie was completely entranced by this handsome Texan, and the feeling was mutual. After a short courtship they were married and returned to Texas. Ibid., pp. 53-80, passim.

"Reata takes all my time. It always will. You'll be a neglected wife. . . . I warned you. . . . Reata matters to me more than anything in the world."⁸³

Bick's words proved true. This was something that Leslie had to learn to accept. Many times Bick was so preoccupied physically and mentally with the operation of this vast empire that he had little time or energy left for his family.

Leslie's family visited Reata after she and Bick had been married for several years. One evening Bick and Jett Rink, a Reata mechanic who had been fired the year before, got into a fight, and Bick was badly beaten. Dr. Lynnton was asked to examine Bick, and after the examination he explained to Leslie that although he was not seriously injured, he had a potential heart condition and must take it easier.⁸⁴ Leslie frankly told him that this was impossible. She stated,

"He loves it [Reata] more than anything or anyone. It's his life. . . . He'll never change, Papa. You might as well ask the Gulf wind to be quiet, or a norther tearing in from the sky."⁸⁵

⁸³Ibid., pp. 171, 371.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 326.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 327.

And Bick never changed. He and Leslie had spent almost twenty years together on Reata, and they were getting old. Leslie suggested that perhaps they should get a smaller place. After all, they did not really need millions of acres in order to live. Bick replied,

"I've lived on Reata all my life. I'm going to live here till I die. Nothing on it is going to change."⁸⁶

With these words the argument was settled.

Ferber, in Giant, tells the story of the love of a man for his land, a love that outweighed all else. Bick's devotion to his ranch and his hard work brought him both fortune and fame, but he found little time for developing personal relationships. For many this would have been a supreme sacrifice; for Bick it was a small price to pay for owning and keeping his beloved Reata.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 356.

C H A P T E R I I

SENSE OF BELONGING

OKLAHOMA AND NEW MEXICO TERRITORY

Cimarron, Ferber's great epic of Oklahoma, begins with Yancey Cravat telling the wild and unbelievable story of the opening of Oklahoma in the land rush of 1889. He had gone like thousands of others to get his acres of free land, and his descriptions indicated the hunger of these people for land of their own. For many this land was another chance, perhaps their only chance, for new dreams, new hopes, a new life. Whole scenes seemed to happen before their eyes as he spoke of this country:⁸⁷

"Folks there's never been anything like it since Creation! Creation! Hell! That took six days. This was done in one. It was History made in an hour--and I helped make it. Thousands and thousands

⁸⁷Yancey was speaking at the Venable dinner table one Sunday morning. Present were Yancey's wife, Sabre Venable Cravat, their son, Cim, Yancey's mother-in-law and father-in-law, Lewis and Felice Venable, Cousin Dabney Venable, and Cousin Bella French Vian. This branch of the Venable family was now living in Kansas, having journeyed to the Mid-west from Mississippi more than two decades ago. Edna Ferber, Cimarron (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1930), pp. 1-3. (Hereinafter referred to as Ferber, Cimarron.)

of people from all over this vast commonwealth of ours traveled hundreds of miles to get a bare piece of land for nothing. But what land! Virgin, except when the Indians had roamed it. Lands of lost gods, and godlike men! They came like a procession--a crazy procession--all the way to the Border, covering the ground as fast as they could, by any means at hand--Scrambling over the ground, pushing and shoving each other into the ditches to get there first. . . . This was going to be made livable territory over night--was made--like a miracle out of the Old Testament. Compared to this, the Loaves and the Fishes and the parting of the Red Sea were nothing--mere tricks. ⁸⁸

Yancey continued by saying that there was not a drink of water left in the town after the first 24 hours, and there was no shade from the burning sun. But the people did not seem to mind, or even to notice, for they were feeding on a crazy excitement. As the final hour before the run approached, they became nervous and restless and began crowding, cursing, and fighting for places near the front line. When the whistle blew, the prairie became covered in a cloud of red dust.⁸⁹ Some of the riders set fire to the grass to keep others from following closely. Many were actually trampled to death. Yancey lost his land to an unscrupulous young woman whom he aided when her horse

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 14-16.

⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 18-25.

broke a leg. While Yancey was killing the suffering animal, she mounted his stallion and continued the run.⁹⁰

Yancey Cravat wanted to go to this wild, unsettled country. He wanted land, and he wanted to be free of Kansas, of ease, of convention. He talked it over with Sabre, his wife, and a week later they began their journey to Osage, Oklahoma. Yancey was happy on the trail, content and at peace, and he seemed to find beauty in all that he saw.⁹¹

In Osage Yancey was completely at home. Osage was a little haphazard town, crude and ugly, boiling in the summer sun. The one main street was red clay, wide-rutted and muddy, and there were no trees, or even a trace of green, to cheer the spirit. Here and there was a straggling house, but for the most part, tents served as the principal dwellings. In this welter of red clay, drabness, Indians, and tobacco juice, Yancey seemed to find an exhilaration and beauty which Sabre could never understand.⁹²

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 27-29.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 61-64.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 84-87, 101.

Yancey was close to the land; he frequently visited the Indians on their reservation and the many farmers close by. However, after six years he could no longer resist the yearning for land of his own, the wide open spaces, and new, challenging experiences. During President Cleveland's term 6,300,000 acres of Oklahoma Cherokee land were bought by the United States government, and this land was opened for white settlement.⁹³ Yancey explained to Sabre,

"Let's get out of this. Clubs, sleeves, church suppers--God! Let's get our hundred and sixty acre allotment of Cherokee Strip land and start a ranch--raise cattle--live in the open--ride--this town life is no good--it's hideous. . . . Sell the Wigwam, take the children, make the Run, get our hundred and sixty, start a ranch, stock up with cattle and horses, build a ranch house and patio; in the saddle all day--"⁹⁴

Sabre would not go. She was settled now and just beginning to get accustomed to Osage. Yancey went alone, and it was five years before Sabre saw him again.⁹⁵

⁹³Ibid., p. 219.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 220-223.

John Steinbeck's⁹⁶ The Grapes of Wrath illustrates again the love of persons for the land of Oklahoma. The Oklahoma land was poor; the extreme drought of the 1930's and the many years of growing cotton had robbed the land of its fertility. The large landowners had to ask the tenant farmers to leave. The land was not producing, and they could no longer afford the sharecropping system.⁹⁷ Something different had to be found or the landowners themselves would have to turn their land over to the banks.⁹⁸ The tenant farmers were angry and bewildered. They were losing the land that they loved, and with it, the only life they knew. Even if it were no

⁹⁶John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, in 1902. His works range from historical fiction to realistic novels, with his primary characters being the poor and downtrodden. In 1940 he received the Pulitzer Prize for The Grapes of Wrath. His other major works include Of Mice and Men, The Winter of Our Discontent, and Tortilla Flat. Walter Loban, Dorothy Holmstrom, and Luella Cook, Adventures in Appreciation (Dallas: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), p. 38.

⁹⁷The sharecropping system, or tenant farming system, was a system whereby the farmer furnished supplies for himself and paid a third or a fourth of his yearly crop to the landowner for use of the land. Many landowners also asked for bonuses at the end of the year if the crops were exceptionally good. John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: Viking Press, 1958), pp. 42-45. (Hereinafter referred to as Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath.)

⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 42-44.

good, it was theirs. It was living on the land, working it, and dying on it that made ownership, not a piece of paper.⁹⁹ This was where they belonged. They thought that perhaps they could fight as their ancestors had done against the Indians. But the invaders were not men. How could one destroy a bank or a social system that made it impossible for the little man to survive?¹⁰⁰

The tenant farmers did not fight. Instead, they gathered their belongings and sold whatever they could, everything that was not absolutely necessary for everyday living. Afterwards, they walked back to their homes. The men did not dance or sing or pick their guitars. Some of them bought a pint and drank it fast so the impact would be quick and hard. They were bitter.¹⁰¹ Thoughts echoed from one to the other:

This land, this red land is us; and the flood years and the drought years are us. We can't start again. The bitterness we sold to the junk man--he got it all right, but we have it still--And when the owner men told us to go, that's us; and when the tractor hit the house, that's us until we're dead.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 46.

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 118-119.

To California or any other place--every one a drum major leading a parade of hurts, marching with our bitterness.¹⁰²

Grandpa Joad, the oldest member of the Joad family, exemplified the feeling for the land that most of these people shared. He refused to leave the morning that the family was to begin their journey to California. He stated,

"Me--I'm stayin'. I give her a going-over all night mos'ly. This here's my country. I b'long here. An' I don't give a goddamn if they's oranges an' grapes crowdin' a fella outa bed even. I ain't a-goin'. This country ain't good, but it's my country. No, you all go ahead. I'll just stay right here where I b'long."¹⁰³

The family, however, forced Grandpa to go, and after being on the road a few days, he became ill. He died one evening in the tent of Ivy and Sairy Wilson, a couple with whom the Joads camped one night.¹⁰⁴ Jim Casey, an ex-minister who was also traveling with them, summed up Grandpa and his death when he explained,

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 152.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 187-189.

"Grandpa an' the old place, they was jus' the same thing. . . . An' Grandpa didn't die tonight. He died the minute you took 'im off the place. . . . Oh, he was breathin' but he was dead. He was that place, an' he knowed it. . . . He's just stayin' with the lan'. He couldn't leave it."¹⁰⁵

The land was Grandpa Joad's life, his security, his whole realm of being. It did not matter to him if it were unproductive, or ugly, or even cruel. As far as he was concerned, it was his, and this was his place in the world.

Steinbeck, in The Grapes of Wrath, again illustrates the love of persons for the land on which they have lived, worked, and spent their lives, regardless of its productivity or the hardships involved. The Oklahoma farm land was home to these tenant farmers. This was where they wanted to be; this land belonged to them.

Hal Brewton, in Conrad Richter's¹⁰⁶ The Sea of Grass, was the nephew of Colonel Jim Brewton, a nineteenth century New Mexico cattle king. Jim Brewton's empire of grass and cattle was "larger than Massachusetts, with

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 199.

¹⁰⁶Conrad Richter was born on October 13, 1890, in Pine Grove, Pennsylvania. His major works include Brothers of No Kin, and Other Stories, Early Americana, and Other Stories, The Sea of Grass, and The Trees. Burke and Howe, American Authors and Books, p. 630.

Connecticut thrown in,"¹⁰⁷ and Brewton's name was a legend throughout the Southwest. His brand was familiar in every packing house, and his word on the range was law.¹⁰⁸

Young Hal had seen the land in its many forms, violent and tame, and he loved it all--the tall grass, the yellow sand, the rolling hills, the desert snow on the burning alkali flat.¹⁰⁹ Ranch work was rough; sometimes Hal was in the saddle from dawn to dusk. But the inner happiness and wholesomeness of being close to the earth and sky far outweighed any disadvantages he might consider. Simply and eloquently, he evaluated his early life on the ranch by saying, "The free life we lived on that shaggy prairie was to me the life of the gods."¹¹⁰

Hal had to leave the ranch and Salt Fork, the small town close by, for the academy at Lexington. He hated the academy far more than he had ever imagined.¹¹¹ On each return to the ranch his spirit was renewed at

¹⁰⁷Conrad Richter, The Sea of Grass (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), p. 4.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 55.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 27.

seeing the grass already turning green, the geese rising from the ponds, and the calves kicking and bucking in the spring sunshine.¹¹² Hal returned to Salt Fork permanently after completing school, and throughout his entire life at the mere sight of the prairie, he experienced a feeling of strength and a renewal of spirit.

Richter, in this novel of southern New Mexico, shows the lasting influence of life on the prairie. The wholesomeness and freedom of being close to the land during his early years provided for Hal Brewton a strength which became solidified in his later life and enhanced at each return to the Brewton land.

This capacity of the land to renew and regenerate the spirit can also be seen in Robert Herrick's¹¹³

¹¹²Ibid., p. 29.

¹¹³Robert Herrick was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on April 26, 1868, the son of William Augustus Herrick and Harriet Emery Herrick. He attended Cambridge Latin School and graduated from Harvard in 1890. After graduation he accepted a position as an instructor of English at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and later taught at the University of Chicago. He lived in Europe, Arizona, California, and Florida. His major works include The Web of Life, The Real World, The Common Lot, Together, Homely Lilla, and Waste. He also wrote numerous short stories and a great deal of nonfiction. Kunitz and Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, pp. 644-645.

Waste. Jarvis Thornton had worked for Wood and Laughlin Engineering Company as a sales representative in Chicago. His job was primarily to bid on, evaluate, and supervise construction jobs in that area. From the building which Wood and Laughlin carried out in Chicago, Thornton learned that the building industry, and everything connected with it, was founded on fraud, graft, and stealing, involving construction bosses, union leaders, and city officials. It was a vicious circle of corruption, and he often wondered about the fate of a society that was founded on dishonesty.¹¹⁴ Thornton had done special work in hydraulics engineering, and his boss, Abe McKeon, asked him to work on a power project for the Great Western Power Company, one of Wood and Laughlin's largest subsidiaries. The site of the development was on the Clear River in Eastern Idaho. Thornton was to act as a consulting engineer for the men actually in charge of the operation, examine their data, and keep them from making costly mistakes.¹¹⁵ Public explanations of the Great Western Power Company stated

¹¹⁴Robert Herrick, Waste (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924). (Hereinafter referred to as Herrick, Waste.)

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 145-146.

that the company was engaged in developing the resources of the Rocky Mountain states, and their literature spoke of "the growing communities served with power and light, the economical development of water resources."¹¹⁶ Their real business, Thornton well knew, was simply to provide cheap power to the mines and the railroads in the area. As the days passed Thornton realized that the company had practically drained the entire valley for its reserves, harnessing much more water than it could possibly utilize and robbing the ranchers who had to irrigate. The company apparently did not think of the common good, and as Thornton spoke to the men with whom he worked, he learned that there was much friction between the company and the inhabitants along the Clear River.¹¹⁷ Thornton returned to his headquarters in Chicago and found that he was unable to rectify the situation. Frustrated by a corrupt society and his own lack of conformity to its principles, he journeyed to New Mexico to think his position through. He settled in an irregular adobe compound outside the little town of Tia, a few miles from Santa Cruz.¹¹⁸ Thornton analyzed his present situation,

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 146.

¹¹⁷Ibid., pp. 146-148.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 404.

He liked this country immensely. Something in its stark indifference to man soothed him like the touch of a large, firm hand. . . . Only the "tourist" crossing the plains for his beloved California brought the smells and ugliness of the dollar civilization, and for the most part, luckily the tourists passed by the great highway to the south through Santa Fe, only stray specimens of the tribe occasionally venturing into the Santa Cruz district in search of "color" There were few human beings in this immense area of land and sky, untouched by the hand of man save along the river bottoms, or by a road blasted indistinguishably from the sandstone cliffs of a cañon. So few and so impotent!¹¹⁹

Thornton summed up his fascination for this section of New Mexico by reflecting that man had been unable to spoil it. The Indians blended with the background, and the Mexicans, living much the same sort of life, lived in indistinguishable houses which harmonized with the landscape. The white ranchers, too, seemed different, for they did not disturb the harmony of nature. Gradually, the peacefulness and solitude of this land calmed Thornton and filled him with a feeling of tranquility and hope.¹²⁰

Thus, Herrick, in Waste, illustrates the renewal of spirit and peace of mind provided by a close association

¹¹⁹Ibid., pp. 405-406.

¹²⁰Ibid.

with the land. Traveling to the isolated country of New Mexico was for Thornton a means of escape from a corrupt, materialistic society. The harmony and beauty of this land filled him with new hope and a sense of belonging as he had never before known.

The Indians' relationship to the land and their natural accommodation to the scene were observed not only by Jarvis Thornton but in another century by Father Latour¹²¹ in Willa Cather's¹²² Death Comes for the Archbishop. Father Latour had great admiration for the Indians and their concept of nature. In the workings

¹²¹Father Jean Marie Latour was Vicar Apostolic of the New Mexico territory. He traveled to the various parishes in his district to check on the priests, perform baptisms and christenings, and hear confessions. He was on the road much of the time. Willa Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 10. (Hereinafter referred to as Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop.)

¹²²Willa Cather was born in Winchester, Virginia, on December 7, 1873. She was the daughter of Charles F. Cather and Mary Virginia Boak Cather. The family moved to Nebraska when she was eight. As a youngster she was a tomboy, more at home in the fields than in the kitchen. She attended high school at Red Cloud, Nebraska, and graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1895. After graduation she worked for a time as a drama critic for the Pittsburgh Daily Leader. Her major works include The Troll Garden, The Sons of the Lark, My Antonia, Shadows on the Rock, and Sapphira and the Slave Girl. Kunitz and Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, pp. 257-258.

of silver or the drilling of turquoise the Indians of New Mexico and Arizona were highly skilled, and they lavishly decorated their blankets, belts, and ceremonial robes. However, this decorative concept did not extend to the landscape. They had none of the Europeans' desire to master nature or improve it. They sought to accommodate themselves to the scene in which they found themselves. Their homes looked like natural upthrusts of the country. The Hopi villages, imperceptible at a distance, were built upon rock mesas and made to look like the rock on which they sat. The Navajo hogans, built among the sand and willows, were made of those same materials.¹²³ Eusebio, Father Latour's Navajo Indian guide, was careful each morning to obliterate any trace of their encampment. He unplied the stones that had surrounded the fire, filled up the holes he had made in the sand, and buried the embers and remnants of food. This accommodation, Father Latour judged, was from an inherited caution and respect. Just as it was the white man's way to assert himself in any landscape, to change it, it was the Indian's way to

¹²³Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 233.

disturb nothing, to pass and leave no trace, like birds flying through the air.¹²⁴ He concluded,

It was as if the great country were asleep, and they wished to carry on their lives without awakening it; or as if the spirits of earth and air and water were things not to antagonize and arouse.¹²⁵

When the Indians hunted, they never slaughtered the animals needlessly. They did not cultivate much land, and when they irrigated, they took only enough water to meet their immediate needs. They were not there to conquer but only to use with consideration and wisdom that which the land provided.¹²⁶

For the Indian the land was part of his religion. The Navajo Indians living in the Canyon de Chelly of New Mexico exemplified this fact. The Canyon de Chelly had been their home when they were a weak tribe; it had protected them. Their gods dwelt in the caverns and in the faces of the cliffs. It was the very heart and center of their lives.¹²⁷ When the United States government

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 234.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 294.

decided that the Navajos must be moved, they fought desperately to keep their beloved land, but they were no match for this new giant. When they saw all that was sacred to them laid to ruin, they lost heart and were taken. They were driven by the thousands to the Bosque Redondo, three hundred miles away on the Pecos River. Manuelito, the Navajo leader, however, was not captured, and he appealed to Father Latour for help. He explained that the Indians asked for nothing but their land and their religion. Father Latour tried to explain that a Roman Catholic priest could not interfere in the affairs of government in a Protestant country.¹²⁸ Manuelito rose and said,

"You are friend of Cristobal [Kit Carson] who hunts my people and drives them over the mountains to the Bosque Redondo. Tell your friend that he will never take me alive. He can come and kill me when he pleases. Two years ago I could not count my flocks; now I have thirty sheep and a few starving horses. My children are eating roots, and I do not care for my life. But my mother and my gods are in the West, and I will never cross the Rio Grande."¹²⁹

And Manuelito never did. The government in Washington finally realized its mistake. The Bosque Redondo was

¹²⁸Ibid., pp. 293-295.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 296.

completely unsuitable for the Navajos. They were shepherds, not farmers, and there was no pasture for their flocks. There was no firewood, and hundreds died from the alkali water. After five years in exile, the Navajos were permitted to return to the Canyon de Chelly, to the land that belonged to them, to the land that was the heart of their existence.¹³⁰

Cather, in this fine novel of the New Mexico Territory, beautifully describes the Indians' relationship to their land. Their sense of accommodation and careful use of the earth and that which it provided showed great respect and wisdom. For the Indians the land was life; it was their religion; it was their whole realm of being.

In the Southwest there are only wistful remains of the aristocratic Spanish life with its feudal character, but the common Mexican has kept a tenacious grip on the soil and is much the same man he has been for several hundred years. The Rio Grand Basin in New Mexico is the heart of the Southwest, and the cultivated lands are like rich veins in this area of rock and sand. The highway

¹³⁰Ibid.

between Taos and Sante Fe runs along the Rio Grande, and a shorter road cuts across the mountains. This mountain road follows the contour of elevation, and one can see the pine and spruce give way to the bushy growth of pinon and cedar. The ridges become narrow mesas, and the canyons become little valleys. In each of these valleys is an isolated village with a cold, clear stream with just enough water to keep it alive. The owners of the tiny farms close by, sometimes called "paisanos," men of the country, men of the soil, are true peasants, perhaps the only ones that ever existed within our borders. The peasant is a lover of the earth who asks nothing but to live his whole life on one patch of soil, work it for a living, and lay his bones in it at last. From the earth the paisano draws his strength, even his identity. He becomes another man when he loses his hold upon it. All his masters have tried to take it from him, but he has clung to it tenaciously. For centuries he quietly loved his land and raised crops and children while his landlords raised revolutions. Most of them are gone; he has survived.¹³¹

¹³¹Fergusson, Rio Grande, pp. 106-108.

The Santos family was one of the few large land owners left on the Texas-Mexican border. Martin Brady, in Tom Lea's¹³² The Wonderful Country, came upon the son of Don Santiago Santos and some of his men while traveling along the border. Brady had killed his father's murderer fourteen years before and had crossed the river to avoid being caught. He had spent those years with Mateo Casas, a vaquero, and his family on a large northern Mexico ranch, the Hacienda Valdepeñas. Brady had hoped that everyone had forgotten this killing many years before because he had just crossed the border when he was greeted by Andrés Santos. Young Santos invited Brady to take shelter with them for the evening and brought him to their camp where he was introduced to Don Santiago Santos himself. After a good meal Brady and the Don engaged in much conversation. The Don spoke of his vast holdings and his

¹³²Tom Lea was born in El Paso, Texas, where his father was mayor and an old style frontier lawyer. During his early life he learned much about ranch life and bullrings. At the age of seventeen he went to Chicago to study art and then worked as a muralist. After a brief interlude in Santa Fe he returned to El Paso. During World War II he was a correspondent and artist for Life Magazine. He illustrates many of his own books. His major works include The Brave Bulls and The Wonderful Country. Publisher's information from Tom Lea, The Brave Bulls (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1949).

great love of the land.¹³³ Explaining that his family had been here for centuries, he stated:

"A man should be where he belongs. We Santos, we live where we belong, I think. . . . We do not produce any damned marquesses in these times, nor any damned politicians either. My grandfather said it was better to own land than to govern it. We Santos produce rancheros. I wish there were more of us. By the time there is fuzz on our cheeks we have learned the music of the bull pens, we know horses and firearms and these sierras. We like them."¹³⁴

The Don would not have been content to live elsewhere, nor would his sons. Fully aware of the goodness of this life close to the land, they believed that they, too, were in their destined place.

Lea, in depicting the great love of the aristocratic Santos family for their land, shows how this feeling was kept alive for many generations. There were few families such as the Santos remaining along the Texas-Mexican border, but those that were left truly believed that they were where they belonged.

The characters discussed in these two chapters were from various areas of the Southwest; they came from

¹³³Tom Lea, The Wonderful Country (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1952), pp. 246-252. (Hereinafter referred to as Lea, The Wonderful Country.)

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 253.

different backgrounds and occupied different stations in life. But all shared a genuine love of the earth. Many, such as Bick Benedict, Cavin Darcy, Molly Taylor, Grandpa Joad, and Don Santiago Santos, were content to spend their entire lives on one patch of ground. Others, such as Yancey Cravat, sought new land and new country from time to time. Some had to fight for their beloved acres; some met no resistance. But their common love of the land and close association with it enabled each, in his own way, to gain a sense of belonging so that he was able to meet the daily challenges and accomplish the difficult tasks essential for personal fulfillment.

C H A P T E R I I I

STRUGGLE

Because of the immense variety of the Southwest, the struggle with the land and nature is much more pronounced in some areas than in others. For instance, the area along the Brazos bottom lands of Texas is generally productive and lacking in the fierce dust storms that are so common in other areas of the Southwest; the struggle there is primarily with destructive hurricanes and overflow of the mighty Brazos. The land of West Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Oklahoma is for the most part a land where man must struggle to survive. It is land that God has armored with hazards as no legendary hero ever had to overcome. Man has to contend with dust storms, giant chasms, perilous mountains; he has to cope with a lack of productivity and search for other means of economic support; he has to endure the loneliness and depression that accompany isolation. And he has to learn that he cannot change this land. It transforms him deeply.

Dorothy Scarborough, in The Wind, tells the poignant story of the struggle and transformation of young

Letitia Mason in the areas of West Texas near Sweetwater. The harshness of life on the prairie and her total lack of preparation for such hardships changed Letty from a care-free, beautiful girl with a tremendous zest for living into an unrecognizable character, moody, despondent, bitter, and oblivious to the joys of living. She became disassociated with reality and paranoid to the point that she believed that the prairie, the sand, and the wind were her enemies; they sought to torment her, to destroy her, to rob her of her youth and her dreams.

Letty first became aware of the woes of the Southwest during a conversation with Wirt Roddy¹³⁵ on the train trip from Ft. Worth to Sweetwater. After Letty explained to him that after her mother's death she had no where to go but to her cousin Beverly's ranch, he began to explain why he could never stay in this area the year round. He said that this country was hard on women, "good enough for a man or a dog, but no place for a woman or a cat."¹³⁶ The wind was the worst thing. It ruined a

¹³⁵Wirt Roddy was a young, wealthy rancher who lived in Fort Worth and only occasionally visited his West Texas land near Sweetwater because of his distaste for wind, sand, and loneliness. Scarborough, The Wind, pp. 7-8.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 20.

woman's looks by roughening her skin until it was brown and tough as leather and drying out her hair. It blew sand in her eyes all day long, doubled the amount of her work, and tried to wear down her nerves.¹³⁷ He stated:

"It'd be a pity for that pretty face of yours to be ruined by the wind--like I've seen some women's faces. If you stay out here, 'twon't be long before your skin won't be as pink and white as it is now. In a little while your hair won't be as yellow and soft, after the hot sun has bleached it and the wind has roughened it. Pretty soon your eyes won't be as clear and blue as they are now, after the sand has near 'bout blinded 'em--if you stay out here."¹³⁸

He continued by saying that the work was hard on women. They could not get help or have the conveniences that might be available in other sections of the country. There were enough cowboys to help with the ranch work, but there were not enough women to help in the house. Keeping a good house and cooking for a group of hungry hands was a full-time, difficult job. And women had no release. The cowhands could go into town once in a while and get drunk, fight, and play poker. Women, however, had to bottle everything up. That was their downfall, sooner or later.¹³⁹

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 21.

¹³⁸Ibid., pp. 22-23.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 21-22.

During the long ride Letty looked out the window. She watched the prairie stretch out before her, vast reaches of sand with diminishing mesquites, scarcely more than bushes now, and dead bunch grass. Sometimes she saw cacti and other tall spikes covered with sword-like growth that looked as if they were anxiously awaiting to inflict a deadly wound. Cattle grazed in the unfenced pastures along the railroad track, and even they seemed afraid of something in this strange, barren land. A wave of desolation swept over her; all the old values and beauty of life seemed left behind. Ahead lay her new home, the path to the West, with its barrenness, its ugliness, and its threats of unknown perils. She felt an impulse to fling herself from the train. Oh, how she wished she were home in Virginia.¹⁴⁰

The train finally reached Sweetwater. Letty was not met by her cousin, Bev, but by one of his cowboy friends, Lige Hightower. It was twenty-five miles to the Mason ranch; so they spent the night with the station master and his wife. Letty decided that Sweetwater was not much better than the prairie they had just crossed.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 28-29, 32-33.

There were no trees or flowers, and the landscape was totally lacking in beauty. The houses were simple and crude, many of them not even painted, and none were softened by the appearance of a tree, a lawn, or a garden. They were naked and unbeautiful structures set down in a waste of sand.¹⁴¹

Even after getting settled in the home of Bev Mason and his wife, Cora, Letty was not happy. She was homesick, and she hated this country with its sand, its sun, and its wind. Too, life on the prairie was monotonous; there were only a few books, no music, and no outside companionship. She saw very few people outside the Mason family except Lige Hightower and his friend Dave, "Sourdough," Denby. Occasionally a cowboy stopped for a meal or some rancher and his wife came in for coffee on their journey from town, but these occasions were rare.¹⁴² After being frightened by a sandstorm one evening while she was alone with Bev's children, Letty promised to marry Lige Hightower, who came by to check on their safety. She had been in a state of shock because of her extreme fear

¹⁴¹Ibid., pp. 42-46, 51-52.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 83.

when she made this promise, but she followed through with it. The marriage did not change things, however, and it seemed as if her suffering and hardships, even her loneliness, were multiplied.¹⁴³

Letty still could not get used to the sight, touch, and smell of sand everywhere. It did no good to dust the furniture, for the sand followed her every move. When setting the table for a meal, she would turn the plates and cups downward. She did her cooking in covered vessels and served the food hastily, but despite these efforts, they ate sand with every mouthful of food. The sand stung her face and made her eyes smart. It clogged her nostrils, and her throat choked with it. It made her pillow scratchy and uncomfortable, and she could feel the grains crawling inside her clothing. When she awakened from a nervous sleep, her eyes would be so filled with sand that she could hardly open them. Not even her tears could cleanse them. During a three-day sandstorm Letty found that the broom was of little use. Lige had to use a shovel to move the huge mounds of dry earth. Outside the sand had piled up like snowdrifts, and the piles were

¹⁴³Ibid., pp. 178-179.

so high that Lige said that he could bury a steer under them and never tell anything was there.¹⁴⁴ On seeing these great mounds, Letty cried passionately,

"This sand is--is wicked! . . . No human being, no wild beast even, could be so tricky and so crafty and so cruel as the wind and the sand!"¹⁴⁵

This was only the beginning. There was no rain in the spring and none in the summer. They hoarded their precious drinking water, and Letty washed her dishes and cooking vessels with minimum amounts of the treasured liquid. It was impossible to keep clean, and her daintiness revolted at the grime in which she had to live. The thought of water troubled her dreams at night and completely occupied her thoughts in the day time. She longed for cool, deep water into which she might plunge and stay forever. Water became almost an insanity with her.¹⁴⁶

As the months went by Letty noticed as she gazed in the mirror that she was not the same girl who had come to Sweetwater. She was worn and faded. Her once attractive

¹⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 197-198.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 271.

mouth was now a thin, tense line. Her soft, blonde hair was bleached and brittle, and her skin was sunburned and rough. Her cheeks were sunken and sallow, and her eyes were no longer blue and shining but inflamed and faded from the wind, the sand, and constant weeping.¹⁴⁷

But much more than a physical change had come over Letty. She, who had been the sunniest of creatures, agreeable, optimistic, and fun-loving, was now despondent, moody, and irritable. She would give short, curt answers to Lige's questions and make no attempt to communicate with him. She would often feel that she would scream if anyone spoke to her or even looked at her. She no longer had a longing for things of the mind, books, music, and easy talk of trivial interests. All that she craved was ease for her body, cooling water in abundance, and an end to the pelting sand and the wicked, harassing wind. She was deadened to the significance and joys of living.¹⁴⁸

One evening Lige and Letty had a fight, and Lige left the house in a fit of anger. A sandstorm blew in shortly after he left, and when he did not return in a few

¹⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 271-272.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 270-271.

hours, Letty became worried. The wind increased, and Letty became more terrified with each sound. Wirt Roddy suddenly came through the door. He told her that Lige was drunk and would not be home until morning. Angry, humiliated, and frightened by the storm, Letty allowed the persuasive Roddy to seduce her. The next morning Letty, sober and remorseful, insisted that the wind and the storm had been to blame for her sin. Because of her fright, she had not been herself, she had not been responsible. She asked Roddy to leave before Lige returned, but he insisted that she go with him. She refused, and he forced her toward the door. She grabbed Lige's gun and fired a shot. Roddy was dead. Letty panicked, but she knew that she must get rid of the body. She dug a hole near the windbreak and covered the body with sand. Inside, she sat by the window and stared at the mound of earth. All at once she saw something she could not believe. The wind had changed direction, and Roddy's body was slowly being uncovered. She thought that the wind had already done its worst to her. But now it was determined that Lige should know of her sins. She could no longer fight; she no longer cared to live. In a moment of final desperation and madness she flung the door open and fled across the prairie.

The wind and the sand were to have their way with her at last.¹⁴⁹

Major Starke Colton's wife, Ellen, in Lea's The Wonderful Country, found the area of extreme West Texas unbearable, and like Letty Mason, eventually took her own life. Ft. Jefflin was near the little town of Puerto, and Ellen described it as a "wild, horrid unknown place."¹⁵⁰ The hills closed in steep against the river, and the wind howled day and night. The land was barren and ugly, and her eyes burned with sand that was whirled in gusts aimed with what seemed to be a personal, grit-edged malice.¹⁵¹ She often cried to her friend, Mr. Stoker, that she hated the major, the dust, the noise of the wind, the sound of the water going over the dam, and the emptiness of this lonely, forsaken land.¹⁵² The major was gone from the post much of the time, and Ellen began seeing the owner of the newspaper.¹⁵³ Tobe Sutton, a Negro soldier at the post, explained the situation to Martin Brady:

¹⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 285-337, passim.

¹⁵⁰Lea, The Wonderful Country, p. 12.

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 327.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 326.

"The major's wife was running around with the man that wrote the newspaper. Two days after the man left town, the major's wife drowned herself. Let me tell you something. I talked to a corporal named Parvis, one of the guard detail at Jefflin while we was gone. Parvis was the one pulled the body from the water and he said they was no doubt. The major's wife was in a family way."¹⁵⁴

Ellen Colton had hated this country, and in trying to find some compensation for her loneliness and desolation, she committed a sin with consequences that she was incapable of handling. She was not an immoral woman but a woman unable to adjust physically and mentally to the harshness of the environment into which she was thrust.

Leslie Lynnton Benedict, in Ferber's Giant, also discovered that the Southwest was a difficult place for a woman to live. Reata was an endless haze of prairie and sky, and Texas was a combination of fierce, withering sun and Gulf winds, and sudden icy northers, sometimes within the same day.¹⁵⁵ There was no green anywhere in this wild country except the grey-green cacti which were spiked and stark. And there was dust everywhere, stinging in the wind.¹⁵⁶ She learned that this land rejected everything

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁵Ferber, Giant, p. 130.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 91-92.

foreign to it, including the concrete, stone, and iron of her ranch home. The elements literally sought to destroy it. The concrete would break out in a cold sweat in a norther; patches of mold followed the spring rains. Dark places were suddenly covered with fungi, and shoes in the closet became filled with mildew. The roofs leaked, the walls cracked, the pipes burst, and the plumbing rusted. It was a constant battle.¹⁵⁷

Not only did this country seek to destroy her home but her physical appearance as well. She heeded the warning words of her mother:

"That Texas climate is frightful for the complexion. Remember to use cold cream all the time, every minute, or your face will look like leather."¹⁵⁸

This was not advice to be ignored, and Leslie went through a nightly ritual of lotions, creams, and powders. On a visit to Virginia to see her family after several years of Texas living, she wondered if all this had been useless, for her mother's first words on seeing her were,

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 112.

"Leslie! Your skin! . . . Leslie! Your hair
Well, I should think the wife of a husband with three
million acres would be able--" ¹⁵⁹

Leslie was strong and competent. She generally found this harsh land challenging and invigorating. She did not mind the fact that she was not as lovely as she had been, or that her house was a constant worry. But Leslie despised the wind. The hot Texas winds made her irritable and nervous; the cold northern winds frightened and chilled her. At the funeral of Luz Benedict, Bick's sister, Leslie met Baldwin, "Bawley," Benedict, Bick's cousin and overseer of the vast Holgado division of Reata, and confessed her feelings regarding the wind. Bawley's eyes were red and watery as if he had been crying, and he explained to Leslie that he was allergic to the dust and the wind. It was not so bad in the mountainous Holgado area where he lived, but the minute he arrived in the brush country of this part of Reata, it was almost unbearable. ¹⁶⁰ He said,

"The dust and the wind and the cow claps and the
hair hides all together they set these springs to

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 301.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 211-213.

working Course the dust's the worst down here. That and the wind."¹⁶¹

This was the impetus Leslie needed to confess her fear and hatred of the wind. She cried,

"The wind The wind the wind. Doesn't it ever stop. Don't tell Jordan--but the wind makes me nervous. Blowing, blowing day and night."¹⁶²

Sabre Cravat, in Feber's Cimarron, shared this same feeling. Sabre despised the sterile land of Oklahoma and longed desperately for the green of Kansas. But, like Leslie, worst of all she hated the wind. At the birth of her second child, curiously enough it was not the pain, the heat, nor the inexperienced attention with delivery that distressed her most; it was the wind.¹⁶³ She moaned deliriously to Yancey,

"The wind! . . . The wind! The wind! Make it stop Yancey! With your gun. Shoot it. Seven notches. I don't care. Only stop it."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ferber, Cimarron, p. 176.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 177.

Most of the land in Oklahoma was red clay as far as the eye could see. The creeks and the rivers were ruddy with it, and at sunset the sky seemed to reflect it. Outside the town of Osage was a trail which led through a cleft in a hill. The red blood of the clay on either side of this hill gave the appearance of a large, gaping wound.¹⁶⁵ Life was hard in this red clay country. In summer the sun beat down so cruelly that one could imagine being in a huge, open hearth oven, slowly being roasted to perfection. The winters were bitter cold, and the already barren landscape looked even more forsaken. Travel was difficult during the winter months, and persons often went many weeks seeing only members of their immediate families. When it rained, the roads became bogs of greased red dough so that the wagons sank and slid simultaneously. At certain periods of the year the wind blew without ceasing.¹⁶⁶ It whirled red dust through the houses, and if the doors or windows were left open, it would snatch the cloth off the table, the sheets off the bed, and the dishes off the shelves. It rattled the doors and windows

¹⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 57-58.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 63-64.

and made faces and clothes grimy.¹⁶⁷ The Oklahoma plains early left its mark on its inhabitants. The women's eyes smarted with the glare of the sun, the wind, and the red dust. Their hands and faces were roughened by these elements and the alkali water, and only a trace of the softness which appeared in their faces before coming to Oklahoma remained.¹⁶⁸ Neither did the men escape the toll of this country. They were stung with dust, scorched by the sun, parched with drought, buffeted by the wind, and many young men had the hands and faces of persons twice their age.¹⁶⁹

After several years in Osage Sabre returned to Kansas with her children for a short visit, and Velice Venable on seeing her daughter, echoed the words of Leslie's mother,

"Your skin! . . . Your hands! Your hair! As dry as a bone! You look a million. What have you done to yourself?"¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 176-177.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 168-169.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p. 143.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., p. 189.

Sabre remembered something that Yancey had once said about Texas and replied, "Oklahoma is fine for men and horses, but it's hell on women and oxen."¹⁷¹

The desolation and human suffering of the bitter struggle with the arid earth of Oklahoma can also be seen in Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath. The Great Depression of the late 1920's and the early 1930's and an extremely dry cycle arrived at about the same time, and the combination of the two proved a real disaster for the farming regions of much of the Southwest. In Oklahoma the rains did not come for months. The surface of the earth crusted; the air became thin, and the sky and earth turned pale. In the roads every moving thing lifted dust into the air, and it was long in settling down again. The wind blew, loosened the dust, and carried it away where it disappeared into the darkening sky. Gradually it increased and dug cunningly among the roots of the corn and freed them, the stalks being thrown sideways toward the earth. Motorists were halted by sand before the windshield, and housewives commented angrily on the constant struggle in keeping their homes clean. The air dried the mucus in the nose,

¹⁷¹Ibid.

and eyes watered to keep the eyeballs from drying out. Men and women tied handkerchiefs over their noses and wore goggles when they were out in the open. Dawn would come, but the sun would be only a dim red circle that gave little light.¹⁷² The drought had ruined the cotton crops, and the landowners were struggling to meet payments to their creditors and the banks. The tenant farmers were asked to leave, to find work elsewhere, as they were no longer needed in Oklahoma.¹⁷³ They had struggled with the land and lost. Now they must be on their way.

Cather, in Death Comes for the Archbishop, vividly illustrates the struggle with the land encountered by the inhabitants of the New Mexico Territory in the early nineteenth century. Bishop Ferrand, a young missionary from America, was dining with three cardinals in the garden of a villa in the Sabine Hills, overlooking Rome, Italy. He was explaining to them that there was much trouble in the New World, that the old mission churches were in ruins, and the parish priests were without guidance or discipline. He stated that the new Vicar of the New Mexico Territory

¹⁷²Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 4-5.

¹⁷³Ibid., pp. 42-44.

must be someone exceptionally strong, both physically and mentally, zealous, intelligent, loyal, and dedicated.¹⁷⁴ He expounded on the reasons for these qualities being essential, and in so doing, depicted many of the hardships of that area. He stated,

"There are no wagon roads, no canals, no navigable rivers. Trade is carried on by means of pack-mules, over treacherous trails. The desert down there has a peculiar horror; I do not mean thirst, nor Indian massacres, which are frequent. The very floor of the world is cracked open into countless canyons and arroyos, fissures in the earth which are sometimes ten feet deep, sometimes a thousand. Up and down these stony chasms the traveller and his mules clamber as best they can. It is impossible to go far in any direction without crossing them He will eat dried buffalo meat and frijoles with chili, and he will be glad to drink water when he can get it. He will have no easy life, your Eminence. That country will drain up his youth and strength as it does the rain."¹⁷⁵

The lives of Father Jean Marie Latour, new Vicar Apostolic of the New Mexico Territory, and Father Joseph Vaillant, a young priest who also came to the New World, were confirmations of the opening words of Bishop Ferrand. It took them a year after embarking upon the Mississippi to reach the New Mexico Territory. At one point in their

¹⁷⁴Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 3-6.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 7-8, 10.

journey they were lost for days in a seemingly featureless area, a landscape heaped into monotonous red sand hills, not much larger than haystacks. Father Latour thought that he had had some experience with thirst, but he had never suffered as he did at that time. He experienced the feeling of illness, the taste of fever in the mouth, and the seizures of vertigo that come after days of meager rations of water.¹⁷⁶ After finally reaching their diocese, both Father Latour and Father Joseph traveled throughout the area. Riding his mule, often from sunup to sundown, Father Latour thought about this country. He thought about the Spanish Fathers who came up to Zuni, then went north to the Navajos, west to the Hopis, and east to the pueblos scattered between Albuquerque and Taos. They came into hostile country; an European could hardly imagine such hardships. In the old countries the wild herbs, fruits, and forest fungi were edible. The trees provided shade and shelter, and sweet, fresh water flowed from the springs. One had a sense of harmony with the land. Not so in this New Mexico of his. In the alkali deserts the water was often poisonous, and the vegetation offered nothing to a

¹⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 17-20.

starving man. Everything was dry and prickly and sharp. What trees there were were small, and they had to fight for life in the sun-baked ground.¹⁷⁷ He thought about the terrible three-day sandstorm that had occurred when he visited Eusabio in his Navajo village.¹⁷⁸ He remembered the story that Father Joseph told about the time he found himself on the brink of a giant chasm, two hundred feet deep, the sides being sheer cliffs.¹⁷⁹ This was a country that tried the endurance of giants. Surely the Spanish Fathers and he had endured hardships beyond any conception St. Paul and his brethren could have had.¹⁸⁰

Along the Brazos bottom lands the air is not thin or full of dust. People can breathe, sleep, and walk outdoors without goggles and handkerchiefs, and there is water and vegetation pleasing to the eye and to the palate. But the inhabitants of this area face a contest with the land and nature that is just as difficult, if, indeed, different from the arid areas of the Southwest.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 277-278.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 223.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., p. 165.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 278.

The Brazos is usually a loitering, lazy river, so slow in places that one can scarcely see it move. Although it mocks the efforts of politicians and engineers to manage navigation of it, it is generally good-natured and kindly. However, in years of a great deal of rain this river can be a destructive force.¹⁸¹ In Scarborough's In the Land of Cotton, the Llewellyn family and other families near Greenacres watched the rain fall day after day. They were fortunate that the greatest part of the cotton was picked, for what was left in the fields would undoubtedly be ruined. After several days the rise began. The worst of it came at night when no one was expecting it. People waked to see the waters rising inside their homes. Calls for help and helpless screams of terror sounded over the rush of the waters. The brazos had become an impressive mass of mad waters. Houses were wrecked, and one could watch carcasses of horses, mules, and cows, loose lumber, pieces of furniture, and even whole cabins with families clinging tenaciously to the roofs, floating down the river.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹Scarborough, In the Land of Cotton, p. 172.

¹⁸²Ibid., pp. 173-190.

The rains stopped at last. People went home to places almost unrecognizable. Fences were down, and it was impossible in some places to tell the boundaries of farms or distinguish the roadways from the fields. The water had left objects in strange places--mattresses in the middle of a field, old clothes in the tops of trees, and broken dishes and kitchen utensils sticking in the mud, resembling strange grave markers. A yellow-red deposit of mud was over everything, and a repulsive odor of decay, rotting, sour vegetation, and decomposing carcasses filled the air.¹⁸³

There was a tragic sense of loss. Families had been separated, some never to be found. Most of the farmers found everything they owned destroyed. That had to start over again. They bought new furniture, new tools, and fresh supplies. Those who did not have their crops in had no income for the year and had to borrow money wherever they could. Many mortgaged next year's crops in order to purchase the necessities of life and began to rebuild their homes. But the sadness of the rewards of a year's labor gone showed in their faces and filled their hearts.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³Ibid., pp. 191-192.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 192-195.

Cavin Darcy, in Krey's And Tell of Time, experienced this same sense of loss when a hurricane destroyed his crop shortly after his return from the Civil War. He had spent long hours plowing, planting, and worrying over his vast acres, and he had needed and hoped for a good crop. One evening shortly after midnight he and Lucina were awakened by the blinds banging against the house. The whole building shook with a violent quiver, and they had to tie the doors with ropes. The rooms became flooded with water, and the draperies and the furniture were ruined. Cavin rushed out into the violent storm to check on his crops. Horror stricken, Lucina waited anxiously for his return. Several hours later he walked through the door. Lucina could tell by the stricken look on his face that all was lost. He dropped down in the chair next to her and laid his face in his hands. He told her what she already knew, his crops had been totally destroyed. He was quiet for a moment, then he began explaining incoherently that he must not weaken, he had too much at stake. He must put the pieces back together and start over again. But he kept repeating that all his work had been in vain; all had been in vain.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵Krey, And Tell of Time, pp. 393-403.

Thus, the hardships of the Southwest are as varied as its landscape. Many of these characters were strong and able to withstand them. In these persons this wild country brought out the better qualities of strength, endurance, and compassion, qualities perhaps unknown to them before. Others were weak and did not survive. This land was their destruction. No one changed this land; few modified it. And it transformed them all.

C H A P T E R I V

EXPLOITATION

Left to herself, nature maintains a balance so that the resources of the earth are never idle. For the most part, water and wind do their work gently. Man outnumbers and dominates the other forms of life, but he has not always maintained nature's order. Ignorance, greed, poverty, and various combinations of these, have brought about a tremendous imbalance and exploitation of our land and natural resources.

Once the land of the Southwest belonged to the Indians and the Mexicans, Steinbeck explained in The Grapes of Wrath. Then the Americans poured in. They had a hunger for land and sought to obtain it by whatever means were necessary. With time, the squatters became owners, and their children and their children's offspring stayed on the land. But the hunger for land, for water, and sky was gradually lost. The people had these things so completely that they no longer eagerly waited for the first light of day to go out to their precious fields. Crops were reckoned in dollars, and land was valued by principal plus

interest. They were no longer farmers but little shopkeepers of crops. They forgot the smell and the feel of the land and remembered only that they owned it, that they gained and lost by it. If the land became worn out, they would just sell it, and move on.¹⁸⁶

Harvey Ferguson, in Rio Grande, stated that a resigned sedentary spirit generally has never been apparent in the American farmer of the Anglo Saxon breed. Being a wanderer and an exploiter, he settled down only when there was no where else to go. He did not cherish the earth. He did not, as the Indians before him, attempt to accommodate himself to the land or practice methods of conservation. He conquered and modified it, exhausted the soil, and moved on. He believed in progress and longed for change.¹⁸⁷

This exploitation of the land, while certainly not a trait of all Anglo Saxon farmers and ranchers, is apparent in varying degree throughout the Southwest. Bick Benedict, in Ferber's Giant, was very much aware of it. Staring out of the window at his vast acres, he

¹⁸⁶Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 315-317.

¹⁸⁷Fergusson, Rio Grande, p. 108.

explained to Leslie that in his grandfather's day two acres of land would support a steer; five years later six acres were required. Today there were whole sections of land, hundreds of miles of Texas range, that could not support a steer on every sixty-five acres. Even on good range it took twenty acres to feed a steer.¹⁸⁸

Mott, "Pinky" Synth, Bick's close friend and a fellow rancher, confirmed this explanation and stated that abuse of the rangeland was the cause of many of Texas' problems the last half century. The ranchers let the grassland run down by overstocking on it, and then they had to buy stock cake, or feed. Feed was expensive, and they eventually went broke.¹⁸⁹ He stated.

"Abuse the rangeland and what's happened to Texas the last half century! Couple inches of top-soil lost from millions of acres, that's what. Like to have wrecked the state."¹⁹⁰

This was a serious matter, for, as Bick continued,

" . . . man hasn't the trick of making earth--or maybe he just hasn't got time. To build back a

¹⁸⁸Ferber, Giant, pp. 170-171.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 260.

¹⁹⁰Ibid.

couple of inches of topsoil in Texas would take nature from eight hundred to four thousand years."¹⁹¹

Although Bick and his fellow ranchers had no firm solutions to this problem, they were aware of its significance and concerned enough to try to find practical answers. Bick worked with agricultural experimentalists and agronomists and encouraged research in this field. Leslie, although still unfamiliar with the problems of Texas at this time, stated that education must be the key. The ranchers must be shown where they were going wrong and given some instruction on how to remedy the situation. Twenty years later Bob Dietz, a young agronomist who had grown up on Reata, echoed Leslie's words when he explained that a man who knew modern methods of agriculture could make a success on four sections of land and not feed his stock a pound of hay or cake even in a drought season.¹⁹²

Associated with exploitation of the land is the tenant farming system. This system was responsible for a destruction of the soil and a devastation of human potential. While the tenant farming system was very common in

¹⁹¹Ibid.

¹⁹²Ibid., p. 261.

the early twentieth century, many of the large landowners lived in the cities or in the nearby towns. Because cotton was the easiest crop to care for and to sell, they insisted that all the land be planted in it year after year. This one crop system destroyed the land's fertility; essential elements were drained from it and never replaced. Finally, the land would no longer yield; the owners increased their debts, and the workers had to move on.¹⁹³

The tenant farmers were the primary victims of this exploitation. Life for them was extremely hard. They generally raised none of their own food and had to buy everything they needed at the store on credit. By buying on time they had to pay from 10 to 50 percent more than the cash buyer. It was difficult to obtain the necessities of life, almost impossible to save enough to buy land of their own. Jeff Wilson, in Scarborough's In the Land of Cotton, was a victim of this system. He worked hard and had little, sometimes nothing, to show for his labors.¹⁹⁴ One day his wife, Emmy, commented that she wanted a home with flowers and rose vines over the porch, a lawn, and a

¹⁹³ Scarborough, In the Land of Cotton, pp. 163-167.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 167.

little vegetable garden. Jeff replied:

"I reckon you cut yourself out of your chance for a home when you married me, Emmy. A tenant farmer in Texas now's got little enough chance. Time he gives the landlord his share and his bonus and pays the credit merchant and the bank for lettin' him live on the earth, and work like a slave, there ain't nothing left to pay for a place."¹⁹⁵

Jeff's son, Ben, felt that he had always been a slave to the land, a slave to this system. As long as he could remember he had had to plow in the cold, plant in the wet, and chop in the piercing sun.¹⁹⁶ He often commented,

"It stole my childhood from me. I had no boyhood. I've had to do a man's work almost ever since I was big enough to walk."¹⁹⁷

Ben thought with bitterness of a crop that was largely raised by the toil of women and children, children who should have been in school or sharing the carefree pleasures of childhood, women who should have been enjoying their homes.¹⁹⁸ Ben did not blame his parents. They had

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 274.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 315.

always done the best that they could; but they were victims, too. He knew that there was something wrong with the entire social scheme. He had seen it make corpses of other children. He had seen the wives of tenant farmers die from sheer overwork and neglect. He sometimes looked at his mother. Her face had once been beautiful; now it showed the effects of work and worry. She had wanted so much for her children, but all that she could see for them was the same life which she had endured these many years.¹⁹⁹

Man has been negligent of and selfish with the land and its resources, and in exploiting it, he has also exploited human lives. However, as Jarvis Thornton stated in Herrick's Waste, there is a solution. Thornton realized that

. . . the ultimate utilization of common resources, which are strictly limited . . . is a matter of good statesmanship--and good citizenship.²⁰⁰

He believed that the people of the United States had been nourished on theories of organized selfishness under the

¹⁹⁹Ibid., p. 274.

²⁰⁰Herrick, Waste, p. 160.

name of individual initiative. The cure of this was a freshening up of the sense of common honesty and the education of the American people. If one could possibly induce a sense of conscience and an awareness of the consequences of this exploitation, now and in the future, there could forever be an end in this country to the immense waste and a renewal of a worthy inheritance for coming generations.²⁰¹

* * *

The literary themes resulting from man's relationship to the land are as varied as these selected novels. For many of the characters a love of the land fulfilled the innate desire to belong and to feel a part of something greater than themselves. This sense of belonging provided the security and stability essential for functioning in a changing, challenging world; it provided a source of strength and vitality, and an avenue of hope and reassurance. This feeling was not limited by the geography or the social position of the characters involved. Lige Hightower felt that he belonged on the harsh,

²⁰¹Ibid., pp. 160-161.

lonely Texas plains just as completely as Cavin Darcy believed that the prolific Brazos bottom lands was his destined place in the world. Grandpa Joad, a poor tenant farmer, loved his land with the same fervor as did Bick Benedict, the owner of over two million acres of Texas rangeland. The Mexican paisanos drew the same strength and identity from the soil as did the aristocratic Don Santiago Santos and his sons. All shared the feeling that those who loved the earth and understood it were the people that owned it, the people that belonged to it.

Man had to struggle to survive in the Southwest. This struggle was not equally severe in all areas nor were the same hardships apparent. Jerry Llewellyn, Cavin Darcy, Jeffrey Fentress, and Jeff Wilson had to cope with violent hurricanes and overflow of the Brazos. Father Jean Latour, the Joad family, Letty Mason, Ellen Colton, Sabre Cravat, and Leslie Benedict had to struggle with the harassing wind, dust, drought, and loneliness of the arid areas of Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona. Many were able to withstand these hardships; some became better persons as a result. Others were destroyed. But regardless of their capabilities or hardships, all learned that the Southwest was a hard land, a land that they could not change, but that changed them significantly.

The Southwest was not always good to man. But man did not always do right by her. He abused the rangeland so that numerous acres were required to support his stock. He planted cotton in the same fields year after year and drained the earth of its fertility. He destroyed the land and exploited human lives in the process. He used neither wisdom nor respect in his utilization of the earth and its resources. There were those, however, such as Bick Benedict and Jarvis Thornton, who recognized the consequences of this exploitation and sought means to correct it through public education and a renewal of a sense of honesty.

Thus, man's relationship to the land is exemplified in many themes, all which reemphasize the significance of the land in his life. The earth is life; it is past, present, and future. The existence of human beings is ephemeral, but in the ritual of seed-time and harvest, all ages become one.

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Martha Ann Zivley typing service

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