

SECTION I

The Far West



Introduction

AS A LITERARY REGION the Far West has its roots in that much larger realm called the American West. During the past fifty years, however, a body of literature has taken shape that deals more directly with the life, the landscape, and the mystique of the farthest reach of the continent—never entirely separate from the West, yet clearly a world of literature that has mapped its own geography.

The literary West began with the oral literature of indigenous native cultures; its first writer of note was James Fenimore Cooper. Western stories and legends can occur anywhere between Appalachia and Puget Sound, between Alaska and Mexico, an area peopled by pioneer mothers, cowhands, miners, whores, soldiers, warriors, sheriffs and sharpshooters. The West Coast as a literary region begins with Mark Twain, then heads rather quickly toward modern times. Its literature tends to deal with contemporary events rather than to reach back into history. Its heroes fight city traffic as well as blizzards. The physical territory includes, with a little flexibility at the borders, the Pacific states of California, Oregon, and Washington, together with British Columbia and Alaska—that side of America which faces the Far East. Among the characters are found some of those familiar cowhands and miners and pioneers, but also tough okies, zany Armenians, scab lumberjacks, Zen poets, talking trout streams, existentialist private eyes, second-rate film stars and undocumented aliens recently smuggled in from Jalisco on their way to work in California's Central Valley.

From the earliest days of settlement, this has been a region of abundance, of excess, of high energy. It has also been a region of tremendous variety in ethnic origins and religious beliefs, as well as in terrain and resources, that kind of uncontainable variety that resists all patterns. Like the life out west, literature now is moving in all directions at once. This is due partly to the so-called open society for which the Far West is notorious and partly to the multitude of writers. It happens that more writers live along the West Coast than in any other part of the United States, outside the Boston-New York-Washington megalopolis. Thus much literature is pro-

duced here. Not all of it deals with the region. Many writers choose to live near the Pacific Coast, drawn by the climate or the movies or a campus job or the available space, but write about other climes, other cultures, sometimes other planets and other galaxies.

In the midst of this literary abundance, a sizable body of work has emerged from the experience of the West Coast, from the terrain, from the legends, from the dreams dreamed and the lives lived, some of it from writers who are native to the coastal states, some from writers who have lived there a while and have also in some way incorporated this experience into their writing. Alice Adams, for example, is a southerner by birth, from North Carolina by way of Virginia. Since the early 1950s she has lived in San Francisco, and some of her strongest work, such as the stories in *Beautiful Girl* (1979), deals with southerners, or easterners, who for one reason or another find themselves out west and whose destinies are fulfilled or concluded here. In southern fiction a frequent theme is the play between present time and some resonant moment in history, such as the Civil War. In the Far West the more frequent situation is a character's present played against a past from another region, like the American South or East, or Mexico, or the China Maxine Hong Kingston reaches back to in *Woman Warrior* (1976). It is a feature of the Pacific Coast that people arrive continually from somewhere else, with high hopes, or no hopes, to start over, or to play the final card. Because the coastline is both a physical and a psycho/spiritual boundary, this interplay between the Far West and the realms left behind is among the recurring themes.

West Coast writers have not practiced any one form as consistently as writers from the South, for instance, have practiced and excelled at the short story. Though many fine stories have emerged from the region, this cannot be dwelled on for long, the way one can dwell on the notion of "the southern short story." In the South, with its own rich oral tradition and much closer ties to England and Europe, the short story seems an authentic mode, built into that region's history. Out west a more characteristic impulse has been toward expansiveness and large works stirred to life by the astonishing scale and richness of the landscape: *The Octopus* (1901) by Frank Norris, *Honey in the Horn* (1935) by H. L. Davis, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) by John Steinbeck, *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964) by Ken Kesey, and *Angle of Repose* (1971) by Wallace Stegner.

The impulse to expand sometimes shows up as a renegade western refusal to be penned in by anyone's expectation of what a narrative should or should not look like, a response William Everson has called "the repudiation of received forms." We see examples in Kesey's layer cake of voices and time-zones, in the chronic digressions of William Saroyan, in Richard

Brautigan's short, surreal, unclassifiable takes on trout fishing, and in the runaway prose of Jack Kerouac, who found a landscape to suit his tastes when he finally reached the same coastal ranges that had inspired Robinson Jeffers to extend his poetic line far past what most publishers had come to accept as the tolerable width of a printed page.

Repudiation of received forms, of course, has long been an American pastime. This may be typical of life and literature in the Far West, but not exclusively so. If anything gives definition to this writing, it is not the forms so much as it is the available material writers have had access to, such elements as the unique history and geography, with its resulting role in the imagery and mythology of the western world, and thus that endless fund of dreams and aspirations funnelled toward the Far West from every direction, some of them fulfilled, some of them demolished, some of them twisted beyond recognition.

The Far West was dreamed about before anyone really knew it was there. It was foreshadowed in a Spanish novel of the sixteenth century called *The Adventures of Esplandian*, a romance—that era's equivalent of science fiction—by Garcia Ordonez de Montalvo. In that novel, published in Madrid in 1510, thirty-two years before the Cabrillo expedition first sighted and identified the West Coast, twenty-five years before Hernando Cortez named what is now the tip of lower California, Montalvo sent his hero and his readers on a fantastic journey:

Know then, that on the right hand of the Indies, there is an island called California, very close to the side of the Terrestrial Paradise, and it was peopled by black women, without any man among them, for they lived in the fashion of the Amazons. They were of strong and hardy bodies, of ardent courage and great force. Their island was the strongest in all the world, with its steep cliffs and rocky shores. Their arms were all of gold, and so was the harness of the wild beasts which they tamed and rode. For, in the whole island, there was no metal but gold. (From the 1872 translation by Edward Everett Hale, for *The Atlantic Monthly*.)

This island of Montalvo's was an invention, a fantasy which actually influenced the expeditions of the earliest Spanish adventurers. And this sequence, the dream running well in advance of reality, has affected the life and the literature of the region from the outset.

But for two-and-a-half centuries that is where the Far West remained, as a beguiling and fabulous place in the mind. Apart from a few scattered sightings and landings by sea-roving explorers, the Pacific Coast was uncharted and unaltered by Europeans until the small band led by Gaspar de Portola made the first overland expedition, following the coastline north

from San Diego five hundred miles to what is now San Francisco Bay. The year was 1769, getting late in the days of conquest, settlement, and the advances of the written word. Elsewhere on the continent Benjamin Franklin had already published numerous editions of *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Mr. William Byrd, Virginia surveyor and prominent man of letters, had accumulated a personal library of 3600 volumes. Settlers in New Mexico had been performing Spanish miracle plays annually for almost two hundred years. But on the Pacific Coast, as of 1769, there were only the diaries of a few men like Portola and his chaplain, Juan Crespi, a Franciscan friar from the island of Mallorca. From these have come the earliest writings about the life and look of the region. Making daily entries as they crept up the coast, Crespi was the first to report at length on the fauna and the flora, the climate, the habits of the local tribes and the habits of the land.

For the next hundred years, the writings came from other travellers—missionaries, adventurers, soldiers and trappers, fortune hunters and homesteaders, trekking overland, or shipping around the Horn. Like Crespi, Lewis and Clark kept remarkable diaries describing their progress westward toward the mouth of the Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean, which they reached in November 1805. Richard Henry Dana sailed the sparsely settled coast of California in the 1830s and recorded his impressions in *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840). 1849 saw the first novel from the Pacific Northwest, an undistinguished effort by Sidney Albert Moss entitled *The Prairie Flower; or, Adventures in the West*. More impressive were such early sojourners' accounts of the region as James G. Swan's *The Northwest Coast* (1857) and Theodore Winthrop's *Canoe and Saddle* (1863). In 1861 Mark Twain left St. Louis, Missouri, on a trip to the Mother Lode, the Sacramento Valley and eventually out to San Francisco, all of which he recounted ten years later in *Roughing It* (1872).

It is in Twain's early writings that we can observe the point where Far West travel narrative began to take the shape of memorable fiction. *Roughing It* is rich with tall tales and outrageous gold country escapades. One such tale became "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," written while he was working as a journalist in San Francisco. It was published in *The New York Saturday Press* in November 1865, and brought him national attention. At the same time Bret Harte was also working in San Francisco, editing *The Overland Monthly* and beginning to write short stories. In 1868 he published "The Luck of Roaring Camp," another mining country tale, and in 1869, "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," a haunting and poignant story which does what numerous West Coast fictions have done since, that is, it plays against the prevailing myth of boundless opportunity, by recounting the fate of several people forced out of a mining camp, who meet their death in a Sierra snowstorm they aren't prepared for. Reputed to be a realm

of mineral wealth and rich promise, the terrain, for these hapless exiles, is deceptively hostile.

These stories established Harte and Twain together as the new voices from the far and fabled West. And this is the starting point for West Coast literature, the small gang of journalists and poets centered in San Francisco in the 1860s, which included Ambrose Bierce, Ina Coolbrith, Charles Warren Stoddard, among others, the San Francisco Circle. Twain and Harte soon left for the East, never to return, but San Francisco was to remain a literary center from then on, for many years the only literary town of any consequence west of the Mississippi.

In the 1880s Robert Louis Stevenson was living there, eventually marrying there, and recounting his honeymoon travels around northern California in *The Silverado Squatters*. The first notable fiction writers native to the West Coast—Gertrude Atherton and Jack London—were both born there in the second half of the nineteenth century. All, along with Joaquin Miller, whose poetry erupted at about the same time, were published in the Bay Area in the 1890s in the company of other poets such as Stoddard, Coolbrith, Edwin Markham, and George Sterling, and the novelist Frank Norris, who had come to California from Chicago with his family at the age of fourteen. Norris studied at Berkeley, and for a while at Harvard, returning to San Francisco as a newspaperman and then, after the success of his fiction took him to New York, as a novelist researching material for his most famous book, *The Octopus* (1901).

The central issue of this novel—the struggle for control of the land and for shares of its bountiful produce—had figured earlier in the original southern California novel, Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (1884), which depicts the plight of Mission Indians caught in the crossfire between Mexican landowners and Yankee entrepreneurs. Similar concerns would continue to turn up after Norris in such varied works as *Factories in the Field* (1939) by Carey McWilliams, John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), the early *Actos* (1966) of Luis Valdez, and *Rabbit Boss* (1973) by Thomas Sanchez. To the north, this tradition was echoed in the proletarian novels of Robert Cantwell, *Laugh and Lie Down* (1931) and *Land of Plenty* (1934).

Based on actual events, Norris's main story deals with a group of independent wheat ranchers defending their interests against a land-greedy, tariff-wielding railroad combine, the octopus of the title. Some features of the novel are typically "western": the time is 1880, the land is recently settled, the railroad is the villain, and the law is hard to find. Other features give it a distinctly far-western flavor: the San Joaquin Valley setting, a side-trip into San Francisco's already thriving Bohemian subculture, the presence of a long-haired wandering mystic who hears voices and believes in

reincarnation, and the aspiring poet, Presley, who observes the unfolding drama.

Norris's sprawling novel signaled many things to come. Economically, ecologically, the history of the Far West has continued to be a saga of exploitation, land abuse, wars for water, bloody struggles and enormous thefts. It has been the same, of course, in other parts of the world during the past two hundred years. What makes the difference, especially in California, are the deathless legends of what the Far West holds in store—first the legend of gold and riches, later the legend of golden opportunities and the Golden Gate, the legend of open space and oranges, a land of promise, some final haven for the granddaddy of all such legends, the Great American Dream. Such expectations can move people to try things they might not otherwise try, and sometimes achieve things they might not otherwise achieve. They can also lead to particularly sharp, often crippling disappointment. Experiences that might be viewed elsewhere as simple reality are viewed out west as a failure of the dream. This dream, it should be pointed out, has seldom been promoted by the serious literature. Other media have kept it alive: word of mouth, popular songs, chambers of commerce, real estate campaigns. What twentieth-century writing has provided, time and time again, is counterpoint, playing under or around or against the legend, as Harte did, prophetically, in "The Outcasts of Poker Flats," as Norris did in *The Octopus*. Presley's yearning for "the frontier of romance" is always there, somehow, in the foreground, or lurking in the background, yet it is usually surrounded, sometimes choked silent, by the various struggles for power. Very often the source for both the dream and the viciousness of the struggle is the same—the extraordinary abundance and dizzying worth, the formidable expanse of the western landscape and the fertility of the land, together with the expectations brought to it by the throngs it has magnetized.

During the 1930s far western literature broadened in range and became rather suddenly more "visible." While a modern generation of native writers found new ways to tap the power of the natural resources, some transplanted writers began to examine the area in ways it had not been looked at before.

In Oregon and Washington, the frontier lasted longer than almost anywhere else in the U.S. excepting Alaska, which had itself inspired some of London's finest stories as well as humorous verse by Robert Service. Further, in the absence of the sort of rare cultural transplanting that had led to San Francisco's prominence, Stewart Holbrook's generalization—" . . . the arts do not commonly follow close on the heels of the pioneer, no matter how literate the people"—was indeed valid for the Pacific Northwest, which, while not the most recent section of the continental United States to re-

ceive what Mark Twain sardonically called the Blessings of Civilization, has probably been the last to develop a written literature worthy of the name. With a few exceptions, such as the autobiographical works of Theodore Winthrop and Joaquin Miller, Frances Fuller Victor's biography of mountain man Joe Meek, some of Idaho-exiled Mary Hallock Foote's fiction, and a scattering of poems from various hands, practically no pre-1920 literature from the Northwest remains readable today.

In 1927 literary life up north stirred considerably when two young writers, James Stevens and H. L. Davis, collaborated on a "manifesto upon the present condition of Northwestern literature," *Status Rerum*, a major contribution even though they could find no publisher for it and had to print it at their own expense. No wonder, for the authors essentially declared war on the academic arbiters of taste whom they accused of keeping the quality of their region's writing imitative and low. Both Stevens and Davis set out to correct such faults with vigorous compositions that actually reflected the land and its people. Over two decades would pass before Stevens's most mature novel, *Big Jim Turner* (1948), set in Idaho, would appear. Meanwhile, writing in the region moved toward maturity.

In 1935, a young woman from the Pacific Northwest, Audrey Wurdemann, became at twenty-four the youngest winner of a Pulitzer Prize for poetry when her *Bright Ambush* was honored. One year later Davis, who had won the 1919 Levinson Prize from *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* and had begun publishing fiction in H. L. Mencken's *American Mercury* in the late 1920s, became the first northwestern novelist to bring wide literary recognition to his region when *Honey in the Horn* was awarded the Pulitzer. For his material Davis had dipped into Oregon's recent past, the homesteading period in the decade after 1900, much as Norris had reached back into a similar period in the tumultuous past of California's central valley. Further definition of the Northwest experience was contributed in the 1930s through 1950s by such novelists as British Columbian Ethel Wilson, Archie Binns, Allis McKay and, in historical novels late in his career (such as *The Earthbreakers*, 1952), by Ernest Haycox.

In the mid-1930s, from the town of Fresno in the rich central valley of California, came the voice of William Saroyan, cocky, flamboyant, and instantly famous upon the publication of his first book, a collection of free-wheeling tales and monologues called *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze* (1934). For Saroyan the farm country of his birth was not a battle zone. It was a warm, generally benevolent place where his Armenian family struggled to set down roots in a new land. *My Name Is Aram* (1940) is still one of his best-known books. In its approach to immigrant culture it is also a landmark book. Only in the past twenty years—since the Civil Rights movement began to unlock minority literatures—has the unique mix of

ethnic groups in the Far West begun to find full expression in poetry and fiction. Saroyan's stories give us one of the earliest examples from the West Coast of writing about an ethnic minority from the inside. This is the source of that love of family and the deeply felt compassion for human effort and human error that mingle with his innate charm and whimsy and perfect timing.

John Steinbeck's first book, *Cup of Gold*, appeared in 1929, and was soon followed by *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), *To a God Unknown* (1933), *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *Of Mice and Men* (1937)—an outpouring of novels and stories and plays that continued for nearly forty years and brought him the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was, among other things, one of America's most territorial writers. Like Faulkner and Mississippi, Steinbeck and his region have become inseparable. He laid such a powerful claim to a specific piece of central California that nowadays all the land between the Gabilan Range and the ocean, between San Jose and the southern end of the long Salinas Valley is referred to fondly as "Steinbeck country."

The Long Valley, a collection of his best short fiction, was published in 1938. The following year saw the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, as well as Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, Aldous Huxley's satirical look at a Hearst-like family in southern California, *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, and Raymond Chandler's first novel, *The Big Sleep*. In 1939 F. Scott Fitzgerald was living in Los Angeles doing much of the work on his Hollywood novel, *The Last Tycoon*, and eastern magazines were publishing the Saroyan stories that would appear a year later in *My Name Is Aram*. This confluence of now-famous West Coast classics, at the end of the decade, suggests the improbable variety of fictions the region would continue to deliver—raw challenges from the back country, struggles for shares of produce in the lowlands, immigrant and minority experience, tales about Hollywood, and a new kind of detective story.

The new detective story, as it was reshaped by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, originated in San Francisco. If we take things chronologically, Hammett actually provided the first popular hero of modern West Coast fiction. Five years before *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, ten years before *The Grapes of Wrath* and the Joad family's epic journey west from Oklahoma, there was *The Maltese Falcon* (1929) and its Satan-faced private eye, Sam Spade, whose prototype, The Continental Op, had been rubbersoling around the city's streets for years. Soon after World War I, Hammett had left his native Maryland and traveled to San Francisco, where he worked for Pinkerton's Detective Agency. He lived there for eight years, writing stories that developed from his own experience as a private investigator. To this he brought a post-World War view that changed the history of detective writing.

The hardboiled private eye, epitomized by the Op and Sam Spade in San Francisco, and by Chandler's Philip Marlowe in Los Angeles, inhabits a world much different from the world that produced Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. In the traditional detective tale, crime is an aberration, murder will out, justice will be done, and order will probably be restored in a more or less reasonable society. In the stories of Hammett and Chandler, crime is the norm, justice is not expected, and any order is temporary because their jaded heroes live, as Chandler wrote in the introduction to his collected stories, "in a world gone wrong," where "the law was something to manipulate for profit and power."

Among the numerous detectives who have continued down these far western streets the most prominent is Ross MacDonald's Lew Archer, hero of some nineteen novels. Like Spade and Marlowe, Archer is a man in mid-life, a loner who expects little from the people he deals with, and whose domain is the California coastline. He too is boiled, but not as hard. In the first scene of *The Underground Man* (1971), he is feeding the birds outside his window and making friends with a five-year-old boy. With a kind of guarded decency Archer moves through a world that is gradually going to pieces around him. What Chandler caught was the tawdry, tarnished glow of '30s and '40s L.A. Bringing southern California into the '70s, MacDonald shows a man living on the edge of imminent social disintegration, somehow continuing with business as usual and, in a strangely archaic way, morality as usual.

The West Coast detective story intersects with the fictions from in and around Hollywood which began to proliferate during the 1930s. Both incline toward urban or suburban settings, city worlds almost always characterized by deceit, artificiality, shallow values, and corrupt habits. Nathanael West, Aldous Huxley, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Budd Schulberg, Christopher Isherwood, Harry Leon Wilson, and Horace McCoy were in the first wave of literary writers lured to the coast by the prices being paid for film scripts. They were then lured, by the very nature of the bizarre and contradictory world they found themselves in, to write about it. In these books the movies merge with a titillating but doomed southern California concoction of fantasy, eccentricity, self-delusion and excess. *The Day of the Locust*, which is still the standard measure in this genre, makes Hollywood a place where the worst possibilities of the Far West find their most grotesque expression, where movie sets mirror hollow lives, where people driven wild by disappointment turn to violence, and the dream becomes a nightmare. Similarly the L. A./Hollywood depicted in Joan Didion's *Play It as It Lays* (1970) is brittle, shallow, faithless, destructive. One difference is that West's novel, like several later books, is a satire, weighted with derision. Didion's account of Maria Lang's downward spiral—in taut, surgical prose, and chopped into

cuts and takes like the film Maria usually thinks she's living through—is in its way a more harrowing view of the sundrenched danger zone. In both these novels, however, and in the numerous others that have now made L.A./Hollywood a literary realm unto itself, a good part of the power and the appeal derives from the fact that the dream is always there, if only to be betrayed, the ongoing western promise of the Big Romance, the Second Chance, which is a given in the environment, as potent and as insistent as the coastline.

In these fictional cities survivors have to be toughly plated, like Spade or Marlowe, or L.A. Police Lt. Tom Spellacy in John Gregory Dunne's *True Confessions* (1977), who outlives his priest brother not because he is better or has tried harder, but because he is meaner and trusts no one. In *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* (1974), Ishmael Reed's kaleidoscope morality play and detective novel parody, the city is Berkeley, and the city is afflicted with a malady called Louisiana Red. The symptoms are malice, bitterness, hypocrisy. At the end the one who comes out smiling is private eye La Bas, the worldly veteran and voodoo investigator. Meanwhile, the soft, the sensitive, the vulnerable, if they don't escape, are liable to get consumed or seriously damaged. At the end of *The Day of the Locust* Tod Hackett is driven away in a police car, screaming, unable to face the mob violence outside a film premiere. At the end of *Play It as It Lays* Maria Lang is in a sanitarium where "nothing applies."

During the 1950s San Francisco once again became the gathering place for an important group of writers. The poets and novelists of the Beat Generation—such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Kenneth Rexroth, Michael McClure, Bob Kaufman—saw themselves as a resistance movement, taking a stand against forces in America that were dehumanizing the cities, stifling the imagination and spreading a gloss of false complacency across the land. The San Francisco Bay area was their headquarters because the spacious Far West seemed well suited to experiment, expansiveness, release and renewal. At the center of this movement was Jack Kerouac, a writer born and bred in Massachusetts whose life and prose were ignited by what he discovered in the Berkeley Hills, the San Jose railyards, the mountain ranges between Big Sur and Washington's North Cascades where he worked one season as a fire lookout.

Kerouac's books pointed the way for a generation of American writers as well as for a generation or two of American seekers, and it was among these mountains that he reached a climax point in his long, erratic spiritual journey. He describes this in *Dharma Bums* (1958), which like all his fictions is thinly veiled autobiography. Ray Smith, the easterner, neophyte Buddhist and student of mountain lore, is Kerouac. Japhy Ryder, his West

Coast mentor, is San Francisco-born poet and Zen scholar Gary Snyder. In this novel Kerouac announces what we might call *the second discovery*. The first discovery had been often described, as Steinbeck did in *East of Eden*, taking his characters into the Salinas Valley in the 1860s, to settle and then to work the virgin soil. For Kerouac in 1955, a valley was not something you worked for crops; a mountain was not to be mined for minerals. He came to the high country more like a poet than a dramatizer, and what he found was spiritual sustenance and renewal.

A revitalizing force in fiction and poetry, the Beat writers explored the boundaries of language and rhythm and styles of life. In the history of the West Coast it might be said that, in ways both actual and symbolic, they reopened the territory; to an enormous audience they reaffirmed the coast as a literary location. During the twenty years since their heyday, far western writing has seen an unprecedented flourishing. The Beat Legend itself has played a role in this, drawing writers toward the coast. So has the constant pull of Hollywood, as well as general population growth and population shift westward, and a new and now sizable generation of writers native to the region, born during the '30s and '40s, began to publish extensively in the '60s and '70s. The result is an ever-widening spectrum of lives and voices, from Tillie Olsen's classic "Tell Me a Riddle" (1956), set in the California beach town of Venice, to explorations of San Joaquin Valley subculture in Leonard Gardner's *Fat City* (1969) and Gerald Haslam's collection *Okies* (1973), to the prize-winning stories of Oregon-born William Kittredge, *The Van Gogh Fields* (1978).

The range of contemporary writing can be seen in the ways authors have continued to make use of the land's riches, both economic and spiritual, and the powers inherent in the western terrain. These elements are boldly present in such novels as Don Berry's *Trask* (1960), which explores the meeting of Indian culture and the earliest white settlers on the Oregon coast during the 1840s, Ken Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964), Wallace Stegner's prize-winning *Angle of Repose* (1971), Thomas Sanchez's *Rabbit Boss* (1973), and in James D. Houston's *Continental Drift* (1978). Sanchez writes of the Washo tribe that inhabited the Tahoe basin at the time of the first white penetration of the Sierras. The story begins in 1846, as a lone Washo hunter comes upon the Donner Party. From there we follow this tribe's fate through four generations, experiencing profoundly what has been lost, not simply land but an identity, culture, and an entire belief system tied to the land. Sanchez evokes that complex consciousness that once pervaded the continent, wherein individual and tribe and every feature of the natural environment were physically and spiritually integrated.

For the Stamper family in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, life in the northwestern woods is an equally intense bonding of kinship, work and soil. Self-

reliant loggers, they are fighting a union that wants to intrude upon their right to grapple with the land. For Hank Stamper, the larger-than-life hero, it is the final struggle of the individual to preserve what he considers a rightful relationship to timber country that is both a source of sustenance and an awesome adversary. The great forests that dominate this terrain are lush and fertile and inspiring, and demonic. The ferocious Wakonda River can define a man's worth, can uplift his body and his spirit, can bear his ancestors and his memories along with its currents, and it can also swallow whatever he loves the most.

For Washington-born Richard Brautigan, author of *Trout Fishing in America* (1967), a feature of the western landscape becomes the central character, has a voice, and suffers a terrible fate. It is a burlesque lament for the ways civilization has punished the great outdoors. We see trout streams that become stairways, water faucets, a row of telephone booths, and at last just a collection of scrap for sale in a San Francisco wrecking yard.

Another Roadside Attraction (1971) by Tom Robbins is set farther north near Puget Sound and the Canadian border. Here the peaks, the mushroom glades and waterways dwarf the towns; yet this spectacular landscape is not being used for produce or for the spiritual renewal of the characters in the story, so much as it serves to launch the author's stoned and vaulting inventiveness as a means to explore another zone of reality. The novel offers its own metaphor, in the huge and marvelous hotdog which rises above the roadside restaurant and which contains within its surreal borders rivers, fields, valleys, a baseball stadium, a view of Kilimanjaro, and the gas rings of the planet Saturn—"the perfect emblem," the narrator tells us, "for the people and the land."

Among writers native to the region who have emerged since the 1950s there are a number of non-whites whose stories, plays and poems have begun to illuminate lives crucial to the West Coast's past and present. Asian-American experience, for example, has been principally a West Coast and Hawaiian phenomenon, located there since the 1840s when men like the great-grandfather in Shawn Wong's 1979 novel *Home Base* crossed the Pacific to seek their fortune in a land the Chinese called Gold Mountain. Japanese-Americans like John Okada, a Seattle native whose uncompromising World War II novel *No-No Boy* (1957) dramatizes the turmoil of a Nisei caught between two cultures, began arriving in numbers in the 1890s. The Chicano presence goes back even further, to the earliest days of exploration, and beyond to the native cultures explorers found in the West. Mexican-Americans, in fact, became an ethnic minority not by immigration but by conquest, since all the states along the border were once northern provinces of Mexico; an area like Los Angeles has had a continuous Spanish-speaking population since it was founded in 1781. Here the cultural con-

tinuum extends not toward Washington, D.C., and London, but south toward Guadalajara.

The growing body of stories and novels by such writers invites another look at some of the prevailing imagery. Because the Anglo voice dominates the literature, one looming presence has been the Pacific coastline as terminus, as some final limit of that great surge outward from Europe that began in the fifteenth century. Yet for Asian-American writers history has also been pushing toward this coastline from the other direction, eastward, across the Pacific. In the works of Chicano writers such as Luis Valdez, Ronald Arias, and José Antonio Villarreal, the coastline is not felt much at all. For them history is pushing northward from the south, across a border that oftentimes seems artificial, into a land their ancestors once held title to. And for Native Americans, the ancestry pushes not from West or East or South, but straight up from the soil beneath their feet. Thus, in these past twenty-five years literature has finally begun to reflect what this region is in fact—not only a terminal zone for the westering thrust, but a crossroads where an extraordinary mix of cultures has met, clashed, intermingled: Yokuts, Miwok, Skagit, Spanish, Mexican, Filipino, Portuguese, Chinese, Basque, African, Scots-Irish, Armenian, Japanese, German, Italian.

Writes Lawson Inada:

It doesn't matter to me
that "the exact geographical center of California"
is located in the back of the Gomez family yard.
Or so they say.

. . . The Gomez family, the Inadas,
are exactly where they are,

where California starts from
and goes out, and out, and out.

From here the going is easy.

Look at our faces, and smile.

This is one of our sources of hope, because in diversity—if it can be preserved—there is always a richness. Moreover, it is yet another indication that, in a part of the world so recently settled, where the literature is still unfolding, there remain many regions—of the land, and of the heart—for writers to explore.

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