



Early Western Literary Scholars

THE AMERICAN WEST has never lacked for interpreters. From the earliest moments of exploration to the most recent stages of urbanization the region has been the topic of studies detailing its essential nature, the events involved in its settlement, and its relation to American history and culture. These studies, however, ranging from Theodore Roosevelt's *The Winning of the West* (1889–1896), Herbert Bolton's *The Spanish Borderlands* (1921), and Walter Prescott Webb's *The Great Plains* (1931) to Ray Allen Billington's *The Far Western Frontier* (1956) and Rodman Paul's *The Frontier and the American West* (1971), have focused primarily upon the traditional stuff of historical inquiry, paying little or no heed to the literary development of the West. Only in the middle years of the twentieth century did the literary materials of the region become the objects of study in their own right, a development stimulated by the works of George R. Stewart, T. M. Pearce, Mabel Major, Henry Nash Smith, and others. By their pioneering studies, these investigators established the inherent continuity of the West's literary growth, linking the region's literature to that of the nation and drawing upon two developments that affected American literary historiography in general.

The first of these developments was the growth of a theory of national culture. Prompted in part by the Centennial observances in 1876 and reinforced by the presentation of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier hypothesis in 1893, the suggestion that a cohesive cultural pattern permeated American literary development was stated most persuasively in 1927, when the first volume of Vernon Louis Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought* appeared. Taking his cue from Turner, Parrington directed his attention, as he says in the introduction to the second volume (1930) of his work, to "the incoming into America of certain old-world ideals and institutions, and the subjection of those ideals and institutions to the pressures of a new environment." The result was an interpretation of American literature national in its scope, Jeffersonian in its assumptions, and dedicated to the belief that American life, land, and literature are inseparably united.

Complementing Parrington's interpretation, and in some respects going beyond it, was the second development: the appearance of literary regionalism as a distinct genre. American literary regionalism originated in the local color fiction flourishing after the Civil War. Intended in part to help heal the wounds of the war by emphasizing the diversity of American life,

local color writing focused upon the distinctive, even peculiar, qualities of the American scene. Bret Harte, in a series of stories beginning with "The Luck of Roaring Camp" (1868), wrote of the colorful mining camps of Gold Rush California; George Washington Cable, in *Old Creole Days* (1879), recreated the ambiance of Old New Orleans; and Joel Chandler Harris, with *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (1881), combined slave tales and animal fables into a memorable recreation of the Old South. Whatever their setting, these works shared certain traits: an emphasis upon colorful, eccentric persons; a careful reconstruction of the dialects spoken by these folk; and a detailed portrayal of the localized settings in which the action occurs. Beyond this they made no effort to go.

More ambitious than local color writing was regional writing, which emerged in the last years of the nineteenth century, burgeoned in the 1930s, and matured in the 1960s. This literature, building upon the place of local regions in national life and an increasing awareness of the interdependence of regions, the nation, and the world, looks beyond the particulars of specific locales to link the place and characters to human life in general. The stories, making use of climate and geography as do the local color tales, grow out of the essential nature of the specific place but go on to consider the larger effects of these local qualities upon all human life. Thus, Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) tells of far-reaching social changes in the fishing villages of Maine; Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) evokes the human cost of midwestern life; O. E. Rølvaag's *Giants in the Earth* (1927) records the pressures of the Great Plains environment upon Norwegian immigrants; and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) links the Depression and Hitler's rise to power with life in an Alabama small town. The materials are the same as those found in the local color stories, but are used to create works significantly more sophisticated than those of the earlier period.

The growth of regional awareness is obvious in the development of western studies. Focusing at the outset upon the odd, the distinctive, and the indigenous, the studies grew steadily in subtlety. As they developed, they shed increasing light upon the national implications of western literature. If their concern initially was with western materials in a purely local context, they came at last to establish the influential role that western writing has played in the development of distinctive American attitudes and ideas.

Despite the tendency of early western studies to emphasize the peculiar traits of their subjects rather than their far-reaching literary merits, they nonetheless suggested the broad historical context within which the materials developed. Parrington called attention to the degree to which American literature in general could be considered the result of an intellectual

synthesis; though the early students of western writing did not go so far as Parrington, they still made plain the importance of diverse times and places to the special circumstances of the particular locale.

A landmark work in establishing this view of literature was George R. Stewart's *Bret Harte: Argonaut and Exile* (1935). Stewart, by his own admission, made no effort to judge Harte's works qualitatively. Instead, he emphasized "what may be called the biographical aspect" of Harte's writings—i.e., "the ways in which they grew out of his own experiences and in which they themselves reacted in turn to influence his life." Harte's life, therefore, appears in its historical setting; Stewart opens his study, for example, by remarking that Harte was born in the same year as Jay Gould, was a year younger than Marshall Field and Samuel Clemens, and a year older than Andrew Carnegie, William Dean Howells, and Mark Hanna. Though Stewart goes on to expand upon Harte's ties to the later nineteenth century, his simple evoking of a half-dozen names effectively orients his subject in time, clearly dramatizing Harte's situation in the midst of the Gilded Age.

Other episodes add to the historical fleshing-out. Stewart makes valuable use of the eastern reception of the early mining-camp sketches, savoring the irony of their appeal to the readers of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and goes on to trace the course of Harte's rise and fall in popularity among eastern readers. If the juxtapositions of his birth supply a frame for his early years, Harte's visit to New England and his conversations with Emerson and Longfellow typify the later years. For Stewart, the inability of the western writer to communicate with the eastern sages speaks volumes, implying an intellectual and literary tension that endures into the present. Harte's works, as works, get little attention; Harte's works, as documents, are put to good use to illustrate the nature of the western literary experience.

In much the same style, although dealing with a figure of far less stature than Harte, was T. M. Pearce's *Lane of the Llano* (1936), the memoirs of the cowboy and frontier scout Jim (Lane) Cook. Pearce, like Stewart, pointed less to the literary merits of his subject than to its localism. Cook's life extended from the first days of the Chisholm Trail (he traveled it at the age of eight, with his father, in 1866) through the last days of the open range and the coming of the syndicate-owned ranch. Pearce relates Cook's story as oral history, letting Cook speak in his own words but interpolating editorial asides to bridge gaps or expand motifs. The result is a work more evocative than specific, one that early on establishes an elegiac tone.

Cook, to Pearce, is a living memorial to a time gone by. As his story unfolds, Cook becomes in Pearce's eyes not only a person who has grown with the country, but also one who symbolizes western life in general. Commenting in the opening pages on the speed and cost of progress, Pearce goes on to remark: "The story of the Old West and the story of the New West

have much in common. Both are bound up in the story of Jim (Lane) Cook." Then, after summarizing his introduction to Cook and the early stages of their association, he concludes: "In his tale, drawn from the vistas of his memory, you will see Jim, honest, stalwart, courageous, carrying his life perilously close to the end with the spirit of beginning new things. . . . There is unity in his story: the unity of searching for the thing he and the Western country have lost." Contrasting old and new as he proceeds, using the memoir format to create a nostalgic sense of what has gone before, Pearce presents in his work a genuine piece of western local color.

Three books edited by Mabel Major and Rebecca W. Smith, John C. Duval's *The Adventures of Big Foot Wallace* and *Early Times in Texas* (both published in 1936) and W. S. Bartlett's *My Foot's in the Stirrup* (1937) also presented western materials as local color. The Duval books, published originally in 1870 and 1892, respectively, deal with the battle for Texas independence. Duval survived the Goliad Massacre of 1836; Wallace, a scout and Indian fighter, survived the Mier Expedition of 1842–44. The two were friends, and their adventures form the nucleus of Duval's works. Conversely, Bartlett's first-person memoir takes him from the last days of the Civil War to the 1870s and his work as a scout in New Mexico Territory. None of the books is claimed to have particular literary significance. All, however, are said to cast light upon a time and place, sharing with the reader a glimpse of the past. They continue, moreover, the Turnerian view of the West as a place of growth and freedom. Young Duval, the editors remark, came to Texas with "a vision of a freer life and a wider range of action than was possible elsewhere," while Bartlett's reminiscences "tell rather what everybody has been in the habit of believing instead of the sifted exactness of history. But these tales have their own way of arriving at truth. Like foot-paths winding through the woods-lot, they lead in the right direction and get you to your destination sooner even than does the big road."

As artifacts in the development of western studies, these five books are significant. They lack in critical discrimination, to be sure, but they worked to establish the potential of western materials and helped to emphasize the essential historical coherence of the materials. The early days of the West were not conducive to literary growth, yet the nucleus for a developing literature was present. Harte created from California materials tales that speak to eastern readers, while Major and Pearce rescued a gallery of near-forgotten names and faces from the ranks of local history. The studies, like the local color works from which they derive, often relied too much upon the unusual nature of their subject and too little upon its literary nature, but they provided the foundation for more sophisticated works to come.

Those works were not long in appearing. Even as they were engrossed in the identifying and circulating of local materials, scholars were con-

cerned with the presenting of more contemplative, critical accounts of the region and its materials. Among the earliest of these was *America in the Southwest: A Regional Anthology* (1933), edited by T. M. Pearce and Telfair Hendon. A volume of essays and fiction dealing with the Southwest, the book drew upon novels (e.g., Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Andy Adams's *The Log of a Cowboy*) and the little magazines developing throughout the West—*New Mexico Quarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Southwest Review*, among others. If the book was hindered by the lack of a fully developed conceptual foundation, it nonetheless moved toward the building of that foundation.

The degree to which local materials can transcend mere quaintness becomes clear in the book's introduction. Pearce is concerned, he says, with the qualities that define the Southwest; with the ways in which the region is becoming more and more involved with the nation at large; and with the question of whether the Southwest can retain the qualities that give it its distinctiveness. To this end, he presents the book in three sections. The first, "What is the Southwest," embraces critical essays speaking to socio-economic matters. The second, "Where is the Southwest," evokes environmental determinism, striving to describe the "aspects of a place that are born in it and give it character." The last, "Who is the Southwest," identifies the several character types found in the region's fiction, emphasizing that these are the persons "who have built civilization here and are the root material for all the story-life which has grown up." The three sections complement each other, forming a cohesive, thought-provoking volume that draws attention to concerns specifically southwestern, but applicable to regional studies everywhere.

If Stewart's *Bret Harte* was a landmark in western literary biography, *Southwest Heritage* (1938), by Mabel Major, Rebecca W. Smith, and T. M. Pearce, was a landmark in western literary history. Combining narrative history, bibliographies, and a teaching syllabus, the book comprised accounts of the literature of the Southwest from the earliest Indian and Spanish materials to current publications in fiction, biography, and folklore. Organized chronologically, it opened with "Literature Before the Anglo-American, to 1800." This was followed by "Literature of Anglo-American Adventurers and Settlers, 1800–c. 1918"; and by sections bringing the listings up to the date nearest publication. Thus, the third edition, published in 1972, ends with "Literature from c. 1918–1948" and "Literature from 1948–1970."

Within these categories, the authors worked toward three goals. They strove, first, to "recognize the informative records and chronicles and descriptions," literary or not. Second, they attempted to identify "racy and indigenous revelations of character and custom, however crudely put down." And, third, they sought to call attention to "beautiful expressions of the

human spirit, whether in the chant of the Indian, the folktale of the backwoodsman, the limpid style of a modern novel, or the clean-cut prose of a scholar." These goals, as stated, are suggestive. No longer is the mere recording of local oddity a sufficient reason for attention; the authors now recognize that local materials have more than provincial significance in the ways in which they can serve as historical evidence, characterize the quirks of the human character, and speak to the more general matter of the human spirit. The number of authors and titles included in *Southwest Heritage* at times causes the authors to fall short of their goals, for critical comments are often limited to a perfunctory sentence or less. The book remains, however, a central and wide-ranging compendium of southwestern regional literature, and marks a major step forward in the progress of western literary studies.

The literary use of local materials pioneered by Pearce and Major reached its adolescence in *San Francisco's Literary Frontier* (1939), by Franklin Walker. On the surface a traditional literary history, Walker's book becomes on closer examination the next step in the progression established by Major and Pearce. Walker was, to be sure, concerned with literary figures and literary history; he sought, he says, "to analyze and evaluate" the early writings of the authors upon whom he concentrates, "and to reconstruct the background of their work." He did so, however, within the context of a particular time and place—San Francisco, from 1848 to 1875—with a particular concern for "how the time and place influenced each writer during the years under discussion." From his efforts came a work that plausibly links authors, time, place, and experience, so that the western literary experience emerges as a telling part of the sweep of the American literary experience.

Walker concentrates upon eight authors: Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Joaquin Miller, Ina Coolbrith, Charles Warren Stoddard, Prentice Mulford, and Henry George. These selected, he proceeds to establish the distinctive milieu in which the eight worked—San Francisco in the middle nineteenth century, a city already burgeoning in an area rich in potential. Limited by the ocean to the west and the desert to the east, California turned in upon itself in a way that few other western states did. Given the circumstances of its founding and its growth, San Francisco became "heterogeneous in cultures, social classes, and racial stocks," producing a society "unique in its sex and age." The writers Walker studies, all young, all ambitious, found the area appealing, and were colored by their experiencing of it.

The significance of Walker's book is two-fold. Walker is, for the first time, dealing with authors of literary importance. If the lasting stature of Ina Coolbrith and Joaquin Miller is debatable, there is no question of the

national significance of Harte, Twain, and George. Thus, dealing at last with writers of merit, Walker is able to consider the literary aspects of their work without becoming overly defensive. He can, as he says, proceed to evaluate the works as well as describe them. Second, and more important, he is also able to deal with these persons as regional writers. They are *writers*; they are not adventurers who chanced to keep a diary or explorers whose only concern was the recording of day-to-day discoveries. They are persons striving consciously to perfect their literary expression, and they do so within a distinctive and invigorating regional atmosphere. Thus, while Walker certainly builds upon the works that precede his own, he is able to go beyond them, speaking of the contribution of the western region to the creation of a sophisticated literature.

The next stimulus to western literary study came from outside the region, and even the nation. The Second World War, examined as an event contributing to a sophistication of regional studies, has received almost no attention. Yet the war played an essential role, for the accommodations that it forced upon the country stimulated the changes in attitude and the broadening of vision that lifted local studies from the provincial and made them truly regional. By its duration, complexity, and intensity, the war forced Americans of all regions to look beyond the concerns of their particular locale and to see themselves within a greater, national context. By its transport of masses of personnel from one region to another, it gave these persons, willy-nilly, a sense of the variousness of the landscape and the diversity of the population. The archetypal platoon including a Texas ranch hand, a New York Jew, a Minnesota Swede, and a California Nisei is a cliché of the war film, yet, in principle, dramatizes one of the secondary effects of the war. Americans, as Americans, became increasingly aware of the parts played by the several regions (and their populations) in constituting the United States as a whole.

A similar awareness derived from the war's enforced exposure of Americans to diverse foreign cultures. World War I was a European war, acquainting American soldiers with France, England, and Germany; the Second War took the military to not only Europe, but also Asia and the Pacific. The ensuing exposure to many cultures and the sense of international interdependence stimulated by the development of nuclear weaponry and the coming of the United Nations created a citizenry necessarily conscious of the world outside the continental limits of the United States. Just as the several regions of the nation had to become concerned about the welfare of the country at large, so, too, had the nation to recognize that its well-being was linked to that of the other countries of the world. Thus, out of the war, in the years between 1945 and 1955, one finds developing in historical writings an effort to place the United States within a world political and cul-

tural context. On a smaller scale, the same pattern appeared in western literary studies.

Setting the stage was George R. Stewart's *Names on the Land* (1945), a book that Stewart later acknowledged "was written at a particular time in history, and many reflections of World War II may be found in its pages." In this study, an account of how the places and things of the American continent were named, Stewart dealt with two themes. He was, certainly, concerned with national diversity, as he points out the sources of names—from the Spanish (Florida, El Paso), the French (Illinois, Louisiana), and the English (elk, robin, Trenton) as well as from quirks of geography (Saddle Mountain, Chimney Rock), the Bible (Goshen, Canaan), and public figures (Jackson, Washington). As he observes, from the names on the land "the patient scholar may piece together some record of what we were."

Yet, if the names on the land record American historical diversity, they create as well a consciousness of American unity. And of this unity Stewart was much aware. The names, he says, have "grown out of the life, and the life-blood, of all those who had gone before. From the names might be known how here one man hoped and struggled, how there another dreamed, or died, or sought fortune, and another joked, twisting an old name to make a new one." The result, he says, is a historical record "closely bound with the land itself and the adventures of the people." By becoming aware of the names, local, regional, and national, the individual becomes aware of the country, in its diversity and its unity. Local detail expands to become a national concern.

The expanding vision that Stewart sought to encourage appears in *Southwesterners Write* (1946), an anthology of regional prose edited by T. M. Pearce and A. P. Thomason. Limited to the American Southwest (Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, and New Mexico), the book contains four sections: "Interpretation," concerned with folkways and attitudes; "Fiction," giving excerpts from novels and short stories deriving from the region's materials; "Narrative," relating tall tales and local history; and perhaps the most significant section, "Opinion," assembling nine critical essays examining the region in its historical, cultural, and national context. The authors included, like the works that represent them, suggest the growing breadth of regional consciousness. Although one finds such familiar western names as J. Frank Dobie, Harvey Fergusson, and C. L. Sonnichsen listed, alongside them are names of another sort: D. H. Lawrence, Paul Horgan, Walter Prescott Webb, and others. Plainly, the region was becoming less provincial.

That diminishing provincialism becomes clear in the editors' preface. They see the book, they say, as a successor to and an extension of the earlier *America in the Southwest*. They are, they say, aware of their literary predecessors—Frank Cushing, who wrote of Zuni myths and folktales; Josiah

Gregg, recording the coming of trade to the West; John C. Duval, whose works combine adventure, history, and humor; and others. And they are, they say, dealing with much the same kind of materials. Their intention, however, is different. The earlier anthology “attempted to give the historic panorama, the character types, the landscape line.” The newer book, in contrast, attempts to identify “the intermingled patterns of living and the contrasting currents of thought in the modern civilization” of the region, taking its materials from “the most professional period of literature the region has attained.” Thus, the editors, while working with and emphasizing the writings of a particular region, are concerned more with illuminating that region’s growing cohesiveness than with proclaiming its specific uniqueness.

Pearce’s contribution to the growth of regional consciousness continued with *Signature of the Sun* (1950), a collection of southwestern poetry that he edited in collaboration with Mabel Major. This work strove to do for poetry what *Southwesterners Write* did for expository prose—call attention to the simultaneously local and universal themes present in regional literature, thereby dramatizing the ties that link the expressions and concerns of a limited region with those of the nation itself. In some respects, the book was more successful in its task than was *Southwesterners Write*, for poetry, by its basic nature, is better suited to the expression of emotional consciousness (a sense at the heart of any regional awareness) than is prose. The books are, however, complementary, and, taken together, do much to advance the synthetic approach to regional study.

The theme of *Signature of the Sun*, like that of *Names on the Land* and *Southwesterners Write*, is unity. Diverse though the peoples of the region are and varied though the experiences they have undergone, their lives are bound together by certain distinctive elements of the time and the place. Thus, the editors note, “Nature conditioning man and man shaping nature are the basic statements of much of the poetry from this area of illimitable contrasts and extremes, unified by proximity and wind-crossed, earth-crossed trails.” The peoples of the region, moreover, “share the rhythm of daily life, the images in the eye, the labors of the hand, [and] the vocabulary on the tongue,” so that the anthology, the editors conclude, “bears a regional stamp, but we also believe that it bears the stamp of good poetry written in America.” The implications of this last comment are profound, for it marks a conscious statement of the change taking place in post-war regional studies. Regional writing builds upon local materials, but it can, and must, speak to the nation as a whole.

The potential of western regional literature, already suggested by the books of Stewart, Pearce, and Major, was crystallized by a work published in the same year as *Signature of the Sun*—Franklin Walker’s *A Literary History of Southern California* (1950). Walker, who had already made good use of

Californian materials in a biography of Frank Norris (1932) and his study of the San Francisco writers, here turned to the more general region of southern California, evoking the names of George Wharton James, Mary Austin, and Helen Hunt Jackson as well as those of Zane Grey, Charlotte Perkins, and Robinson Jeffers. His book, however, was more significant for its method than for its materials; if Walker dealt with authors of disparate significance and familiarity, he did so in a way that lifts regional study to a new level.

Walker's method is simple, yet profound. Identifying the several authors most associated with the region, he goes on to consider them in a way that is as much cultural history as it is literary history. He speaks of the authors' roles in creating the "California mystique," of their parts in an idealization of the past, and of the ways in which their own views and works are shaped by the social, mercantile, and technological developments taking place about them. He identifies distinctively local themes (the contrast of Spaniard and Yankee; the impact of the missions upon the Indian; the pervasive lack of water and how this need was met), but, like Pearce and Major, goes on to link these themes with the life of the nation. "These local themes were all well established before World War I and were amplified rather than displaced during the resurgence of American letters in the 'twenties,'" he writes. "Such isolation, in fact and in spirit, as the region had known during its youth rapidly disappeared with the increase in speed and ease of communication and the growing nationalization of our culture; yet the older, basic themes lingered on." Here is the real contribution of the *Literary History of Southern California*. By embodying the interlocking development of local and national literary culture, it established the national importance of local materials and prepared the way for an even greater exposition of these materials, Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land*.

Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (1950) is, as befits one of the most influential single works in the literary study of the American West, soundly rooted in the region. Its author, Henry Nash Smith, was born in Dallas, served for ten years (1930–1940) on the faculty of Southern Methodist University, and worked in various capacities for the *Southwest Review* during its early years. The *Review*, itself one of the most distinguished and staunchly regional of the literary quarterlies appearing in the United States during the first third of the century, nonetheless espoused an enlightened regionalism. Though dedicated to advancing fictional and non-fictional accounts of the Southwest as region, it strove to keep these accounts from lapsing into the provincial. Thus, in its columns, one finds local folktales and Texas fiction interspersed with essays on national literary figures and analyses of current political matters. The region, it tacitly suggests, may have its distinctive and indigenous qualities, but is still a part of the greater nation.

The conceptual breadth implicit in the editorial policies of the *Southwest Review* appears explicitly in *Virgin Land*. Beginning with the observation that “one of the most persistent generalizations concerning American life and character is the notion that our society has been shaped by the pull of a vacant continent drawing population westward,” Smith “traces the impact of the West, the vacant continent beyond the frontier, on the consciousness of Americans and follows the principal consequences of this impact in literature and social thought down to Turner’s formulation of it.” In its way, therefore, the book becomes the fruition of the intellectual and literary movements begun by Turner and Parrington. Assuming, with Parrington, the existence of a generalized American character, it sets out to examine, with Turner, the effects on that character of the frontier, its experiences, and its expressions.

Smith develops his argument through the examination of three central motifs. The first is that of “Passage to India”—i.e., the role of the West in the carrying out of the dream of America’s steady growth toward the Pacific. Within this section Smith concerns himself with the philosopher-politician Thomas Jefferson, the politician Thomas Hart Benton, the merchant Asa Whitney, and the poet Walt Whitman. Each, he notes, possessed a vision of the United States as reaching to the Pacific Ocean and beyond, a vision embodied variously in Jefferson’s dispatching of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Whitney’s efforts to finance a transcontinental railroad, and Whitman’s articulations of the dreams of manifest destiny in such poems as “Passage to India” and “Pioneers! O Pioneers!” Though their motives and goals differed, all of these individuals contributed to the American vision of the West as the direction of empire.

Smith’s second motif is “The Sons of Leatherstocking,” which leads him to an inquiry into the nature of the hunter and trapper who so quickly came to dominate American mythology. Here Smith widens his scope to include the fictional (Natty Bumppo, Deadwood Dick, and a host of lesser characters) as well as the historical (Daniel Boone, Kit Carson, William F. Cody), exploring the mystique that grew around the hunter-trapper figure whether real or created. If the resulting images quickly became standardized and formulaic, they nevertheless retained their power of influencing American thought, for they prepared the way for the most lasting of American mythic figures, the cowboy hero so memorably crystallized by Owen Wister in *The Virginian* (1902).

The final motif, discussed in the third and longest section of the book, is “The Garden of the World.” In this section Smith deals with the westerner not as imperialist or hunter, but as farmer, tracing the vision of the West as a land of fertility and plenty, so that western imagery serves to complement a view of the United States as an agricultural nation. The materials

are diverse, coming from literature (the works of Hamlin Garland, Caroline Kirkland, and E. W. Howe, among others), from politics (the Homestead Act), and from the figures of the past (Thomas Jefferson, Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur). From them, however, Smith demonstrates a widespread unity of belief as he examines the part played by each in establishing the generalized myth of the yeoman farmer. The farmer as symbol, already a part of American lore, became in the last years of the nineteenth century the final expression of the American view of the West.

In discussing these motifs and their implications, Smith brought to full maturity the first stages of western literary study. The lasting importance of *Virgin Land* was as much in what it made possible as in what it accomplished, for it became the starting point of the second great wave of western studies. Its accomplishments are far from negligible. It establishes the lineal relationship of American attitudes toward the West; it points to how those attitudes, by coloring the American character, have contributed to the difficulties of Americans in adapting to life in an interdependent world community; and it argues persuasively the belief that "history cannot happen—that is, men cannot engage in purposive group behavior—without images which simultaneously express collective desires and impose coherence on the infinitely numerous and infinitely varied data of experience." Yet, important as these achievements are, their implications are even greater.

The achievement of *Virgin Land* was to bring the life, history, and literature of the American West into the fold of the United States. Smith was certainly concerned with western materials, but he was concerned with them as the stuff of the *American* West. He was, therefore, accepting diverse regional materials as integral parts of the national experience. In so doing, he established the importance of the West in influencing Americans' views of themselves. A myth, he says, is "an intellectual construction that fuses concept and emotion into an image." The West, with its evocations of fact and feeling, is an image intelligible to all Americans, and therefore one that gains in impact. Smith established, moreover, the principle that the West, a region, is also the West, a part of America. Its concerns are those of its populace and are affected by the specific, individual circumstances of geography and society. Yet it is tightly linked to the greater nation and through that to the human condition. What happens in the West is important there, but significant everywhere.

With the publication of *Virgin Land*, western literary study reached intellectual maturity. Its development had been lengthy. Beginning with a simple recognition and largely uncritical exposition of local materials, it moved to the stage of exploration, cataloging and appreciating the diversity and scope of these materials. Its final stage, expansion and synthesis, incorporated detached evaluation of the materials, investigation of their signifi-

cance, and application of that significance to matters of extra-local concern. Just as the frontier hypothesis of Frederick Jackson Turner was an intellectual product of all that had preceded it, so, too, is the study of western literary materials the culmination of a long sequence of growth. The study builds upon the sense that American literary culture has many parts. Assuming that the culture is the product of these parts, the study goes on to conclude that American culture is linked to the culture of the world at large. Accepting at last the place of local culture within the national, and the national within that of the world, the study presents a careful, coherent examination of western literature as national, even world literature. The bonds of provincialism are broken at last, and if much remains to be done, the work that has gone before will endure.

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