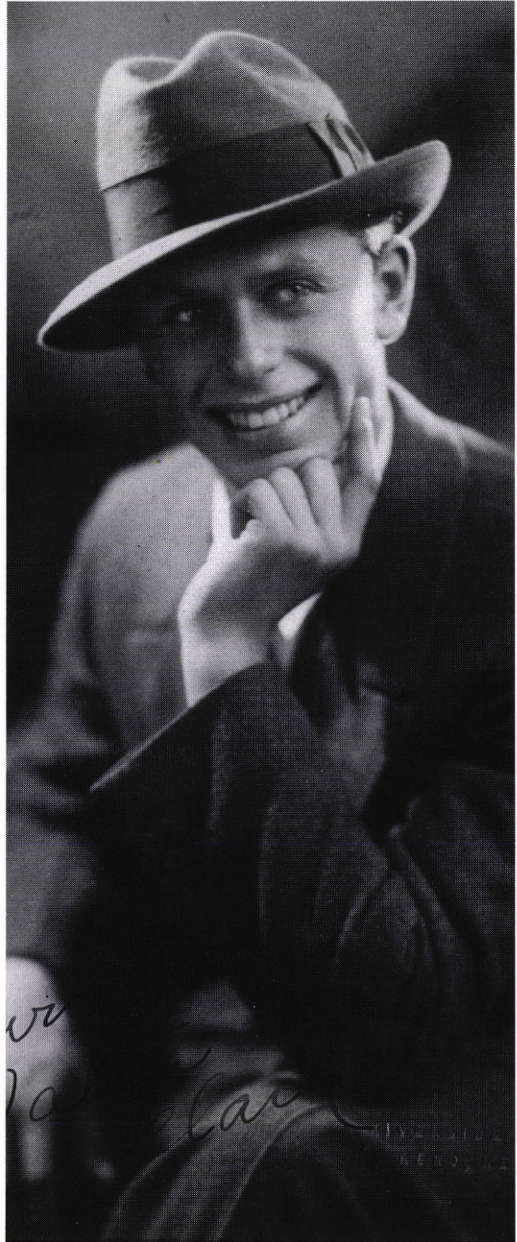


Nevada

Historical Society Quarterly



SPRING 2021



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The *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* solicits contributions of scholarly or popular interest dealing with the general or natural history of Nevada, the Great Basin, and the West. For more information about potential subject materials and submission guidelines, please visit our website: <http://nvhistoricalsociety.org>.

The *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* (ISSN 0047-9462) is published quarterly by the Nevada Historical Society. The *Quarterly* is sent to all members except our Senior and Student categories. Membership applications and dues should be sent to: Membership, Nevada Historical Society, 1650 N. Virginia St., Reno, NV 89503.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 1650 N. Virginia St., Reno, NV 89503.

Nevada

Historical Society Quarterly

Volume 64

Spring 2021

Number 1

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JACQUELYN K. SUNDSTRAND

Front Cover: Mark Twain (1835-1910) left, and Walter Van Tilburg Clark (1909-1971) right. In these photos both are aspiring young authors. Twain achieved fame as one of the greatest literary figures in American history after his brief Comstock newspaper career with the *Territorial Enterprise* and the publication of *Roughing It* in 1872, set mostly in territorial Nevada. Clark, the son of University of Nevada President Walter E. Clark (1918-1938), made his mark as a writer and novelist whose themes gave larger meanings to the American western novel with the publication of *Oxbow Incident* in 1940 and its adaptation into a movie in 1942. His largely autobiographical novel, *The City of Trembling Leaves* (1945) related his youthful aspirations growing up in Reno, contrasting the asphalt and concrete of the city with its omni present natural setting at the base of the Sierra and vast landscapes of desert and mountains to the east. (Nevada Historical Society; Special Collection and Archives, University of Nevada, Reno)

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Editor's Note

Four separate issues of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* will appear in 2021, a departure from the combined issues of the past several years. In separate articles, the spring issue features two prominent figures in Nevada literary history: Mark Twain and Walter Van Tilburg Clark. Historian Michael D. Pierson explains the trouble Twain fomented after he criticized the women of Carson City for stepping outside their sphere of influence (home and hearth). Twain took a dim view of the civic role they assumed in organizing a fundraising campaign for the Sanitary Commission's work on behalf of wounded Union soldiers in the Civil War. The author ties the incident to Twain's sudden departure from Nevada in 1864 and his move to the larger journalistic and literary world of San Francisco. While the article avoids the legacies of Twain's journalistic beginnings in Nevada, American literature professor Terry Beers immerses the reader in some of the intricate legacies of Clark's writings, including the semi-autobiographical novel *The City of Trembling Leaves* (1945), set in Reno. The novel and Clark's short stories offer texts to structure a comparison with the works of Clark's contemporary, the California poet Robinson Jeffers. In their very different environments—for Jeffers, the coast of California, and for Clark, the empty desert and mountainous spaces of Nevada—both authors sought similar solaces and meanings in nature.

Jacquelyn K. Sundstrand extracts a long-buried story from the archives concerning University of Nevada professor Samuel B. Doten. After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, Doten applied his amateur fishing knowledge to assist in the reconstruction of scientific specimen collections damaged in the Bay Area. In particular, he provided specimens of Pyramid Lake's rare and ancient cui-ui. Turning from history to folklore in the *Notes & Documents* section, readers will find a witty and insightful revision of lore and legend surrounding Julia Bulette, the Comstock's famed lady of the night, by folklorist and historian Ron James. Finally, the book-review section offers comments on a sample of recently published works that may interest readers of western and Nevada history.

William D. Rowley
Editor-in-Chief

Mark Twain and the Women of Carson City

Gendered Politics of Civil War Fundraising

MICHAEL D. PIERSON

This is the story of a small but momentous slice of Samuel Clemens's life (FIGURE 1). In May 1864, he left the Nevada Territory for San Francisco and fame. His departure was not entirely voluntary; however, for all that, it turned out well for him. This essay explains his departure by looking at his involvement in a controversy surrounding a fundraising event for the United States Sanitary Commission (U.S.S.C.) that had been organized and led by women in Carson City. In an ill-advised editorial, he attacked the women, who included his sister-in-law, Mollie Clemens (FIGURE 2), even though they had done nothing more scandalous than raise money for the care of Union soldiers in the midst of the Civil War. Clemens's weak attempts to apologize afterward failed to offer much satisfaction. Added to the tensions he faced after picking a fight with a rival newspaperman in his own town of Virginia City over a different U.S.S.C. fundraising event, the attack on the Carson City women made him distinctly unpopular. It was time for him to flee the territory. As he later wrote about his earlier Civil War service in Missouri in 1861, "I knew even more about retreating than the man who invented retreating."¹ He knew even more still by the time he reached San Francisco.

But why did he attack the Carson City women? In addition to explaining why he left Nevada, the controversy between Clemens and the women enables us to better understand his political and social beliefs at this early stage of his writing career. In 1864, Clemens was not far removed from his Missouri childhood, a period when he had been immersed in slave-state

¹Mark Twain, "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed," in *Mark Twain's Civil War*, ed. David Rachels (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 77. This article uses the name Samuel Clemens when discussing the person and Mark Twain when referring to the author of works published under that name.

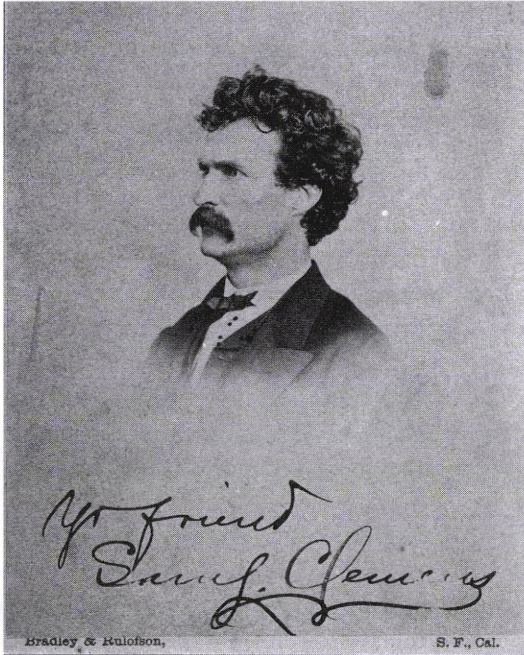


FIGURE 1. Samuel Clemens. (Special Collections and University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno)



FIGURE 2. Mollie Clemens. (Nevada Historical Society)

culture and politics. Even in Unionist Nevada, he continued to hold conservative positions on race and emancipation, as scholars have increasingly noticed. Clemens's wartime conservatism, this essay demonstrates, also included a decidedly masculinist perspective. Clemens attacked the Carson City women because he strongly disapproved of them acting publicly in an organized fashion on a political issue. Blinded by his rage at seeing women engaged in civic life, he inflicted grievous injury to his own standing in the community.

Clemens's attack on the Carson City women shows us the importance he placed on patriarchal rights. We also see that masculinist rhetoric played a key role in Democratic Party ideology during the Civil War. While Republicans like Clemens's brother and his wife, Mollie, embraced increasingly activist roles for women, Samuel Clemens condemned women for their public benevolence. This issue was part of the continued political debates between Democrats and Republicans, as they disputed women's rights and gender roles more broadly throughout the Civil War era. When he later omitted references to the U.S.S.C. women's fundraising in Nevada in his autobiographical *Roughing It*, he hid the fact that gender played a role in forming political identities. He also distorted Nevada's Civil War history by leaving out women. This article tries to correct that distortion by writing women back into the story.

When the Confederacy opened the Civil War by firing at Fort Sumter in South Carolina, Samuel Clemens was working as a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi River. The war threatened to stop river traffic, so Clemens reacted by returning to his hometown of Hannibal, Missouri. There he enlisted in a Missouri State Guard unit known as the Ralls County Rangers, and soon he was elected lieutenant. The Missouri State Guard was pledged to repel invaders generally, but its members understood this promise to include only those trespassers who supported the government in Washington. Clemens left the state guard after about three weeks. We do not

know for sure why he left so quickly, but perhaps he did not enjoy military service. It is hard to see the man who would become Mark Twain, the famous iconoclast, tolerating drilling or being drilled. He may also have thought, after suffering boils and a twisted ankle, that active campaigning was simply not for him. Or he may have realized, as he implies in his work "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed," that he did not want to be "a murderer."²

In the course of moving to Nevada in 1861, Clemens changed sides in a war that was just getting underway in earnest. The prospect that brought him over to the Union and kept him there was offered by his brother Orion Clemens and indirectly by Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln had appointed Orion, then an Iowa journalist who had campaigned for him, as secretary for the Nevada Territory. Orion in turn asked Samuel along as the secretary's unpaid secretary, and the two set out for the West in July 1861. Clemens would not go back east until after Appomattox.³

Samuel Clemens stayed in Nevada from July 1861 until May 1864, when he made a hasty departure for California. Much can be made of his years in the territory. During this time, he learned the patterns and vocabulary of western speech that gave a distinct flavor to his early writings. Also, it was in Nevada where he first served as a professional writer. Clemens was hired to cover local news by the *Virginia City Enterprise* late in 1862. He also wrote his first short stories in Nevada. By the time he left, Clemens—now Mark Twain when he wrote—boasted a modest following as an author, considerable experience with a pen, and perhaps most important, a stock of stories from frontier mining towns. And while we can never know what would have happened had he stayed in Missouri, let alone in the Confederate military, Clemens's stay in Nevada kept his mind from getting too entangled in Southern myths and memories.

Twain's stay in Nevada allowed him to produce a brand of Civil War writing that deviated sharply from Lost Cause mythology. But this is not to say that his Southern outlook disappeared overnight. Literary scholar Joe B. Fulton has argued that Twain retained a Southern perspective longer than many critics have been willing to admit. Studying Twain's words about slavery, race, and the war, Fulton paints a convincing portrait of him as willing to back the Union cause (at least tacitly) but unlikely to surrender his broadly racist point of view too quickly.⁴ Early in the war, Clemens's private correspondence even seemed to express satisfaction with Confederate military victories.⁵ There is a temptation to try to pin Clemens down to a particular political camp, and he would certainly have been a Democrat rather than a Republican during the war. But what did being a Democrat mean? Some Democrats fused with Republicans into the new Union Party, which supported the Lincoln administration's war efforts. Others stayed Democrats, backing the war but maintaining a separate political organization and the right to object to some Republican Party measures. Still others became Peace Democrats, or "Copperheads," and preferred to see the bloodshed end, even if it meant making peace with the Confederacy. Like many others, Clemens seems to have moved across the Democratic spectrum, depending on the flow of events or the audience for his writing. Just where he was at any one point is difficult to discern.

²Mark Twain, "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed," 73.

³For an account of Twain's war years, see Roy Morris Jr., *Lighting Out for the Territory: How Samuel Clemens Headed West and Became Mark Twain* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

⁴Joe B. Fulton, *The Reconstruction of Mark Twain: How a Confederate Bushwhacker Became the Lincoln of Our Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010).

⁵One scholar writes that Twain, in his Nevada years, "was an indignant pro-Confederate Southerner. He wrote fiery letters to pro-Confederate friends praising 'our Missourians' in the field, despising the 'sickening boasts' of the Unionists." Neil Schmitz, "Mark Twain, Traitor," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 63, no. 4 (2007): 28.

By looking at the events that would drive Clemens from the territory in 1864, we can gain a better understanding of how he viewed the war's social and political consequences. He proved willing to back some Unionist enterprises but doubted emancipation. Most dramatically, he abruptly exploded at the mention thought of women taking political positions in public. His shocking blowup about the Nevada women's public activism was so violent, and so sudden, that he could not recover his standing in the community. While willing to extend a charitable hand to help Union soldiers, even when their victory would end slavery, Twain unequivocally refused to sanction anything to do with female political involvement. For him, women's rights would prove even more controversial than emancipation.

Clemens tells most of his Nevada stories in *Roughing It*, an account of his years in the territory, California, and Hawaii. *Roughing It* usually has little to do with the Civil War, and readers can pretend that the Nevada section is not a war story at all. But two of Mark Twain's Nevada stories do see the war intrude. Both tales concern fundraising on behalf of the U.S.S.C., a charitable organization devoted to providing Union soldiers with clothing, food, and medical care and supplies. The heart of the U.S.S.C. were its 7,000 local soldiers' aid societies, groups composed almost entirely of women. As one historian has written of the group, "Women were the initiators, the main financial supporters, and a significant part of the workforce" of the commission.⁶ The women donated homemade food, clothing, and bandages to the national organization, which then distributed everything to the units and hospitals in need of them most. Women also contributed handmade goods that could be sold at "fairs," the temporary stores established by local branches of the commission to raise money. The commission provided the United States with vital supplies at no cost and gave northern women an outlet for their patriotic energies. Women also learned important organizational skills and new ways of seeing themselves and their role as citizens, all while helping the Union cause.

While the fighting bypassed Nevada, the territory heeded the call to help the Sanitary Commission. Twain recounts two stories about how Nevadans donated money to the cause; however, he also completely leaves out a third fundraising event for the Sanitary Commission in *Roughing It*, an omission that obscures both the role women played in Civil War politics in the Silver State and why Clemens left the Territory in such a hurry. By telling that story here, this essay explores the significance of a literary silence. The omitted story reveals a great deal about the young Samuel Clemens as well as the ways in which Americans contested gender politics.

Twain told his two fundraising stories with gusto, and he even took an active role in one of them. In *Roughing It*, he praises the goal of getting donations "for the relief of the wounded sailors and soldiers of the Union languishing in the eastern hospitals."⁷ While Twain doubted the wisdom of emancipation, and may even have been ambivalent about which side he wanted to win the war, he apparently suffered no qualms about helping sick and wounded men. As Twain tells it in his first story about the Sanitary Commission, news arrived in his town of Virginia City in a telegraph from the East calling for funds. The telegram inspired a frenzy of activity. Twain writes that local men "hurriedly organized" a committee to oversee fundraising, but that citizens needed no encouragement. The mere rumor that money was

⁶Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The U. S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), xi. For more about the U.S.S.C., see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the 19th-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 140–73; and Frances M. Clarke, *War Stories: Suffering and Sacrifice in the Civil War North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 84–110.

⁷Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1872; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 293.

being collected, combined with the sight of the committee's chairman riding through town on a cart, incited a throng of would-be donors. Undeterred by assurances that "if the town would only wait an hour, an office would be ready, books opened, and the Commission prepared to receive contributions," the people of Virginia City "swore they would not wait." According to Twain, "it was the wildest mob Virginia had ever seen."

Twain's description of the crowd of willful philanthropists is not entirely positive. In *Roughing It*, Twain describes an irrational "mob," not a group of generous citizens. The mob is "ungovernable" and "deaf to all entreaty." There are also people in the crowd who, he would have us think, have no place at such a public event. Twain depicts "Chinamen and Indians" stupidly throwing money into the cart "without knowing or caring what it was all about." Generosity by such means earns these people an insult, not praise, and may even serve to disqualify them from citizenship. Women were there, too, and their behavior also seems inappropriate. Twain writes that the women fought their way "to the cart with their coin," only to emerge from the scuffle with their formerly trim "apparel in a state of hopeless dilapidation." Throughout the scene, Twain presents donors as thoughtless, noisy, and pushy. The commission receives a lot of cash quickly—but only because Virginia City was awash with the riches of silver mining, Twain implies. Money, he writes, "was wonderfully plenty. The trouble was, not how to get it,—but how to spend it, how to lavish it, get rid of it, squander it."⁸ As he wrote in a private letter at this time, "I think they like the Sanitary Fund because it affords them such a bully opportunity of giving away their money."⁹

Twain's second and more famous U.S. Sanitary Commission fundraising story centers around Reuel Gridley and a sack of flour. It makes for a good story, and Twain embraces it for both its narrative appeals and its political uses. The tale is worth retelling here because it shows what Twain was willing to praise, a useful image to have in mind when we consider why he omitted references to Nevada's third U.S.S.C. fundraiser. Twain had known the central actor, Reuel Gridley, since they were boys in Missouri. Like Clemens, Gridley was a Democrat, and he had made an election-day bet, unwisely backing a Democratic mayoral candidate. Having lost, Gridley was obligated to carry a 50-pound sack of flour to his house, accompanied by a band and a cheering crowd. With everyone at his door at the end of his exhausting trek, Gridley, who probably never wanted to see that heavy sack again, "asked what people thought he had better do with it."¹⁰ One voice suggested that he auction it on the spot, with the price of the winning bid going to the Sanitary Commission. This may well have been a bit of partisan taunting, probing Gridley to see if the Democrat would balk at raising money for the Union war effort. But if it was a test of his allegiance, Gridley passed with flying colors by readily agreeing. The high bidder in turn auctioned it again, and the enthusiasm continued until some 300 people (probably all of them men, given the political nature of the hike that had brought them to Gridley's door) had bought the sack, only to then sell it again. According to Twain, they raised some \$8,000 that afternoon.

Within days, popular demand launched Gridley on a tour of Nevada towns with his sack of flour. With the help of Twain's enthusiastic coverage in the *Virginia City Enterprise*, along with local leaders who warmed up crowds, Gridley orchestrated the sale and resale of the flour all across the territory. Competitive rivalries among towns sparked donations; no town

⁸All quotations from Twain, *Roughing It*.

⁹Edgar Marquess Branch, Michael B. Frank, and Kenneth M. Sanderson, eds., *Mark Twain's Letters, Volume One, 1853–1866* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 281–82.

¹⁰Twain, *Roughing It*, 294.



THE GREAT FLOUR SACK PROCESSION.

FIGURE 3. Illustration from *Roughing It* by Mark Twain, 1872 edition. (Nevada Historical Society)

wanted to be seen as stingy. By the time Gridley and his sack reached Virginia City for the second time (an initial appearance had been a bit of a flop), the town was “ready to surrender at discretion.” Bidding was public and competitive at a mass meeting. The affair was a complete success. Twain wrote that “this was the greatest day Virginia ever saw, perhaps.”¹¹ For his part, Gridley and his sack then went on to California and the East Coast, holding auctions all the way until he reached the great Sanitary Fair in St. Louis. Even then he was not done. In St. Louis, the flour was finally baked into cakes to be sold, thereby making still more money for the commission. As one early Twain historian wrote, “No story of the early period of Nevada history is complete without” Gridley and his sack of flour.¹²

Why was Twain so fond of telling this story? Most obviously, Gridley was a longtime friend. But political reasons may also have motivated him. Both in 1864 and afterward, the story helped to remove the stigma associated with being a Democrat during the war. In postwar years, Clemens moved toward the Republican Party, but his wartime association with the Democracy or Democratic Party could not be easily suppressed. Reuel Gridley and his flour sack offered a way for him to claim that he had supported the war effort when it mattered. Twain linked Gridley to

¹¹Twain, *Roughing It*, 297, 298.

¹²Effie Mona Mack, *Mark Twain in Nevada* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947), 308–14, quotation on 308. Gridley’s story also found in Fred Kaplan, *The Singular Mark Twain: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 116–17; Gary Scharnhorst, *The Life of Mark Twain: The Early Years, 1835–1871* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2018), 245–47; and Paul Fatout, *Mark Twain in Virginia City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 186–95. The fullest account is Robert E. Stewart, “Mark Twain, Ruel Gridley, and the U.S. Sanitary Commission: Raising Funds to Aid Civil War Soldiers,” *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 60 (2017): 18–36.



COULDN'T WAIT.

FIGURE 4. Illustration from *Roughing It* by Mark Twain, 1872 edition. (Nevada Historical Society)



FIGURE 5. Illustration from *Roughing It* by Mark Twain, 1872 edition. (Nevada Historical Society)

the Democratic Party in *Roughing It* and could share Gridley's patriotism.¹³ By making Gridley an enthusiastic Democrat in *Roughing It*, Twain tried to make War Democrats the dominant image of the party, thereby obliterating the Peace Democrats from his past.

Twain might also have retold the flour-sack story because it was an all-male affair. There are no women in any of the versions that he told. This is also true for the illustration that accompanies the flour-sack episode in *Roughing It*: the drawing showing Gridley's flour sack passing through town depicts only men (FIGURE 3). The scene is at night, with a wagon carrying the flour sack through the streets of a crowded but orderly Nevada town. There are 15 figures in the foreground and on the wagon, all of them men or boys. The people shown in the background seem also to be men, making the illustration of "The Great 'Flour Sack' Procession" an accurate rendition of Twain's all-male text. This contrasts with the drawing labeled "Couldn't Wait," which shows the episode described above, of people unthinkingly throwing money into the not-yet-ready cart. In this drawing, however, a female figure is prominent in the foreground (FIGURE 4). While her trim attire is not yet disheveled, she is not amid a calm, reasoning crowd. Instead, she vies with wild-eyed and yelling men, all jostling one another so much so that a hat flies through the air above them. Twain surely would not have approved of her being there. Even the chapter's final drawing, a reproduction of the U.S.S.C.'s seal, can be read as an exclusion of the real women who made up so much of the commission. The seal, showing an oversize angel above a soldier and his wounded comrade, depicts a powerful feminine figure (FIGURE 5). Nevertheless, the two soldiers are the only actual people represented. Twain's remaking of the U.S.S.C. into an exclusively male effort foreshadows why he found the commission's third fundraiser so objectionable that he excluded it from his book—and why Nevada excluded him for his trouble.

The fact that the flour-sack tale and the earlier story of the mob of donors revolve around cash may also have appealed to Clemens. One scholar has written that the "unifying focus" of *Roughing It* "is one that remains near and dear to Sam Clemens throughout his life: money."¹⁴ As we have seen, cash dominates both of Twain's stories of the U.S.S.C. in Nevada. Twain's obituary of Gridley, written for *The New York Tribune* in 1870, speaks of the flour auctions raising "great sums," "extravagant prices," and bringing in "\$30,000 gold" in Virginia City alone.¹⁵ This may not stand out to modern readers, since big charities today usually seek money in lieu of everything else. But it is a distinct departure from the way most Americans thought about charity during the Civil War and especially from what the Sanitary Commission meant to most Americans. The core of the U.S.S.C. were its local chapters, where women gathered to make clothes and bandages. The organization, at its heart, was about homemade goods, not about cash. Because of the obvious contrast between the female membership and the way Twain depicts Nevada's U.S.S.C., his chapter in *Roughing It* appears to be a complete omission of women's involvement. To see a possible motivation behind that silencing, we need to review the history of women's public fundraising.

The first fundraising fairs staged by women were held by northern abolitionists in the 1830s. Women would collect donations of homemade goods throughout the year and then organize a sale during which women staffed tables and sold the items. Historians agree that

¹³Twain gave Gridley no party affiliation in the obituary he wrote about him in *The New York Tribune*, saying only that Gridley had promised to carry the sack "in case an approaching election went against his political party." *The New York Tribune*, December 13, 1870.

¹⁴Jeffrey W. Miller, "By and By I Was Smitten with the Silver Fever": Literary Veins in *Roughing It*," in *Mark Twain and Money: Language, Capital, and Culture*, eds., Henry B. Wonham and Lawrence Howe (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017), 218–32, quotation on 219.

¹⁵*The New York Tribune*, December 13, 1870.

these fairs raised crucial revenue for the movement, but they also point to other ways that such fairs helped the women and their cause. Historian Julie Roy Jeffrey writes that “although undertaken primarily to raise money, women’s fairs made other contributions that were less tangible than cash but no less important. Above all, the fairs fostered communication and sympathy between women that helped keep them involved in the abolitionist cause.”¹⁶ Rural and urban women wrote back and forth, sharing stories with the packages and sending well wishes along with goods. Lessening the isolation that could accompany taking a strong and unpopular position on slavery proved a valuable benefit of fairs.¹⁷

In addition to sustaining movement morale by building support networks, fairs spread the antislavery message by selling items emblazoned with abolitionist iconography in rooms decorated with banners that bore appropriate mottoes. Far from being just a way to make money, the events were part of a “distinctive political culture” for women that, as historian Lee Chambers-Schiller writes, “valued consciousness-raising over fund-raising.”¹⁸ There were, in fact, more important things than money for the women who put together fairs. The money mattered, but so, too, did educating people about slavery, boosting morale by strengthening personal networks, and working toward a general “moral transformation” of society.¹⁹

The Sanitary Commission fairs staged during the Civil War were the direct descendants of women’s antislavery fairs.²⁰ As such, they arrived on the scene with more than a tint of radicalism; they were enveloped in enough of the atmosphere of old-fashioned abolitionism to make them highly suspect to conservatives. Such lingering doubts about the abolitionist antecedents of the fairs explain several otherwise puzzling aspects of the history of U.S.S.C. fairs. It seems odd that the first U.S.S.C. fair was held relatively late in the war, in Chicago in October 1863. It seems stranger still that the Chicago fair initially prompted opposition among men, but it did. As historian Jeanie Attie has observed, the Chicago event “provoked ridicule and fear among Sanitary Commission men and local politicians.”²¹ The fair’s success, however, soon caused a “fair hysteria,” with cities across the North staging similar events.²²

But even as fairs swept the North, they still sparked controversy. Despite the fact that the U.S.S.C. women (and the handful of men who shared control of the group’s national executive board) worked hard to prove themselves patriots instead of politicians, some people still

¹⁶Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 108.

¹⁷Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army*, 108–26. For histories of antislavery fairs, see: Lee Chambers-Schiller, “‘A Good Work Among the People’: The Political Culture of the Boston Antislavery Fair,” in Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women’s Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 249–74; Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, *The Devotion of These Women: Rhode Island in the Antislavery Network* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 173–97; Stacey M. Robertson, *Hearts Beating for Liberty: Women Abolitionists in the Old Northwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 91–126; Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 124–39; Beth A. Salerno, *Sister Societies: Women’s Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 37–38, 112–13.

¹⁸Lee Chambers-Schiller, “‘A Good Work Among the People,’” 251. For abolitionist iconography, see Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁹Lee Chambers-Schiller, “‘A Good Work Among the People,’” 253. For the fairs’ financial impact, see Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 133–34.

²⁰Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army*, 212.

²¹Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 198–219, quotation on 200. See also Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood*, 105–07.

²²Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 174–93, quotation on 186.

wondered whether the women had a hidden political agenda. The fact that several of the most prominent women in the U.S.S.C. had Republican Party associations aroused suspicions. But even without that, the commission's successes sparked concern about what to do with the money the fairs generated. Debates flared about whether it should be sent to the centralized office of the U.S.S.C. or kept at the local level to buy supplies that women could use to make clothing and other goods.²³ Tensions continued throughout the war about how much power the female-controlled local societies would retain relative to the more male-dominated national office. Women obviously were drawn into that highly visible fight.²⁴

Perhaps most important, local women kept alive a vital part of the abolitionist tradition of women's fairs. At all fairs, women retained their former focus on networks, education, morale boosting, and the hand production of goods for sale. The fairs were not entirely about money. At their most radical, women could assert that the things they made were better than cash, because money lost its value during wartime inflation.²⁵ They also believed that homemade goods would maintain bonds between soldiers and their homes, helping with morale and keeping the young men morally strong.²⁶ It was also clear that U.S.S.C. women occupied a central public role during the fairs, serving as spokespeople, donors, saleswomen, and organizers. The fairs would, as Jeanie Attie has written, give women "a means of increasing both their local social authority and their political presence."²⁷

It is worth noting that Mark Twain, at least in *Roughing It*, celebrates none of these feminine influences or experiences. His stories of U.S.S.C. fundraising are about individual striving, and the goal is money, pure and simple. Men compete to get to the wagon to throw money in, and any woman who joins the push comes out disheveled at best, unsexed at worst. Men compete to outbid one another to win the flour sack and to show off their wealth and patriotism. No networks are built, either by men or women. No one learns about the cause, communicates with others, or builds morale by sharing experiences or encouragement.

To highlight how odd Twain's depiction of U.S.S.C. fundraising was, we can look at Louisa May Alcott's famous Civil War novel, *Little Women*, written only three years before *Roughing It*. The two books show how differently men and women went about the business of charitable fundraising. Alcott thrusts Amy, one of the younger March family sisters, into the middle of a fundraising fair to benefit the Freedmen, as former slaves were called. While that was a cause that Alcott believed in, the chapter in which it is mentioned is not about Freedmen, nor even about raising money. It is about the moral development of Amy and her young friends as they negotiate who gets to staff the prestigious Art Table at the fair. Although Amy is a talented artist who has made many of the items for sale at the Art Table, she is shunted off to the less rewarding Flower Table. That table is seen as an undesirable place at a summer fair, with free flowers growing outside and the ones at the table wilting visibly as the day goes on. Eventually, all turns out for the best, with the neighboring college boy Laurie and his friends spending freely at all of the tables and the fair being proclaimed "a success." But Alcott does not linger on the financial details of the success; no dollar total is announced, the

²³Thavolia Glymph, *The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 135–51; Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood*, 105.

²⁴For example, Nina Silber writes that the fairs "drew upon a similar vision of a national community that celebrated individual and local distinctions." Silber, *Daughters of the Union*, 187.

²⁵Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood*, 82.

²⁶Clarke, *War Stories*, 84–110.

²⁷Attie, *Patriotic Toil*, 219.

price of Amy's artwork is not discussed, and readers do not learn where the money goes nor what purpose it will serve. All that's noted is that Amy's art "made a nice little sum of money for us."²⁸ Readers see that Amy's handcrafted book of maxims plays on her conscience and makes her a better person, but they are not told who bought it or how much was paid for it.

While not a U.S.S.C. fundraiser, Alcott's fictional Freedman's Fair depicts a typical Civil War-era women's fair. All of the workers are women, including teenagers, preteens, and the redoubtable Mrs. Chester, who oversees the whole affair. The goods sold are handmade by women and girls, who use their talents not only to produce but also to display the merchandise. Alcott's characters become better friends during the fair, learning to smooth over conflicts and work together. Finally, like antebellum abolitionist fairs, Alcott's imagined Freedman's Fair serves an educational purpose, as Amy and those around her, including the more famous Jo March, learn to become better people. Amy teaches herself, through her own book of maxims, that "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" and that "Virtue is its own reward."²⁹ Amy's young rival and eventual friend learns to "overcome sundry small temptations as well." Alcott summarizes the women's ideals nicely when she writes that even a fair table "may become a pulpit" from which to preach.³⁰

Clemens did not share Alcott's focus on women, work, and self-improvement. Instead, we can read the flour-sack story as mocking women's fairs. Twain and Gridley raise donations without selling anything of value, handmade or otherwise. No one learns anything by bidding, and human interaction is held to a distinct minimum. Perhaps Twain's ribbing of women's culture is fair play, since Alcott gently mocks her young male characters by describing them in unflattering military terms. Her young men at one point execute a "change of base," a term used by the unsuccessful General George McClellan as a euphemism for his retreat during the Peninsula Campaign in 1862.³¹ Also, the men are literally ordered about by Jo, to whom they owe obedience as if they are a "devoted phalanx."³² By making the single men obedient to Jo, Alcott gives women considerable power during the hours of the fair. If Alcott can poke fun at single men's willingness to obey single women, perhaps Twain is making fun of women's culture in turn. Fair enough, maybe. But Twain pushes further.

Much of what Alcott wrote in *Little Women* has a gentle humor to it, including Jo's dominion over the college boys in the Freedmen's Fair scenes. But when we consider the third episode of U.S.S.C. fundraising in Nevada, the one that Twain never retold and which drove him from the territory, we can see that the divide between men and women was not always a laughing matter.

Not all U.S.S.C. fundraising in Nevada was controlled by men like Gridley, Clemens, and the territory's political leadership. Nevada women also organized events. After hearing that some in Gold Hill had raised over \$3,000 at a benefit in "the Old Theatre," a group of women in Carson City decided to help the U.S.S.C. by holding a Fancy Dress Ball on May 5, 1864.³³ Like many public events in the Civil War era, the Fancy Dress Ball required a vast amount of committee work, all of it performed by women. Planning started on April 18, with a meeting called by "Miss Clapp." At this preliminary meeting, according to the *Gold*

²⁸Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868–1869; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 2012), both quotations from 306.

²⁹Alcott, *Little Women*, 302, 305.

³⁰Alcott, *Little Women*, 306, 302.

³¹Alcott, *Little Women*, all quotations from 305.

³²Alcott, *Little Women*, 306.

³³Mack, *Mark Twain in Nevada*, 307.

Hill Daily News, "Mrs. Ross was nominated President *pro tem.*, and Mrs. [Mollie] Clemens Secretary." Twain's sister-in-law, Mollie, only stayed secretary for part of the meeting, however, as the assembled women soon elected permanent officers. The four women elected as permanent officers then guided the meeting to approve the Fancy Dress Ball idea. This gave the women only a little more than two weeks to stage the event; with eyes on the calendar, they appointed women to head committees on "Solicitation, Invitation, Decoration, Reception, Music and Floor Managers." Committee membership lists would be publicized at the next meeting, on April 23, giving the committee heads only five days to pull their committees together.³⁴ The Fancy Dress Ball would require a great deal of work to stage, perhaps most importantly by the Committee of Solicitation, which would collect donations of food and goods in order to maximize the net profit. As the women made clear, they hoped to "outdo our fair fellow-citizens in the amount of funds raised."³⁵ Money always was one of the important goals, even for the women.

Supporting this ball would seem to have been an easy way for Twain to have helped his family and support the U.S.S.C., something he was already doing. But he did not endorse it. Instead, he attacked the event in print. While the Carson City Fancy Dress Ball went off without a hitch on May 5, Twain paid no note of it before the May 17 issue of the *Enterprise*. He waited almost two weeks to criticize (or even notice) the fundraiser that his sister-in-law had helped start. In his belated editorial about the ball, Twain charged that the women were planning to illicitly redirect the proceeds away from wounded soldiers and instead give it to "aid a Miscegenation Society somewhere in the East."³⁶ Twain's charge was incendiary, accusing the women of dishonesty for not following through on their public promise to support the Sanitary Commission. Even more controversially, he alleged that they would direct the money to a radical abolitionist group that would use it to promote interracial sex. A more scandalous accusation could hardly have been imagined in 1864.

We can sense the gravity of Twain's indictment by the reactions of people then and now. The four female officers who presided over the dance wrote a formal letter of protest to the *Enterprise*. Two of the women's husbands, acting separately, challenged Clemens to duels. Twain biographers have also been unimpressed. Justin Kaplan's judgement that the editorial "was a blunder in taste and tact" probably speaks for all, especially given that Twain had directly impeached the honesty of his own sister-in-law.³⁷ That Mollie and Sam's brother Orion (FIGURE 6) had just suffered the death of their only child, Jennie, a mere three months before only makes Twain's comment worse.³⁸

In the face of such a mistake, Twain gave only half-hearted and incomplete apologies. He failed to satisfy the Carson City women with a letter addressed to them. Biographer Ron Powers calls his letter to Mollie Clemens an indulgence in "further self-pity" rather than

³⁴Quotations from *Gold Hill Daily News*, April 21, 1864.

³⁵*Gold Hill Daily News*, April 15, 1864.

³⁶Justin Kaplan, *Mark Twain and His World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 57. There is an effective summary of Clemens's controversy with the Carson City women in Scharnhorst, *The Life of Mark Twain: The Early Years*, 248–51. The primary-source documents regarding the episode are available in the Mark Twain Project's online collection of his letters at MarkTwainProject.org. The supporting notes are especially rich.

³⁷Justin Kaplan, *Mark Twain and His World*, 57.

³⁸Fred Kaplan, *Singular Mark Twain*, 114. Mollie Clemens strikes most Twain biographers as a pleasant, unfortunate victim of her husband's lack of financial success. Ron Powers points out, however, that Twain probably disliked her, criticizing her in a later, private passage as a "bald-headed old-maid" who was afflicted "with the most malignant form of Presbyterianism." Ron Powers, *Mark Twain: A Life* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 424.



FIGURE 6. Mollie and Orion Clemens. (Nevada Historical Society)

an apology.³⁹ Twain tried to excuse his editorial by writing that he and a fellow newspaper staffer had gotten drunk the night before its publication, and that he had written the poor copy while under the influence. According to Twain, his friend had advised him against publishing it, and he claimed he agreed to withhold the piece. Twain wrote that he had then left it on his desk instead of destroying it. There it was found by typesetters scrounging for copy, and they put it into the paper. Such was his story; it satisfied no one. And soon he was engaging in another war of words with a rival newspaper that also provoked talk of a duel, or maybe two. By the end of May, Clemens was out of the territory, forced to flee in the face of mounting hostility and the threat of duels. Even if he had survived those encounters, he would have been liable for arrest for violating Nevada's anti-dueling law. As Paul Fatout writes about Clemens's last weeks in Nevada, they made up "one of the most depressing episodes of Mark Twain's career."⁴⁰

Critics, most of whom admire Samuel Clemens, have found excuses for his shabby treatment of Mollie and the other activist women in Carson City. They have explained his behavior in a range of ways, none of which is fully convincing. Fred Kaplan offers perhaps the most pro-Twain spin on the Carson City episode, writing that his attack was "apparently based on joking words he had overheard earlier in the day." He thus gives Twain credit as a reporter

³⁹Powers, *Mark Twain: A Life*, 138–39, quotation on 139.

⁴⁰Fatout, *Mark Twain in Nevada*, 212.

for having his ear to the ground. He then offers Twain a second and third line of defense, adding that he had composed the words only as a “witty tease,” before finally stating that Twain’s story of drunken writing and mistaken publishing was “a reasonable defense—the publication had been accidental.”⁴¹ But Twain’s words were no accident. As we will see, they were the culmination of Democratic Party rhetoric surrounding activist women, the U.S.S.C., and race, taken to their illogical extreme by the lively mind of Mark Twain.

While some critics accept Twain’s story on how his column stumbled into the *Enterprise*, others see the incident as an unconsciously engineered exit strategy for leaving Virginia City. Viewed this way by critics and biographers, Clemens was ready to leave Nevada for the wider audience he deserved but could not muster the courage to do so on his own. Thus, his printed words forced him out of a situation that had begun to stifle his ambitions. Ivan Benson laid out this argument in 1938, writing that Clemens “had become interested in wider fields.”⁴² Less charitably, Ron Powers writes that “unfathomably, Sam Clemens’s demons broke loose.”⁴³ All of these explanations give personal reasons for Twain’s political editorial. His editorial was not, as some would have it seem, an attack on emancipation, interracial sex, female political activism, or the Republican Party but rather an unstable combination of ambition, alcohol, humor, and sloppy staff work in the newsroom.

More recently, historians have begun to consider that Twain might have meant what he wrote. Perhaps he was a conservative Democrat who intended to land a partisan shot against the Republicans, who were gaining ground in Nevada politics. Jerome Loving writes that Twain’s Carson City editorial was penned “before his conversion from secession to loyalty.” Joe B. Fulton argues that Twain’s “appeal to racist discourse suggested he remained something of a ‘secesh’ or at least a Copperhead in May 1864.”⁴⁴ Loving and Fulton argue that we need to see Clemens as conservative on racial matters, and that Union and Republican success triggered an irrational (and devastatingly unpopular and tactless) response from him. They have a good case. But there is more to it.

Social conservatives like Clemens (in 1864) feared more than just racial equality. Equality of rights between the sexes and the destabilization of gender roles that they thought would accompany racial changes also alarmed conservatives throughout the Civil War era. On gender matters as on racial ones, the Democratic Party assumed the more conservative positions. It did this in both northern and southern states, and as its members migrated west, they carried their opposition to women voting or speaking in public. Democratic opposition to female empowerment was frequently stated, and it encompassed a range of issues such as women’s

⁴¹All quotations from Fred Kaplan, *Singular Mark Twain*, 117. Historian Robert E. Stewart offers this apology for the editorial: “miscegenation was a newly-coined word, and in the flush of success, at a late-night hour after a wonderfully full day, and probably a few drinks, Mark Twain apparently made an impetuous, naive mistake by playing with the word.” Stewart adds that “there is also, perhaps, a bit of sibling teasing at play.” Stewart, “Mark Twain, Ruel Gridley, and the U.S. Sanitary Commission,” 32, 33.

⁴²Ivan Benson, *Mark Twain’s Western Years* (1938; repr., New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 113; See also Mack, *Mark Twain in Nevada*, 324–25; and Fred Kaplan, who calls Clemens “restless, often bored” after his first six months on the *Enterprise* staff. See *Singular Mark Twain*, 110.

⁴³Powers, *Mark Twain: A Life*, 137.

⁴⁴Jerome Loving, *Confederate Bushwhacker: Mark Twain in the Shadow of the Civil War* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2013), 166; Fulton, *Reconstruction of Mark Twain*, 81–84, quotation on 81. Fulton adds that Twain’s attack was more sophisticated than simple race baiting. His analysis makes a fascinating but perhaps tenuous case that Twain meant to criticize Republicans for being “only very lukewarm supporters of abolition” and even less enthusiastic backers of racial equality. In other words, he faulted Republicans for being outraged by the accusation that they supported interracial marriage. See Fulton, *Reconstruction of Mark Twain*, 82.

access to public universities, high-paying careers such as law, medicine, and the clergy, and legal reforms that would grant wives greater rights. Republicans, for their part, inched toward gender equality at much the same pace as they approached racial equality.⁴⁵

Southern white men and Democrats (like Samuel Clemens) shared many views with their northern peers that patriarchal rights and liberties should remain intact. But southern white men lived in a different cultural environment, one that was entirely devoid of a women's-rights campaign in their states, as well as one in which the violence and volatility of slavery lent an urgency to maintaining social hierarchies like race and sex that northerners could not share. Historical studies of southern masculinity show us a world in which white men strove to display their mastery over their dependents, with a great premium placed on how other men perceived a man. Stephen W. Berry's study of the writings of a hyper-literate group of southern white men in the Civil War era provides perhaps the best window into the gender ideologies of men like Samuel Clemens. According to Berry, such men longed for recognition of their much-vaunted accomplishments; their ambitions "were grander, more appalling, and more personally destructive than is usually allowed," he notes. As these men went about seeking the "dream of immortality" on the scale of so many would-be Napoleons, they needed women to play a certain part in the dramas of their lives. "Antebellum men were accustomed to seeing women as an essential part of the masculine enterprise; women were witnesses to male becoming,"⁴⁶ Berry writes. But that was the limit of their actions. Women were expected to be passive observers, not doers in the public arena. For such men, women's passive role as witnesses was an essential foundation for their own overpowering ambitions. There could be no masculine accomplishment without an audience.

Like the southern white men in Berry's study, Samuel Clemens doubted the wisdom of women entering public life. This was especially true of Clemens when he lived in Nevada. As Laura E. Skandera-Trombley has shown, Olivia Langdon, Clemens's wife beginning in 1870, eventually helped him arrive at more feminist positions. In 1864, however, that conversion was still in the future. In the earlier years of his life, as critic Shelley Fisher Fishkin writes, "Twain was appalled by the notion of women's suffrage, and wrote peevish satires trivializing the subject."⁴⁷ His 1867 denunciation of women's right to vote, for example, calls forth even the most hackneyed reasons for allowing only men to vote. He did not hesitate in 1867 to drag out

⁴⁵See Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 97–114; Stephanie McCurry, "The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina," *Journal of American History* 78 (March 1992): 1,245–64; and Joshua A. Lynn, "A Manly Doughface: James Buchanan and the Sectional Politics of Gender," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 4 (December 2018): 591–620.

⁴⁶Stephen W. Berry II, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), quotations on 18, 40, and 191. Other recent books on Southern masculinity include Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); John Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009); and James J. Broomall, *Private Confederacies: The Emotional Worlds of Southern Men as Citizens and Soldiers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

⁴⁷Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Mark Twain and Women," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*, ed. Forrest G. Robinson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 52–73, quotation on 66. Laura E. Skandera-Trombley refers to Clemens's "highly traditional attitude toward women" but persuasively depicts Olivia Langdon and her family as immersed in reform culture, including women's rights and suffrage. Laura E. Skandera-Trombley, *Mark Twain in the Company of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 65–154, quotation on 4. Ron Powers finds Clemens deriding women's suffrage as late as 1871. Only in 1873 and 1874 does Powers find him supporting enhanced roles for women. Powers, *Mark Twain: A Life, 187, 300–01, 342.*

the already shopworn question of who would take care of the babies when women went to the polls.⁴⁸ Separately, he attacked a school run by a Nevada woman that had received \$20,000 in government appropriations for a new building, likening the spending to a "bottomless gullet." Co-running the school was Ellen G. Cutler, who was also, we should note, president of the U.S.S.C.'s Fancy Dress Ball committee in Carson City.⁴⁹ Clemens's hostility to women taking public roles comes out in his reaction to U.S.S.C. events in Nevada. He was willing to endorse a U.S.S.C. fundraiser as long as it was organized by men like his fellow journalists, local politicians, and Reuel Gridley. Helping soldiers engaged in an abolitionist war was, to some extent, fine with Clemens. The only difference between what he supported and what he savaged was the sex of the people running the show.

Even though Clemens approved of men's U.S.S.C. activities in Nevada, he had a record of doubting women's participation in the war effort. His newspaper coverage of a January 1863 "Sanitary Ball" run by women reads like an extended joke, one played on the women in charge. The article begins with what we soon understand to be a sarcastic and untrustworthy comic lead: "The Sanitary Ball ... was a very marked success, and proved beyond a shadow of a doubt, the correctness of our theory, that ladies never fail in undertakings of this kind." In fact, everything in the rest of the column points to the failure of the event, with the final, irresistible conclusion that the only correct "theory" must be that women should not organize public events. What went wrong? First, Twain could not find a dance partner, certainly the truest sign of a disordered society. Why could he not? Because he was drunk. This was a warning to readers that female-led events would be run along temperance lines. Nor did people turn out for the ball. "If there had been about two dozen more people there," he wrote, "the house would have been crowded." It also did not raise much money. While no figure had yet been announced by the organizers, a bad sign in itself, Twain reported with mock celebration that "the net proceeds of the ball ... will doubtless reach quite a respectable figure—say \$400." Twain readers will see this line as a "snapper," a type of joke that Twain reveled in; he often reports something in the usual grand rhetoric of the day, only to undercut it with a brief tag at the end. Often the deflating snapper would be the word "perhaps," or "mostly." In this case it was the diminutive dollar figure, and even that was made suspiciously vague by the word "say," all of which gives the lie to the stock phrase of "quite a respectable figure." For our purpose, we will note that his concluding focus on cash at the expense of moral lessons learned or networks fostered points again to the different values he imposes on charitable work.⁵⁰

Already inclined to attack women when they entered public life, Clemens in 1864 tapped into national Democratic Party rhetoric to create his criticism of the Carson City event. His column, however, went further than other Democratic attacks on the Sanitary Commission by combining disparate elements of the party's message into a strange and outrageous new whole. Other Democrats had accused women involved in relief work for soldiers of diverting funds; one Iowa minister with Democratic leanings claimed in 1863 that Annie Wittenmyer,

⁴⁸Mark Twain, "Female Suffrage" in *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays, 1852–1890* (New York: Library of America, 1992), 214–26.

⁴⁹Mark Twain, "Miss Clapp's School" in *Collected Tales, Sketches, 1852–1890*, 62–65.

⁵⁰Mark Twain, "The Sanitary Ball," in Edgar Marquess Branch and Robert H. Hirst, eds., *Early Tales and Sketches: 1851–1864, Volume 1*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 185–87. Column published in *Virginia City Enterprise*, January 10, 1863.

who led the Keokuk Ladies' Soldiers' Aid Society, had sold donated food for her own gain.⁵¹ A different attack, created by a handful of particularly virulent Democratic racists, depicted the Republican Party as advocates of interracial sex.⁵² Twain has the unenviable distinction of being the only writer known to have put these two distinct accusations together into one story. Even in 1864, he was uniquely inventive, though hardly in a good way. That he would later erase the Carson City episode from *Roughing It* is to his credit; he became a better person as he matured. But there is also no reason to think that in 1864 he somehow meant all of this as a joke or a hoax devoid of political meaning. Other people who made these two charges individually were serious. Twain went too far, and farther than anyone else, but he did so according to established conservative lines of argument.⁵³

Twain's inventiveness in combining these two different critiques of the Sanitary Commission and the Republican Party might have drawn on a confluence of newspaper stories then current in Nevada. While we lack many issues of the territory's newspapers for May 1864, the extant issues of the *Gold Hill Daily News* give us an idea of what was circulating in Nevada's papers at the time. The *Gold Hill* paper, intriguingly, ran stories about financial corruption at the Sanitary Commission, a Sanitary Commission fundraiser that featured a reading of *Othello* (with its interracial couple), and jokes about the skimpy clothing women wore at fancy-dress balls like the one held in Carson City. It even managed to run stories about all three of these topics in the period between the Carson City event and Twain's editorial. All the elements of Twain's ill-advised column were readily at hand, and he merely had to mash them together. The *Gold Hill Daily News* on May 12 answered complaints that it reprinted from the *San Francisco Democratic Press* calling for an investigation into "who has made the premium" from converting gold donated to the Sanitary Commission into cash. The fact that the *Daily News* answered the charge by saying that it was "a shovelful of filth" from a "low-lived treason-dispensing sheet" was perhaps less important than the fact that Clemens could have read the original charge reprinted in the *Gold Hill* paper's columns.⁵⁴ Two days later, on May 14, the *Gold Hill* paper reported that the famous white abolitionist Gerrit Smith had "played *Othello* at an amateur theatrical performance in Peterboro [in New York], recently, for the benefit of the Sanitary Fair. He brought down the house."⁵⁵ On May 5, the *Gold Hill* paper also ran a joke at the expense of women who wore revealing costumes during fancy-dress balls. Such jokes were a stock in the trade of male editors, who were able to titillate their readers with visions of underdressed women while pretending to disapprove of such attire. The *Gold Hill* editor told the story of an encounter at a Parisian fancy-dress ball: "a lady, partly robed in a

⁵¹Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 77–78. See also Attie, *Patriotic Toil*, 214, for mention of the Democratic *New York Herald's* editorial claims of diversion of Sanitary funds toward private gain. The *Herald* criticized the commission soon after Ulysses S. Grant began his Overland Campaign, asking, "What are they doing in these battles for the wounded soldiers? Where are the million of dollars raised at the late Sanitary Fair in this city?" *New York Herald*, May 13, 1864. This, however, was too late to have influenced Twain.

⁵²For Democratic lithographs, see Harold Holzer and the New York Historical Society, *The Civil War in 50 Objects* (New York: Viking, 2013), 277–85; for Democratic pamphlets on miscegenation, see Holzer, *The Civil War in 50 Objects*; and Mark E. Neely, Jr., *Lincoln and the Democrats: The Politics of Opposition in the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 107–14. Neely argues convincingly that the miscegenation attack failed to catch on with the broader party (just as it failed Twain in Nevada), and that it "had lost steam by the heart of the electoral season," (110).

⁵³In taking his words seriously, I am following critic Joe B. Fulton, who argues that "Clemens included the comment about the miscegenation society as a dig at the ladies.... [T]he comment ... was calculated to draw fire but drew quite a bit more than Clemens had intended." Fulton, *Reconstruction of Mark Twain*, 80.

⁵⁴*Gold Hill Daily News*, May 12, 1864

⁵⁵*Gold Hill Daily News*, May 14, 1864.

very low-necked (they call them the neck in Paris) wide-floating, waving abundance of green gauze, was asked what she personated. 'The sea, Monsieur.' 'At low tide, then, Madame,' was the polite response."⁵⁶ One can almost sense Twain's creative mind running all of these elements together (financial corruption, Othello's marriage, and women's scandalous fancy-dress costumes) and creating the editorial that came out on May 17.

We can see, then, that Twain's joke drew from a broader national political context during the spring of 1864. His attack relied on racism for its bite and its scandal. But it also made hay against the idea of women in politics, claiming that they could have no other reason to enter that arena than to fulfill their lustful and misplaced appetites. Twain's joke was very much against the Carson City women. We have every reason to believe that he was every bit the gender conservative that the making of this joke required.

Viewed in its narrowest sense, Mark Twain decamped from Nevada because he was afraid that his involvement in the early stages of duels would result in his arrest. But looked at in a broader way, Twain had to leave because he had not realized how Republican Nevada had become, and how seriously people would take his misogynist charge. He also failed to understand that U.S.S.C. women—including Mollie Clemens—had succeeded in convincing others that they were patriots acting for the good of the country, not party hacks out for their own good who could be attacked in such a savagely partisan way. Historian Nina Silber laments that women had to make that conciliatory gesture away from partisanship, arguing that the move hurt the women's rights movement in the long run. But in this case, seeming to be apolitical protected the Carson City women from Twain's political attack.⁵⁷ One could not go against fundraising for the Union soldiers in 1864, no matter who was running the show, as even Reuel Gridley, the accused Copperhead, could have told his friend Clemens. And so, Clemens really had to leave. Twain imposed his masculinist version of Civil War fundraising in 1872. In his version of events, the Sanitary Commission was about men and dollars, even reducing the money down to the level of specie. No one learns about the Union cause, forms a network, makes anything by hand, or becomes a better person. Few women clutter the public stage. The real and vast U.S.S.C. effort of women getting together formally and informally to make bandages and clothes, orchestrate dances and fairs, produce goods, staff tables, and talk about issues with customers is swept away by the omission of the Carson City women's dress ball. The only faint echo of the women's efforts in Twain's work comes in the form of a male parody of female practices—Gridley's competitive selling of something that no one had made by hand, no one would ever learn from, and no one would keep. That we remember the flour sack and display it in the Nevada Historical Society Museum is testimony to Gridley's generosity, his civic engagement, and his demanding work over many months for a good cause. But it is also a victory for remembering masculine culture at the expense of the experiences and values of Nevada's Civil War-era women.

⁵⁶*Gold Hill Daily News*, May 5, 1864. A month before, the *Gold Hill Daily News* reprinted a story about "novelties of the Sanitary Fairs," including ones that placed women in risqué circumstances. The fair in Albany, New York, for example, featured a tableau with "a life-like picture of a Turkish apartment—the Turk being seated upon an ottoman, with eight or ten beautiful woman reclining about him." The fair in New York City, the story continued, "will be presided over by all the pretty belles of New York in fancy costumes.... Just imagine a Circassian slave, or Page's picture of Venus, represented by some of Gotham's fairest daughters," *Gold Hill Daily News*, April 5, 1864.

⁵⁷Silber, *Daughters of the Union*, 174–75.

"Something Listening"
Sacred Spaces in Fiction by Walter Van Tilburg Clark

TERRY BEERS

God thinks through action
And all this show is God's brain, the water, the cloud yonder,
The coast hills thinking the thing out to conclusion.

—"The Women at Point Sur," Robinson Jeffers¹

Walter Van Tilburg Clark (FIGURE 1) is one of the finest fiction writers of the American West, best known for his 1940 novel, *The Ox-Bow Incident*. Among his other achievements, Clark helped to establish the vibrancy of western themes and settings—in his case, chiefly Nevada—showing how the western novel could shrug off stale stereotypes and thereby claim an important place in the mainstream of modern and contemporary American writers. While not as well-known as contemporaries who wrote about the American West, John Steinbeck, Wallace Stegner, and others, Clark's work could be every bit as finely wrought, partly because of how he depicted the natural world in his writing, a world that for Clark consisted of sacred spaces that offered solace to the human spirit. Like other writers of and about the West, he was inspired by the incomparable beauty and daunting breadth of western landscapes.

To understand Clark's contribution to western American writing, the works of another underappreciated writer, California poet Robinson Jeffers (FIGURE 2), offer some assistance. Known not only for his exquisite lyric verse but also for long narrative poems, Jeffers decried the egotistical self-absorption of modern human beings, who too often turn away from the

¹Robinson Jeffers, *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, vol. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 254.



FIGURE 1. Walter Van Tilburg Clark. (Special Collections and Archives, University of Nevada, Reno)



FIGURE 2. Robinson Jeffers. (San Francisco Public Library)

"divinely superfluous beauty" of the natural world.² Such is the message of his longest narrative poem, "The Women at Point Sur," the story of a self-deluded minister, the Reverend Arthur Barclay, who confuses his own will with God's. The poem ends badly for Barclay, in a final scene wherein a dying Barclay turns away from divine natural landscapes to declare, "I will build again all that's gone down. / I am inexhaustible."³ Jeffers clearly intends readers to see Barclay's inherent solipsism as a warning, an example of what happens when human beings forget, like the demented reverend, that they, too, are just a small part of "all this show," not its purpose, not its end.

While Clark met the California poet only once, he wrote his master's thesis on Jeffers and a narrative poem, "Strange Hunting," in Jeffers's fashion. While never published in Clark's lifetime, he did return to "Strange Hunting" for material for his last novel, *The Track of the Cat*.⁴ As Max Westbrook has written, what the young writer found in Jeffers was "a poetry that measured up to his own most consistent principles," chief among them the recognition "of man's kinship with nature, his belief that the intellect lacks generative capability, and his distrust of rituals which are borrowed from other cultures."⁵

²Jeffers, *Collected Poetry*, 4.

³Jeffers, *Collected Poetry*, 367.

⁴Terry Beers, "Walter Van Tilburg Clark's 'Strange Hunting,'" *Jeffers Studies* 3, no. 4 (1999): 24.

⁵Max Westbrook, *Walter Van Tilburg Clark* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 34. Also see Henry Nuwer, "Jeffers' Influence upon Walter Van Tilburg Clark," who finds Jeffers's influence much stronger than Westbrook thinks it is, partly because Clark's use of hawk imagery connects him directly to Jeffers and shows that "Jeffers affected Clark's poetry and fiction to a significant and measurable degree." (*Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*, no. 44 [1976]: 11).

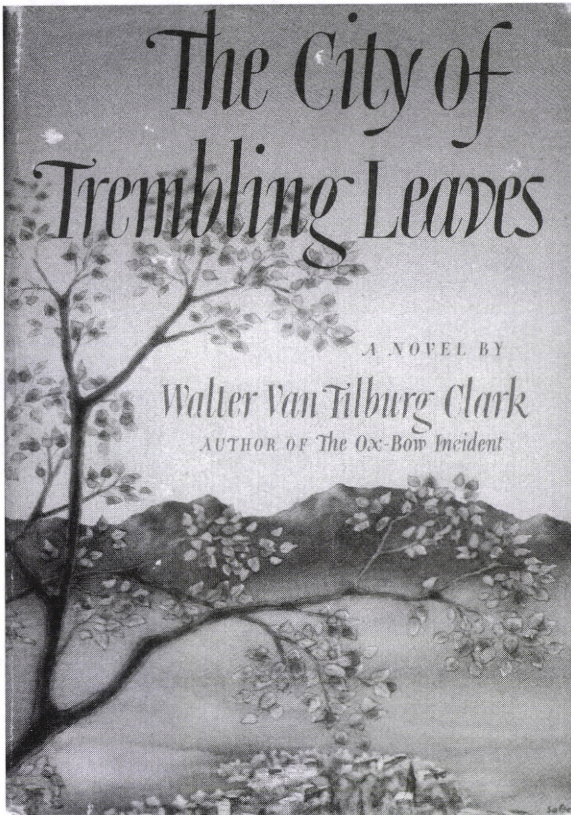


FIGURE 3. *City of Trembling Leaves* first edition cover. (Special Collections and University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno)

The two writers share an attitude about humanity's place within the larger cosmos. One was moved by the awesome shoreline violence of the Pacific as it pounded the granite shores of the West Coast in a kind of sublime manifestation of nature's power; the other was moved by the vast breadth of the Great Basin, "the pale, burning and shadowed east that led the mind out."⁶ Both urged the importance of opening oneself to the sacred experience of the whole, a dangerous spiritual undertaking, though, since such experiences can lead to an end like Barclay's, substituting self for God, or they can lead to an opposite result, ultimately just as solipsistic, of erasing one's humanity and one's culture by loving the cosmos too much, ironically another kind of attention seeking. Jeffers's Barclay character was clearly a warning about the first end, but Jeffers's philosophical leanings toward something he once called "inhumanism"⁷ offer to the unwary an opening to the second.⁸ But in his own work, Clark pointedly distanced himself from Jeffers's starkly rendered dilemma

of human existence and redefined the choice, developing a nuanced stance toward the integration of human beings *and* human culture within the overarching natural world, itself the manifestation of the sacred.

Clark's affinity for these sacred aspects of the world—his artistic expression of the possibilities of a life lived in harmony with them—has been convincingly explored by Westbrook, who uses a Jungian frame to probe what he calls the evocation of sacrality in Clark's work, the "belief that concrete acts, here and now, can recreate the primordial energy and meaning of the relevant or cosmic or original act."⁹ Westbrook sees this aspect of Clark's fiction not only in the descriptions of the western landscapes that permeate his work but perhaps primarily in

⁶Walter Van Tilburg Clark, *The City of Trembling Leaves* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 394.

⁷Jeffers's choice of term was an unfortunate one. He explained it in the introduction to his 1946 volume *The Double-Axe and Other Poems* as "a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man." (New York: Random House, 1948), vii.

⁸Yvor Winters, reviewing Jeffers's *Dear Judas and Other Poems*, seemed somewhat worried about this possibility, writing that "Mr. Jeffers preaches [that]... union with God, oblivion, the complete extinction of one's humanity, is the only good he is able to discover.... but for Mr. Jeffers a simple and mechanical device lies always ready; namely, suicide, a device to which he has not resorted." (*Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, vol. 35, no. 5 [1930]: 280). But in *The Excesses of God: Robinson Jeffers as a Religious Figure*, William Everson—a much more sympathetic reader of Jeffers's verse—offers an approach that counters Winters's. Everson sees Jeffers as "one who stands religiously committed not on the basis of thought but of attitude, a disposition primarily and consistently of the heart and only secondarily and inconsistently of the mind" (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 4.

⁹Westbrook, *Clark*, 12.

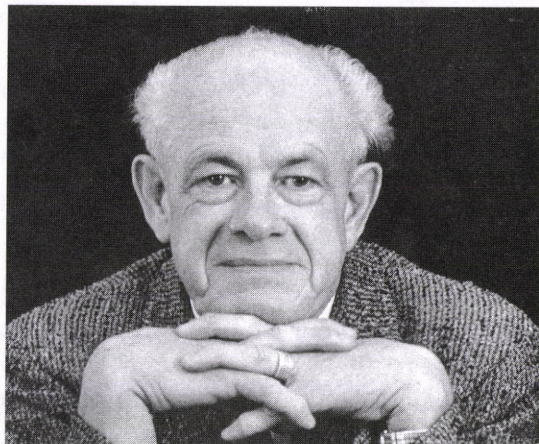
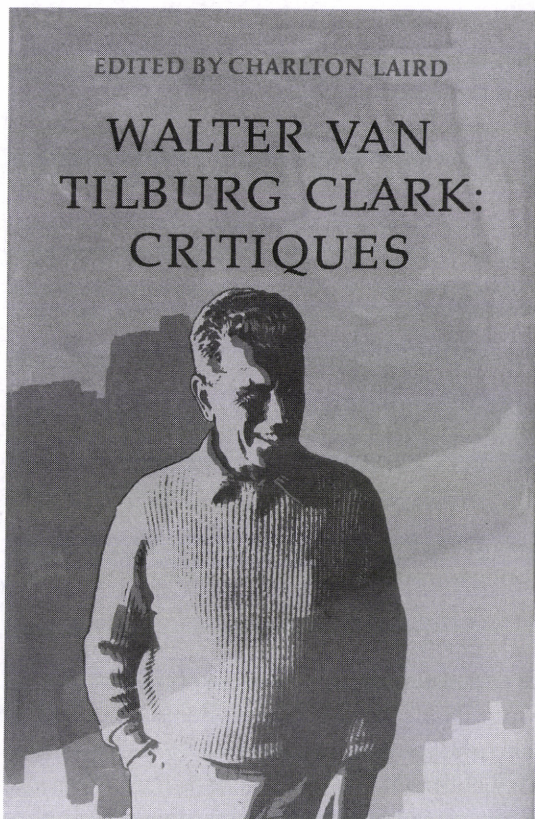


FIGURE 4. Charlton Laird. (Special Collections and University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno)

FIGURE 5. Cover of *Walter Van Tilburg Clark: Critiques*, edited by Charlton Laird. (Special Collections and University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno)

techniques of characterization. For example, in his discussion of *The Ox-Bow Incident*, a novel about the lynching of innocents and the good men who fail to prevent it, Westbrook argues that "the tragedy of *The Ox-Bow Incident* is that most of us, including the man of sensitivity and the man of reason, are alienated from the saving grace of archetypal reality."¹⁰

Westbrook suggests that an overabundance of sensitivity or reason—represented in the novel in the characters of imaginative cowboy Art Croft and the upright storekeeper Arthur Davies—burden human beings who might otherwise feel freer to act ethically and in accordance with the divinity within the world around us. The same reality archetype applies to or undergirds discussions of the novels *The City of Trembling Leaves* (FIGURE 3) and *The Track of the Cat* and the novella "The Watchful Gods," each in some way an exploration of, on one hand, characters who feel deeply and imaginatively the pull toward a unified whole but who do not have the will to achieve it and, on the other hand, characters who feel a call toward action but, blinded by reason, fail to imagine even the possibility to apprehend a "larger eternity."¹¹ But as Charlton Laird (FIGURES 4-5) usefully reminds us, Clark "talked about writing as an expression of art, not as a veil to be cast over philosophy."¹² Considering Laird's admonition should lead us not just to explicate what is said but also to appreciate the craft of its saying. One formal component of this "expression of art" in Clark's fiction is his handling of space, especially

¹⁰Westbrook, *Clark*, 67.

¹¹Westbrook, *Clark*, 67.

¹²Charlton Laird, "The Gospel According to the Trembling Leaves," in *Walter Van Tilburg Clark: Critiques*, ed. Charlton Laird (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1983), 170.

as a vehicle for evoking the imaginative engagement of the individual with the magic and sacred aspects of the natural world. Attending to his use of space offers an important means of appreciating how subtly Clark embeds his ideas in his fiction.¹³

The importance of appreciating Clark's use of space has already been argued by Suzanne Kehde, who sees the landscape in Clark's work as assuming a "characterlike role."¹⁴ In her analysis of *The Ox-Bow Incident* and *The Track of the Cat*, she focuses on the consequences of what happens when men withdraw from nature. She shows how the often dark interior spaces of the two novels reinforce this separation, as do the snow and darkness of the wintry exterior settings: "Both novels are replete with images of the hidden landscape: In town, it is obscured by buildings, on the range by box canyons or enclosed valleys, by mist, by snow, by darkness. All these obscurities have the effect of undercutting man's judgment, his sense of proportion, depriving him of his fixed lookout point onto the universe."¹⁵ In her insightful reading, Kehde emphasizes not just the driving underlying theme of Clark's fiction—the importance of staying connected to the natural world—but how his handling of space becomes a tool of his craftsmanship that reinforces this theme. Without a "fixed lookout point onto the universe," men become susceptible to evil. The analysis is compelling and useful, but here I want to turn to another aspect of the way Clark often handles space in his fiction: he not only uses it to emphasize the consequences of withdrawal from the natural world, he uses it to figure in the manifest presence of the magical and sacred.

Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan defines space as "that which allows movement" and is appreciated best from the "security and stability of place."¹⁶ Natural landmarks exist within the open space, and these organize territory for human beings, who understand it through features important for their own cultural purposes. Often in Clark's fiction, such open spaces are not yet fully dominated by humans, some of whom exude a deep regard for the relatively unbounded space of the western landscapes, which is familiar from Clark's writing, a regard much like Gaston Bachelard's idea of topophilia: "the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love."¹⁷ Tim Hazard, in *The City of Trembling Leaves*, evokes this feeling about Lake Tahoe, which at certain times "has then a purity which is unique and imponderable...."¹⁸ Another way of thinking about space focuses on settlements and villages, sites where human activity has led to a varying degree of construction according to custom, law, need, and tradition. These are some of the settings that interest Kehde in her discussion of *The Ox-Bow Incident*, for example, the homosocial order present in the town of Bridger Wells, which the main characters Art Croft and Gil Carter seek to join.¹⁹

These two ways of thinking about space—terrain in a relatively untouched state and architectonic sites that host human activity—form a kind of spectrum imagined as the possibility of movement in space against the relative stasis of settled life in a particular place. Think of this spectrum, ultimately rooted in the bodily experience of the world, as something like what Edward Soja, following Henri Lefebvre, describes as "the concrete materiality of spatial

¹³Laird, ed., *Critiques*, while warning against seeing Clark's work as a veil for philosophy, Laird also observes that "ideas permeates Clark's work, all of it," 171.

¹⁴Suzanne Kehde, "Walter Van Tilburg Clark and the Withdrawal of Landscape," in *The Big Empty: Essays on Western Landscape and Narrative*, ed. Leonard Engel (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 134.

¹⁵Kehde, "Landscape," 136.

¹⁶Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

¹⁷Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), xxxv.

¹⁸Walter Van Tilburg Clark, *The City of Trembling Leaves* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 165.

¹⁹Kehde, "Landscape," 138.

forms."²⁰ On one end, the spectrum is defined by the material projections of power and ownership, such as saloons and remote mountain cabins, places that are recognized as significant structures for human life at a local level. On the other end, think of the spectrum as defined partly by the *absence* of such human artifacts, a space where movement is much freer for the lack of them and where dwells a greater possibility of sacred or magical experience. Edward Relph explains that "sacred space is that of archaic religious experience; it is continuously differentiated and replete with symbols, sacred centres, and meaningful objects."²¹ Thus some spaces form the sites of religious experience, stories of creation, or the existence of unseen benign or malevolent forces. Clark's fiction is particularly attuned to this latter possibility.

Once again, drawing a contrast with Jeffers's poetry is useful, for despite their common theme of urging humanity to regard itself as part of a natural world, they figured its sacred essence somewhat differently. Jeffers's god is famously indifferent toward human beings, and the poet wastes no time trying to solve the mysteries of origin or of the existence of pain, suffering, and inexhaustible beauty. In "Apology for Bad Dreams," he writes:

I have seen these ways of God: I know of no reason
 For fire and change and torture and the old returnings.
 He being sufficient might be still. I think they admit no reason;
 they are the ways of my love.
 Unmeasured power, incredible passion, enormous craft:
 no thought apparent but burns darkly
 Smothered with its own smoke in the human brain-vault: no thought outside:
 a certain measure in phenomena:
 The fountains of the boiling stars, the flowers on the foreland,
 the ever-returning roses of dawn.²²

Such expressions align in some ways with the manner in which Kehde sees space being used in Clark's fiction, which emphasizes the alienation that occurs when human beings withdraw from the landscape and the attendant danger looms of becoming "vulnerable to the excesses of the homosocial order, in danger of being too easily led or too intent on leading."²³

In some of his works, Clark took a different path from Jeffers's rather stark inhumanism, rooted as it is in the conviction that God, manifest in all the natural world, is disinterested in humanity. For Jeffers, humanity can best redeem itself by diverting attention from itself and embracing "the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe."²⁴ Clark doesn't disagree with Jeffers in this, but he emphasizes another specific, perhaps humanizing, dimension to the idea: he often portrays unhuman spirits that *are* interested in human activity (though not always approvingly, but interested nevertheless). These gods and spirits appear in notable works throughout Clark's fiction, including in his novel *The City of Trembling Leaves* (1945) and in two shorter works, "The Buck in the Hills" (1943) and "The Watchful Gods" (1950).

²⁰Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Press, 1996), 10.

²¹Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976), 15.

²²Jeffers, *Collected Poetry*, 211.

²³Kehde, "Landscape," 144.

²⁴Robinson Jeffers, "The Answer," in *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, vol. 2 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 536.

In his biography of Clark, Jackson J. Benson marks the importance of these spirits, noting in "The Watchful Gods," for instance, that "[t]hese spirits, which colleague Robert Gorrell has said that Clark 'almost really believed in,' come to represent the various aspects of nature—the fog god, for example representing nature's opposition to human will as well as the sinister, threatening aspects of nature."²⁵ But the importance of these spirits in his fiction is that they allow Clark to preach the desideratum of unity with the sacred while showing how culture prepares us to experience nature. This result is possible because of a dialogue between spatial human constructs and exterior natural landscapes. The latter is space whose spiritual value is apprehended by seeking the sacred beauty of the natural world and the approval of spirits and gods that dwell within it. This apprehension is fueled by a finely developed imagination that prepares for the experience through the acquisition of human culture and tradition, which in acquisition often takes place in spaces away from the natural world. This dialogue is hardly noticeable in "The Buck in the Hills," the first published work of the fiction examined here, but it's crucial to the story's effect.

Originally published in *The Rocky Mountain Review* (and later included in the 1950 collection *The Watchful Gods and Other Stories*), "The Buck in the Hills" won recognition as an O. Henry Prize winner in 1944. The story is straightforward. An unnamed narrator is camping near the snow line in a remote mountain valley and has just finished a bracing swim in a clear mountain pond when he is joined by a companion, Tom Williams, who is returning from hunting deer. The narrator briefly resents the return of his friend, since Tom's presence interferes with the narrator's solitary experience of nature: "This was the way I liked it, alone, and clean cold, and a lot of time ahead."²⁶ But the slight annoyance over Tom's presence soon gives way to dismay, as Tom recounts what happened on the hunt with a third person, the thoroughly unlikable "first-rate bastard"²⁷ Chet McKenny, who had deliberately shot a ten-point buck in the foreleg and then drove the wounded and slow-moving animal downslope to avoid having to bring out the 200-pound carcass himself.²⁸ The unspeakable cruelty of Chet has poisoned his friendship with Tom (and confirmed the narrator's opinion of Chet), especially since Chet tricked Tom into helping him finally slay the deer, asking Tom to hold the animal's head while he slit its throat. Feeling betrayed, Tom hikes out on his own, leaving Chet with the carcass of the deer. After telling the story of the hunt to the narrator, Tom washes the deer's blood from his hands in the pond and, along with the narrator, slides into the water for a brief, cleansing swim, which seems to return some equilibrium to their friendship. The following morning, they silently hike out:

Snow makes a hush that's even harder to talk in than the clear silence. There was something listening behind each tree and rock we passed, and something waiting among the taller trees down slope, blue through the falling snow. They wouldn't stop us, but they didn't like us either. The snow was their ally.²⁹

Westbrook has compared this story to the fishing interlude in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, noticing the connection to the natural world that is shared by the protagonists

²⁵Jackson J. Benson, *The Ox-Bow Man* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004), 170.

²⁶Walter Van Tilburg Clark, "The Buck in the Hills," in *The Watchful Gods and Other Stories* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004), 98.

²⁷Clark, "Buck," 100.

²⁸Clark, "Buck," 107.

²⁹Clark, "Buck," 109.

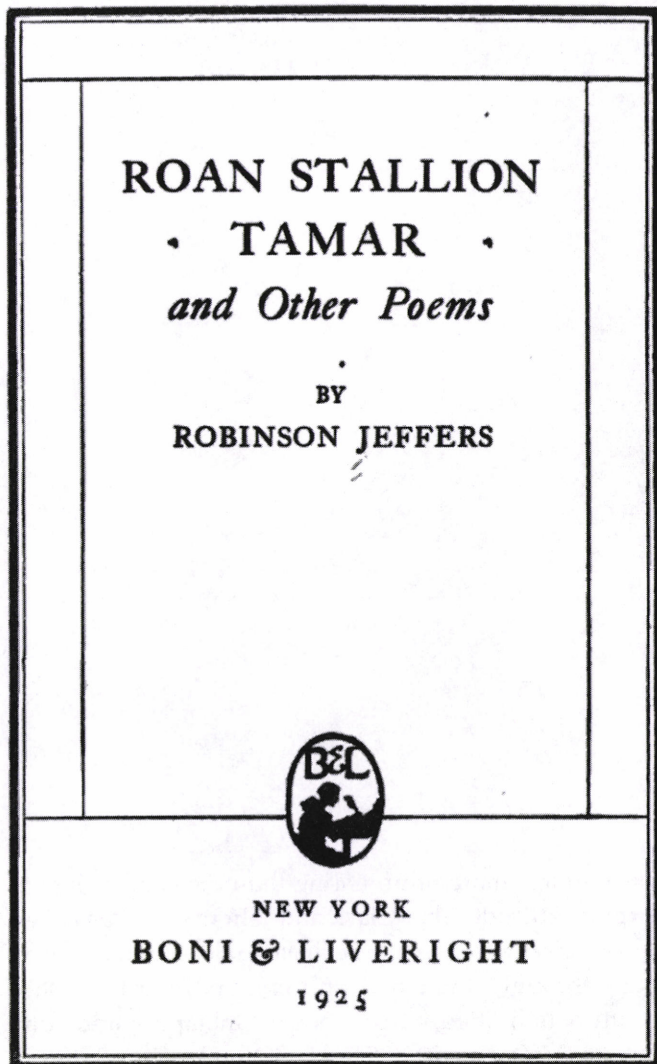


FIGURE 6. Cover of *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems*. (Special Collections and University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno)

in both stories.³⁰ This comparison is useful insofar as it emphasizes the common theme of humanity's need to leave behind, however briefly, the cares that we attach to our membership within social structures, structures whose demands tend to drag us away from direct experience of the natural world. This theme is also memorably and explicitly echoed in Jeffers's "Roan Stallion" (FIGURE 6):

Humanity is the mould to break away from, the crust to break through,
the coal to break into fire,
The atom to be split.³¹

³⁰Westbrook, *Clark*, 135; also see Benson (*Ox-Bow Man*), who extends the Hemingway comparison to "Big Two-Hearted River," 86.

³¹Robinson Jeffers, "Roan Stallion," in *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, vol. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 189.



FIGURE 7. Walter Van Tilburg Clark.
(Special Collections and Archives,
University of Nevada, Reno)

This comparison to Jeffers's work is perhaps more illuminating than the comparison to Hemingway, not only because of the explicit attitudes that Clark and Jeffers share, as previously noted, but also because it highlights their differences of emphasis, at least as evidenced in much of their art. The idea of breaking through "the crust" of humanity in order to face nature relatively untainted by human culture (admittedly a provocative metaphor and not a prescription for actual behavior) is just not as strong a part of Clark's fiction as it is in Jeffers's poetry. There, the human spaces that nurture culture provide the imaginative scaffolding to face nature with understanding and deep appreciation.

Clark's "The Buck in the Hills" begins with the narrator telling of his midafternoon return to the high mountain valley after a hike to an unnamed peak. As he recalls walking through a meadow, he reflects on the experience:

Already in shadow from the col, the grass yellowing and the sod stiffening from the fall nights, so that I could walk straight across and feel only the first solidity and then a slight give which didn't spring back. It was strange in the meadows, walking in the shadow, but with the sky still bright blue, as in the middle of the afternoon, and the sunlight, when I stopped to look back at the peak, just beginning to look late. It was chilly in the shadow too, but I didn't hurry. The peak was sacred to me, the climb was pilgrimage, and five years is a long time.³²

³²Clark, "Buck," 95.

The narrator couldn't be clearer about his relationship to the natural features of the terrain, especially the peak that was "sacred" to him. And he's certainly alert to the details of this natural scene and appreciative of its significance, especially its strangeness, which is to say, its magical qualities emphasized by the play of shadow and light. But also notice the almost off-the-cuff background that ends the passage, characterizing the climb as a pilgrimage and the reflection that "five years is a long time." The clear implication is that there's a pattern to the narrator's visits here, characterized in plainly religious terms, and that the five-year absence makes this visit especially intense for the narrator.

What's easy to overlook, however, is that by framing this visit as a "pilgrimage," the narrator is creating a religious metaphor as a way of emphasizing the sense of ritual perfected from previous visits to this place by comparing that experience to a familiar cultural practice. This reliance on cultural frames emerges again when, shortly after he climbs over a rock barrier on his way back to camp, the narrator recalls previous visits, and one in particular, when he was accompanied by "the dark girl who knew all the flowers, and who, when I bet her she couldn't find more than thirty kinds, found more than fifty."³³ Again, the cultural background—in this case extensive botanical knowledge ultimately grounded in science and its traditions—frames the immediate, imaginative response to the experience of natural spaces and, like the idea of the pilgrimage and the sense of ritual that accompanies it, is something that the narrator and his companions—the "dark girl" and members of his current group—bring with them from other spaces, among them, presumably, some unspecified but essential spaces (perhaps classrooms, libraries, studies, and art and music studios) that serve as sites for the acquisition of cultural knowledge.

Perhaps the most satisfying moment of the mountain sojourn is when the narrator, still alone, arrives back near his camp and decides to take his solitary swim in an adjacent lake, really "just a pool of snow water":³⁴

The water was even colder than I expected, and hardened my whole body at once. For a minute or two I swam rapidly in circles in the small center that was deep enough. Then I was all right, and could roll easily, and even float looking up. The first stars were showing above the ridge in the east. I let go a couple of bars of high, operatic-sounding something. It came back at me from under the col, sounding much better, sweet and clear and high. God, I was happy.³⁵

The narrator's happiness doesn't last long, however, because Tom, carrying the story of Chet's cruelty to the wounded deer, is about to arrive. But in the meantime, the narrator enjoys a remarkable sense of union with the natural world, offering his own joyful "operatic-sounding something" to the surrounding wilderness and having it returned "sweet and clear and high." The narrator's voice serves as a kind of artful offering, and the surrounding valley and imposing peaks and ridges respond, seemingly, with approval, a moment that distills the spiritual trope of the pilgrimage, the satisfying correspondence of botanical knowledge with firsthand experience, and the human voice modified and expanded by the echoing landscape. All these add up to a significant illustration of how human cultural practice and knowledge prepares us for satisfying and intentional experiences of the natural world. Of course, not all of us behave as the narrator does.

³³Clark, "Buck," 96.

³⁴Clark, "Buck," 97.

³⁵Clark, "Buck," 98.

In his discussion of "The Buck in the Hills," Jackson Benson cites Clark's son, Robert, as saying that his father was "angry at the general course of human activity" and also notes that Clark had given up both hunting and fishing before he was 20.³⁶ So perhaps it's no wonder that the narrator in this story has such contempt for Chet and his cruelty toward his prey. The narrator, perhaps like Clark himself, is already predisposed to disapprove of hunting. Before Tom tells the narrator about Chet's unfathomable cruelty, he reassures his friend: "'Don't you worry,' Tom said. 'I didn't get anything. I didn't even get a shot. I didn't see a thing.'"³⁷ But the understanding that lurks beneath the surface is that those who choose to hunt are supposed to be bound by the ethics of the pursuit. And even if these are a small comfort to the sensibilities of the narrator, they are meaningful for Tom and hence acknowledged, if not wholly accepted, by his friend the narrator. Specifically, Chet's pursuit of the deer and his refusal to kill it cleanly and quickly violate the principles of fair chase that usually govern hunters.³⁸ Chet's debased behavior embraces cruelty for the sake of convenience, and it's sickening. The cultural heritage that guides the thoughts and behavior of the narrator and complements the almost divine mountain setting contrasts strongly with the selfish behavior of the brute who forsakes wilderness ethics and disrespects the sacred inherent in natural spaces. And whatever it is that lurks behind each tree as the narrator and Tom take their leave, whatever it is that "didn't like us, either,"³⁹ isn't about to let any of them off the hook for Chet's remarkable betrayal of the natural world *and* the cultural values that supposedly govern hunters in the wild.

While the haunting presence of the spirits in "The Buck in the Hills" may seem like simply a small part of the story, their function as a kind of genius loci of the small valley serves Clark's artistic purposes well, underscoring the importance of integrating human cultural knowledge into the sacred spaces of wilderness animated by a watchful and judgmental presence, a presence that functions as a sort of overarching conscience by which the characters might measure how well they live up to their potential. We can appreciate the role of Clark's spirits in this story more fully by regarding their appearance here as a prologue to other works. For example, the same kind of dynamic between a sacred wilderness experience and cultural tradition underlies parts of Clark's autobiographical novel *The City of Trembling Leaves*. In this far more expansive work, human places serve as the explicit sites of the acquisition of cultural knowledge and traditions. In "The Buck in the Hills," wilderness spirits are keenly attuned to how human beings wear the cultural heritage they bring with them when they leave mostly human surrounds.

The City of Trembling Leaves appeared in 1945 after the popular and critical success of *The Ox-Bow Incident*. The 600-plus-page novel, which is set in Reno, proved a huge disappointment for Clark's publishers. According to Benson, the novel may have been "Clark's sentimental favorite, but it was little appreciated by either the public or the critics. The sales were so poor that although he had one story included in each volume of the O. Henry prize stories from 1941 to 1945, Random House declined to publish a new collection of his short stories."⁴⁰

³⁶Benson, *Ox Bow Man*, 87, 86.

³⁷Clark, "Buck," 101.

³⁸A well-known proponent of such hunting ethics is the Boone and Crockett Club, founded by Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell. See "The Boone and Crockett Club on Fair Chase," https://www.boone-crockett.org/pdf/On_Fair_Chase.pdf, 2016. Accessed June 26, 2017.

³⁹Clark, "Buck," 109.

⁴⁰Benson, *Ox Bow Man*, 126.

Many readers found *The City of Trembling Leaves* rambling or were unconvinced by the musical conceit that lends structure to the novel, organized more or less like a symphony. Yet as partly autobiographical fiction, it offers deeply satisfying portraits of landscapes and a story of a young man growing to maturity. At the same time, the novel's artistic accomplishment remains central to understanding Clark's sense of the "growth of consciousness," in Benson's useful description of the core of the story.⁴¹

Walt Clark is the narrator, whose voice is most often submerged in favor of revealing the events of the life of Tim Hazard and the discovery and cultivation of his artistic imagination as expressed in music. In some ways, the novel recalls the episodic works of the 18th century, each chapter announced by a brief description, which, considering the length of the work (almost 700 pages), offers encouragement for overwhelmed readers. According to Benson, the chapter titles are less important than the development of Clark's ideas through art in various forms: music, in the form of Tim's composing; graphic art, in the works of his friend Lawrence Black (a character based on Clark's good friend, the artist Robert Caples); and finally the writing, as offered by the narrator, Clark's alter ego, Walt Clark.⁴² An overarching theme is the experience of bodily desire and spiritual love, as Tim moves through several important relationships and eventually settles into marriage and artistic satisfaction, though both can be fleeting. Westbrook sees the novel as ironic, the record of "Tim's wavering progress from a child's sense of the sacred toward a realistic sense of the sacred, from abstract images of himself and the world through a more concrete image of himself in an abstract world, and toward a realistic image of himself as an ironically comic yet holy member of a realistic world."⁴³

At one point in the novel, Tim grudgingly tries to explain what he seeks in life and art, a spiritual idea he calls "the nuclear":

"A lot of words," he said slowly, thinking about it, "mean something of what I mean by nuclear, but none of them quite gets it, and neither does any combination of them. It is a guide toward the whole which is more than any sum we have yet made of the parts. It is an impetus toward the God becoming. People are feeling the power of the nuclear when they call a performance of some kind 'masterful.' But the term mastery excludes the suggestion of the more, and to some extent excludes even spontaneity."⁴⁴

Tim's idea of the nuclear parallels Jeffers's idea of "breaking through" insofar as both notions emphasize the importance of moving toward a spiritual "whole," or "the God becoming." But notice that Clark's formulation is also firmly grounded in the idea of cultural performance, linking art and the imagination as a means of approaching spiritual wholeness, extending, it seems to me, an idea implicit in "The Buck in the Hills." And as in that short story, Clark draws on nature's listening spirits to help convey this idea, but first he sets the table, offering glimpses of the development of Tim's imagination and intellect, yet he also connects these to the development of his physical body. The combination is classical: *mens sana in corpore sano* ("a healthy mind in a healthy body").

Not long into the novel, Tim—a high schooler on the track team—is set to run the mile at an important meet. Besides athletes from other schools, the event includes Tim's teammate Red, an accomplished miler who Tim resolves to beat after a difficult and disappointing finish

⁴¹Benson, *Ox Bow Man*, 117.

⁴²Benson, *Ox Bow Man*, 118.

⁴³Westbrook, *Clark*, 85.

⁴⁴Clark, *The City*, 200.

in the half mile. For Tim, however, the mile doesn't only represent an opportunity to beat his rival (who is also courting a young woman, Rachel, admired by Tim) but it also represents an opportunity to "get right" until "the joy of flight came."⁴⁵ In doing so, Tim loses himself in a kind of athletic transcendence:

The spring sunlight was wonderful. He had forgotten about the sun, the way he had forgotten about the gun, and now it burst open around him. He rode before the wind. It was wonderful, too. It made coming down the stretch like running down hill. Now he could imagine his stallion; now he could imagine a pale antelope skimming level backed through the gray brush. He could be lavish with strength now; no silly stride to think about, no miserish idea to cherish, like that of running evenly. Just let go; let go and swing home from the mountains.⁴⁶

Westbrook has noted that the episode contains a key idea that goes beyond the ostensible events tied to a youth's coming of age; this idea is that "the temptation which lures toward destruction any man who has felt—with bone-knowledge, with blood-knowledge—his sacred self, the magic powers of the primordial. That temptation is the demon perfection."⁴⁷

Westbrook's reading of the episode makes good sense, especially if we see Tim's athletic experience in the mile as the kind of sacred transcendence—"Just let go"—that is, as a version of Jeffers's idea of breaking through the crust of humanity and the implied abrogation of self that scholars like Yvor Winters fear. But it's also worth noting the cultural qualities that define the space for Tim's experience. Most obviously, this space is the track itself, the quarter-mile oval whose design sets the course of the event, an event shaped by traditional rules and training strategies and practices, things like starting guns, staggered lanes, attention to pace and stride, school sponsorships of teams, and the promotion of school spirit among them. Within his own imagination, Tim seems to be transforming the human space of this highly structured, seemingly quotidian high school athletic competition into something less familiar and individually transcendent. Edward Relph has written of the "placelessness" that emerges as nearly identical spaces are constantly replicated in different locations, erasing the individuality that used to inhere such particular places.⁴⁸ A high school track certainly qualifies, thanks to its standard shape and size and countless familiar iterations throughout the country. Yet even within this culturally defined space, Tim experiences a connection that reaches beyond the immediate space that his body inhabits. Through his performance he gains confidence and insight without design or intention to help him *feel* a "power of the nuclear," a confidence that serves him well whenever he finds himself in more natural spaces whose boundaries challenge the power of human beings to define them. As revealing as it is, however, the episode of Tim's race and its focus on the response of the body only complement culturally determined spaces that the novel presents as the sites for developing the mind and imagination, especially formative for Tim's growth as artist and eventual devotee of the sacred spaces of the natural world.

A variety of these built spaces appear in the novel. For example, as he grows up, Tim's working-class home, specifically his bedroom, provides an especially secure space to indulge his imagina-

⁴⁵Clark, *The City*, 192.

⁴⁶Clark, *The City*, 194.

⁴⁷Westbrook, *Clark*, 78.

⁴⁸Relph describes placelessness as "a weakening of the identity of places to the point where they not only look alike but feel alike and offer the same bland possibilities of experience," 90.

tion and foster his artistic leanings.⁴⁹ These include his musings over religion, the contradictory and, to young Tim, incomplete stories of the Bible, the "great prophets of other people," Buddha and Mohammed, the "present deities" of the American Indians and Greek and Nordic gods and heroes.⁵⁰ For young Tim, these become a kind of backdrop for the images that captured the spirit of the all-pervasive but did not assume a limited and deceptive form, for example the all-too-familiar, unconvincing, artificial—and to Tim, the inartistic and commercial—image of Moses on Mount Sinai. Instead, the spirit that arose within him was tied to the religious impulse that inspired sacred texts but was not limited by words: Nevada's Mount Rose at dawn, a shining flock of birds that rose from the islands within Pyramid Lake at sunset.⁵¹ School provides a site for more formal learning, especially for reading and practicing art and music. It ranged from Tim's eighth-grade understanding of "The Lady in the Lake" and his introduction to Jacob Briaski, a friend who undertakes teaching Tim the violin, only to be quickly out-mastered by him.⁵² And there is the family home of Tim's best friend, Lawrence Black, with its basement studio, which, when Tim first visits, makes a deep impression on him: "The room was long, low, cool and spacious, and full of a shadowy privacy which the drop-light only increased, as the late sunlight, filtering through the leaves outside the narrow windows, increased the secrecy. Tim felt happy in the studio almost at once. It was his kind of room. The St. Francis life would be easy there."⁵³ All of these spaces provide Tim with sites where he can enrich his talent and gather to him cultural capital that he might spend on interpreting the natural world, a world that, as in "The Buck in the Hills," is replete with gods and spirits attuned to the hearts of human beings who would seek communion with them.

Midway through the novel, Tim and Rachel (the onetime love interest of Tim's track rival, Red), set out to climb Mount Rose, which occupies a central space in the story. Rising almost 11,000 feet, it is one of the most prominent peaks of the Sierra Nevada, located within Tim's home state, and creates an imposing presence above Reno:

A further and, perhaps, in the course of time, even more important difference between the north edge, and low south edge, is that Mt. Rose is the sole, white, exalted patron angel and fountain of wind and storm to south Reno, while in the north Reno, her reign is strongly contested by black Peavine Mountain, less austere, wilder, and the home of two winds. Mt. Rose is a detached goal of the spirit, requiring a lofty and difficult worship.⁵⁴

The apparent reverence for this sacred natural space, characterized in plainly religious terms, seems apt, given the narrator's regard for the natural world. But Mount Rose claims an additional distinction, since it also serves as the dwelling place of gods, the spirits and guardians who watch humans and seem to offer judgments about their behavior. Tim, familiar

⁴⁹Cultural geographer Tim Cresswell, while acknowledging the work of scholars who challenge reductive notions of the meaning of "home" by pointing out that a home can be a fraught space marked by domestic violence and feelings of helplessness, also draws on the works of other scholars who emphasize that "home" can be a "center of meaning" and a field of care (*Place: A Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2014], 39–40). This idea seems to describe Tim's home and other spaces that the narrator describes in *The City of Trembling Leaves*. The clear implication is that these family spaces are a natural outgrowth of human culture, itself a part of a larger natural order.

⁵⁰Clark, *The City*, 28.

⁵¹Clark, *The City*, 27.

⁵²Clark, *The City*, 29–37.

⁵³Clark, *The City*, 144.

⁵⁴Clark, *The City*, 7–8.

with the peak and the ways of these spirits, draws on his experience—and his imagination—to interpret them for Rachel, who is sensitive enough to feel a magical presence but initially requires Tim's guidance to make sense of it. Unlike the similar setting of "The Buck in the Hills," this one includes no manifestly crude character replete with self-serving and revolting behavior. That does not mean, however, that the resident spirits are automatically welcoming. Human beings must first demonstrate their good will toward natural spaces.

As they climb the mountain, the features of the majestic natural spaces that they enter, nearly devoid of human presence or its handiwork, evoke in both Tim and Rachel a religious reverence for the landscape, the rocky ridges that partly define it, and the animal life that lives there—frogs, chipmunks, and a hawk wheeling high overhead. Each contributes its own voice to the place: "These small, wild sounds and movements were intensely significant, touching the profundity of the place itself."⁵⁵ The sacredness of the landscape is reinforced by Tim, who stops to put his hand in the water of a small lake, a ritual that he says he always has to perform. Rachel does the same. "Now I'm initiated," she says, recognizing that she's earned "special privileges." But Tim responds to this impulse toward the religious by asserting that the privileges are not his to give, for they belong to the lake and the "guardians" who live on the mountain. Tim is sharing his private ritual with Rachel, who deeply appreciates being included, though she is still an acolyte. Tim tells her that she will not yet know if she has really been initiated. She has to climb the mountain and come back to find out if she's truly been accepted.⁵⁶ As they climb on toward the peak of Mount Rose, Tim tells Rachel, "The direct descendants of all the original gods are in the mountains, you know. In the mountains or in the sea. I suppose there's a hundred kinds in the Sierras [*sic*] alone. Maybe if we really studied the *Golden Bough* and meditated, we could be more specific. We should come on hunts, anyway. It would make very exciting reading up here."⁵⁷

Passages in this chapter, aptly titled "The Mountain," feature gorgeous descriptions of the Sierra terrain, enough by themselves to evoke a sense of the sacred in the heart of Walt Clark's reader. The element of spiritual presences and Tim's sense of ritual, however, parallels closely the landscape and the narrator's behavior as depicted in "The Buck in the Hills," the same high-mountain beauty, the same sense of the sacred, the same listening spirits, the same ritualistic response. And Tim's inclination, like the narrator of the short story, is to draw on his learning and imagination, specifically, and only slightly ironically, by citing James Frazer's 1922 opus, *The Golden Bough*. Thus Tim leans on his cultural preparation—not just on his previous hiking experiences—to explain to Rachel the source of the feelings that animate her response to the spirits that watch them, some of which, says Tim, are ancient immortals who "prefer loneliness" but others of which "are born and they die and they are reborn within an instant. That is why you are always delighted here, but never sure what it is that haunts you, so that you are always full of expectation and wonder."⁵⁸ No doubt some of Tim's explanations are fanciful, stories that originate in the mind of someone steeped in books and art and who carries that learning lightly and imaginatively. We've seen how Tim, even as a boy alone in his room, revised his reading of religious texts to suit his own spiritual needs. But the stories that Tim tells crucially serve to connect him to the sacred world around him, feeding his need to organize his experience in a private ritual and, incidentally, providing Rachel an attractive vehicle by which to appreciate her own connection to the sacred nearly as much as does Tim.

⁵⁵Clark, *The City*, 385.

⁵⁶Clark, *The City*, 385.

⁵⁷Clark, *The City*, 387.

⁵⁸Clark, *The City*, 387.

The City of Trembling Leaves, of course, contains other themes, including the nature of friendship, the importance of family and community, the insecurities deeply felt by serious artists, the relationship between hard-won craftsmanship and the creation of high art, fitting complements to a core theme of aspiring to, if not ever perfectly achieving, individual integration with the sacred whole. Clark's thematic treatment of contrasting cultural and sacred spaces was so satisfying that he returned to it once again in his final published volume of fiction, *The Watchful Gods and Other Stories*, which appeared in 1950. The eponymous novella of the collection focuses on a young boy, just turned 12, and his encounters with sacred gods, real and imagined. The boy, Buck, is much like Tim Hazard, but here the outdoor setting is a rocky coastline, not a mountain, an alternative presaged by Tim's words about the gods, who dwell "in the mountains or in the sea." In a 1950 letter to his Random House editor, Saxe Commins, even Clark connected the two works:

The theme I finally used has also interested me for some time—made me watchful of many pertinent manifestations in youngsters while I was teaching and since, and an explorer, insofar as memory can be trusted—and mine is pretty good—of the same things in my own childhood and adolescence. You will recollect hints of it—the running and the kind of prayer Tim Hazard used, for instance in *The City*. Very roughly speaking, the idea is that religious development is a continuously repeated experience of the race—each individual in his childhood and early adolescence (barring such ideological straightjacketing as that of the Catholic Church—and often even then) recapitulates in capsule form, as it were, the religious history of the race, from primitive anthropomorphism, through the more regular and limited classical pantheon (or some counterpart thereof—it wouldn't be the same of course) into the simple two-force (good and evil) basic to Christianity, and finally, given a sufficiently strong urge to unity and honesty in appraising the events of life, into the complete unity of mysticism....⁵⁹

Praise for the short-story collection was weak, even though it collected many of the pieces that in previous years had helped Clark claim strong critical recognition.⁶⁰ Despite the poor critical reception, Westbrook places the novella alongside some of the finest works of American fiction, finding that the characterization of Buck, who is driven by concerns for the relationship between the rational and "the dark realities of nonrational meaning," compares favorably to "Hawthorne's Hester and Dimmesdale, Melville's Ishmael and Captain Vere, Hemingway's Jake Barnes and Frederick Henry, Faulkner's Quentin Compson and Ike McCaslin."⁶¹ Westbrook's critical focus is primarily on Buck's complex imagination, but in "The Watchful Gods," as in the fiction examined above, part of Clark's art lies in his use of space. The work is far shorter than *The City of Trembling Leaves*, but its artistic reliance on the treatments of cultural and natural spaces, perhaps because of its tighter focus, proves even more effective in showing how human spaces and natural spaces complement one another.

⁵⁹Walter Van Tilburg Clark, "On 'The Watchful Gods,'" in *Walter Van Tilburg Clark: Critiques*, ed. Charlton Laird (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1983), 188.

⁶⁰See Westbrook, *Clark*, for a brief overview, 112; some praise for Clark, however, came from a surprising source in a letter to Raymond J. Pflug in which Jeffers wrote, "Walter Clark's work interests me. I didn't know about his thesis at Vermont. I met somebody a few days ago who said Clark's latest book was not good—'He can write stories about animals not about human beings.' I said, 'The Ox-Bow Incident'?" Ann N. Ridgeway, ed., *The Selected Letters of Robinson Jeffers: 1897-1962* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 347.

⁶¹Westbrook, *Clark*, 123.

Although she doesn't use this exact spatial frame, Ann Ronald, author of the foreword to the 2004 reissue of *The Watchful Gods and Other Stories*, makes an observation consistent with such an approach, writing that the title work "is a tightly controlled exploration of the inner self with the rich parameters of the outer world."⁶² We need only add that the inner self forms within human spaces that allow it to grasp and reimagine cultural knowledge in order to face the outer (that is, natural) world, where dwell the by now familiar gods and spirits that appeal to conscience as well as fancy.

The lead character of "The Watchful Gods," Buck, lives with his family near a rocky coastline. On Buck's 12th birthday, his father passes him the .22 rifle that he has long wanted. The gift comes with serious responsibility, and Buck feels that weight as an acknowledgment of his growing maturity. But he is still a boy, and as he leaves his house and enters the open space of the rugged coastline with his rifle, his imagination is stimulated to flashbacks of previous adventures in the coastal wilds and then to other adventures to come, some made up from preadolescent fantasies that take the form of mash-ups of clichéd entertainment and serious literature, and many featuring his personal pantheon of gods that represent for him light and dark, good and evil. During his outing, he encounters a small rabbit and slays it with the rifle, a senseless act that serves as a bridge from innocence to something approaching experience, which he understands partly by referencing the gods that inhabit the shoreline and the nearby sea, recognizing that "the powers of light and darkness were not wholly and always opposed to one another."⁶³

Cultural spaces in "The Watchful Gods," as in *The City of Trembling Leaves*, encompass attractive, bookish, comfortable interiors as well as exterior sites dedicated to sports (in this story, mainly tennis). The latter are mostly presented through Buck's consciousness, either as memories or as imagined encounters that follow an adolescent's imaginative, highly charged competitive triumphs; these typically involve a girl that Buck badly wants to impress. The spatial choreography is complex, since the physical space that Buck inhabits, his room, say, recedes in the narrative in favor of human space claimed and manipulated by his imagination. It's a fanciful technique that Buck also falls back on in the outdoors, perhaps deconstructing the seeming primacy of natural spaces or, more usefully, given Clark's beliefs, illustrating humanity's inability to interpret the natural world in a raw manner, to "break through." Notable, too, is the spirit of competition that pervades Buck's initially naive approach to the world, first signified in the field of athletics and later in an imagined conversation with the dying rabbit, which seems to slide into a legal contest adjudicating the circumstances of Buck's "murder"⁶⁴ of the small animal.

The story opens as Buck awakens in his bedroom on his 12th birthday and as he emerges from a dream (one he thinks might have been about a girl, Janet Haley). But before Buck gets up, he gazes through his bedroom window, which, like a theater proscenium, frames a portion of the outdoors where Buck spends so much of his time. The window serves as a significant connection between indoor and outdoor spaces, the former safe and warm, the other something inviting, the terrain of adventure—but the terrain is also darkly forbidding, a fog-shrouded landscape surrounding Buck's family home:

⁶²Ann Ronald, Foreword, in Walter Van Tilburg Clark, *The Watchful Gods and Other Stories* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004), xiii.

⁶³Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 281.

⁶⁴Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 271.

He turned his head on the pillow and looked up through the window at where the big, brown hill should have been, with the grove of white-stemmed eucalyptus trees high and faraway on top of it. The hill wasn't there at all, though, and only a little of the eucalyptus grove showed in each of two places, up on the right shoulder of the hill. The fog drifted among the gently bowing, dark plumes, and across them, changing the shapes of the two openings, and everywhere else there was only fog moving across fog or turning slowly within fog.⁶⁵

The window seems to unite the insubstantial haziness of Buck's dreamworld with the foggy haziness of the outdoors, which shrouds the hill and trees and foreshadows the appearance in the story of the fog god, who has an active interest in Buck's activities. But for now, it's enough to appreciate that human and natural spaces are not wholly separate but intricately related through Buck's consciousness as aided by the physical construction of his bedroom window. Moreover, the fog outside his window reminds him of the "Japanese prints his mother liked so much, the ones that showed just the fuzzy, black edges of mountains standing up out [of] a gray mist," an image that leads him to think of his father's edition of the works of Walter Scott, and eventually, thanks to the specter of the melancholy fog, to reimagining "The Lady of the Lake," which in Buck's version features Janet Haley.⁶⁶ Subsequent pages continue in this vein, as Buck merges memory—his first glimpse of Janet, who is with her father watching a tennis match that Buck also attended—with fancy, at one point casting her in the role of Isolde opposite Buck's Tristram.⁶⁷

The central position occupied by the tennis court—like the running track in *The City of Trembling Leaves*—implies the centrality of space for healthy physical competition, of a type that is rule bound and reproducible, possibly preparative of the physical confidence useful in natural spaces. Indeed, as Buck recalls the match, he feels the intensity and striving for perfection that blurs the distinction between the human and nonhuman as he pretends to take on the roles of the competitors: "Thinking himself hard into first one of them and then the other, so that he was able to make every stroke for both of them, and to feel himself getting bigger and swifter and more powerful all the time. A kind of golden haze, made up of millions of the sprites of joy, and just a trifle brighter than the sunlight itself, hung over the court where such magnificent action was going on."⁶⁸ And, as in *The City*, the characteristics of built interior spaces signify the cultural capital that influences learning and imagination. Buck is particularly fond of his father's study, wherein the hoped-for gift of the .22 has been kept, but he likes the room also because of the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, the Navajo rug, the papers and books, all of which signify the cultural capital that forms the backdrop for Buck's coming-of-age. He recalls fondly his mother's piano and her playing Chopin, Debussy, and Beethoven; his sister's paintings; the engravings in the volume of Walter Scott; even his own violin.⁶⁹ Like the young Tim Hazard, Buck takes in the art and learning that are offered within the interior spaces that protect and promote them and uses his own imagination to repurpose them for his own aims, imagining daring events in the pleasant company of Janet Haley, the kind of thing typical of a 12-year-old, but also imagining—or is the right word recognizing?—the gods

⁶⁵Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 191.

⁶⁶Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 193.

⁶⁷Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 198.

⁶⁸Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 196

⁶⁹Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 205–07.

who will test his mettle and his conscience as he explores the outdoors. The narrative thus seems to argue, perhaps more clearly than in *The City*, that human and nonhuman spaces are *always* mediated by consciousness and thus, for human beings at least, nature and culture are ultimately indivisible. This theme carries through the balance of the story as, released from the family birthday rituals, Buck carefully and nearly silently slips outdoors with his coveted rifle; “the moment his feet touched the hard earth of the yard, however, he began to run.”⁷⁰

Though he is comfortable in his home, “most things made by people, especially those used indoors, didn’t interest Buck.”⁷¹ What does interest him is the natural world, which features the freedom (away from human spaces but also parents handing down rules) of moving through magnificent and joyfully haunted natural spaces, which are achingly beautiful after the fog lifts and reveals the terrain that Buck loves:

The fog had lifted and thinned a good deal since he’d first looked out at it through his bedroom window. The whole, big, rounded lower part of the hill was revealed more distinctly in the darkened air than it ever was in sunlight, and even the eucalyptus grove on the summit was faintly but entirely visible. The eucalyptus, the laurel, the sweet grass, even the earth and stones, had strong, damp smells after the fog, and everything was so quiet that his own panting and the quick rhythmic patting of his bare feet became disconcertingly loud. There was no wind at all; not even the wild wheat was moving. It was the interval of perfect balance between earth and ocean, when the land wind had died away to nothing, and the sea wind couldn’t quite begin. The whole world of the hills and ravines was waiting for the change, silent, motionless and attentive.⁷²

Of course, the natural space that so attracts Buck isn’t wholly natural—the eucalyptus is a foreign transplant, and the wild wheat is likely one of the annual grasses that escaped the control of early explorers and missionaries and has all but choked out the setting’s native plant life. But for Buck, these are still part of a wild scene whose moment of perfect equilibrium he appreciates, since he knows that that balance won’t be sustained. The only constant seems to be the presence of the ominous fog god and the spirits and creatures of its coastal domain, also the setting for much of Buck’s inner life.

Buck likes to revisit outdoor adventures and characterize them in terms of the sacred presence that he discerns in the coastal landscape. An encounter with a rattlesnake gives rise to the idea that it harbors a “major allegiance” to the fog god.⁷³ On a secret beach, closed off by cliffs and rocks, he feels deeply the spirit of the place, which he thinks of as the “shore throne of Poseidon,” who Buck imagines as “like a Michelangelo Moses or Blake’s God, lying all relaxed and mighty among the tidal boulders.”⁷⁴ Here is where Buck senses a greater spirit, “a vague but warm, enormous, and beneficent being, and by all the associated sprites and even by the great, inconceivable, Master-God, who from somewhere clear above the blue sky and out of touch, presumably governed all that went on through these deputies.”⁷⁵ Though his parents think the place as dangerous with riptides and forbid him to visit alone, Buck feels

⁷⁰Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 247.

⁷¹Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 206.

⁷²Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 247–48.

⁷³Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 206.

⁷⁴Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 212.

⁷⁵Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 213.

especially safe there because of "the goodness of the sprites and the kind, warm guardianship of the spirit of the cliff."⁷⁶ While some of Buck's imaginative stylings of these spirits are the callow notions of a boy, notice that they draw on a wealth of cultural background to give shape to the deep and genuine feelings that the natural space has evoked in Buck's heart and imagination. This cultural capital will also help him navigate his way through an impending crisis of conscience when he senselessly uses his birthday gift, the .22 rifle, to take the life of a small rabbit.

Buck spots the animal on the other side of a ravine, moments after he imagines himself—now armed with deadly force—as an "impatient instrument of the fog god," recognizing that the life around him "was not deceived about which power he was representing now. It knew he had gone over to the enemy."⁷⁷ He aims at the rabbit and fires, taking three shots (and marking their echoes) to dispatch the creature, quite inefficiently:

One part of him was still the hunter upon the south rim of the ravine, disturbed by his ineptitude, but the other part of him entered into the rabbit upon the north rim, patiently and inexplicably awaiting a third shot, and perhaps even, if that also proved a bad shot, the Lord only knew how many more for the Lord only knew what reason, if any. The hunter part of him was filled with a kind of desperation at the thought of the protracted cruelty.⁷⁸

Buck's self-alignment with the dark forces of the fog god doesn't survive an encounter with his conscience, formed by his cultural background and repelled by the needless cruelty of his act. Buck is clearly the moral superior of Chet in "The Buck in the Hills," who apparently feels no remorse over his own cruel behavior. In fact, it is Buck's ability to imagine the act from the point of view of the rabbit that shows his capacity for empathy and for remorse, deeply human feelings that help connect Buck to the animal world.⁷⁹

Ashamed before the genius of the place, "the watcher above him,"⁸⁰ Buck begins a kind of internal conversation with the dead rabbit, in part justifying his act because of the insignificant consequences of taking such a small life, but he doesn't convince himself, especially since he senses that the spirit of the animal, one that comes to Buck's mind as a small and not quite discernable voice, seems to him forgiving. Yet Buck rejects it. He is moved to bury the rabbit, but the language in which he forms the idea is stark:

In the intervals of his conversation with the rabbit, he began to consider the practical implications of the murder. They resolved themselves eventually into two opposed views, which he argued out alternately with the points of his confession to the rabbit, so that sometimes the two discourses became one, as when he told the rabbit, "I guess maybe I should bury you and say a prayer."⁸¹

⁷⁶Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 216.

⁷⁷Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 253.

⁷⁸Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 258.

⁷⁹Though conditioned by European and white American traditions, in this moment Buck's attitude seems closer to American Indian attitudes toward animals, which seek to honor the connections among living things, even those that might become prey.

⁸⁰Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 270.

⁸¹Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 271.

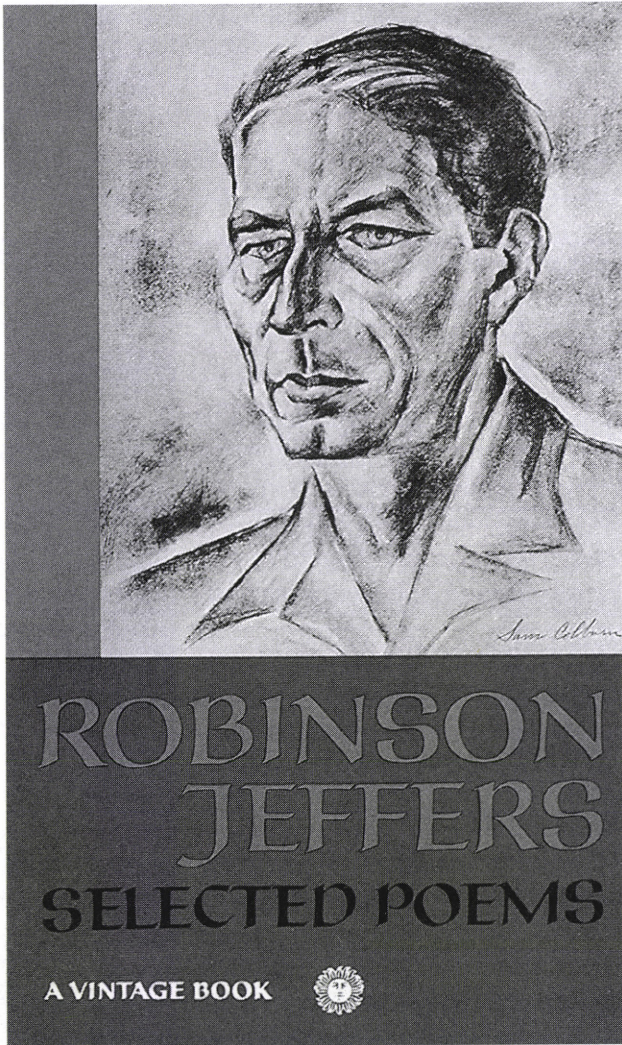


FIGURE 8. 1965 cover *Selected Poems* by Robinson Jeffers. (Penguin Random House)

The use of the term “murder” well signifies the state of Buck’s inner turmoil and, to some degree, his willingness to own up to his moral failing and seek atonement through the burial of the rabbit and the offering of a prayer. He is improvising a ritual based on the forms he knows from his reading and his religious training, but he also recognizes that in the natural world of the Pacific Coast, the ritual may not signify as much to the Master-God as the landscape seems to evoke in his imagination. When he finally settles on a burial site and says a prayer, he falters. His words are formula, unsuited, he realizes, to the “high headland over the gray sea in the enormous, gray morning.” He intones, “O Lord and Father, take this little rabbit unto You. Give him back, O Father, the life that I have taken away. Make him forget how it hurt, and keep him with You forever and ever. Amen.”⁸²

Throughout the novella, Buck’s local nature gods remain interested in his actions, and their apparent judgments reflect his own inner turmoil or they reflect his own sensibilities evoked by the qualities of the natural landscape that he loves so dearly, a landscape shaped by

⁸²Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 299.

the play of fog and sunlight, appreciated through a cultural lens that focuses Buck's imagination, which in turn governs how Buck responds sensitively to the terrain, respects the living things that dwell within it, and feels the pangs of conscience and self-recrimination when he needlessly transgresses against the natural order. Partly as a result of his wholly human impulse toward penance, Buck loses a part of his 12-year-old innocence, as he escapes some of the local gods' power over him. But he gains something, too, a more mature sense of the whole, as he contemplates the natural spaces that surround him:

He walked slowly down the beach until the last turning edge of the waves would cover his feet, and stood there, motionless, for several minutes, staring down at the foam sliding around his ankles, and not thinking or feeling anything in particular that he could have discovered. He knew without looking that there was no benign overseer in the cliff behind him, no far-looking Poseidon on the last point in the north, no single mermaid of any kind, let alone a red-headed one, riding up in those melancholy rollers. The new presence was greater and more inclusive, perhaps, than all his old friends put together, but it was a stranger, and not in the least interested in him, or in any single being, probably.⁸³

Whether, as friend Robert Gorrell wondered, Clark did or did not believe in the spirits and gods that inhabit the natural spaces in his fiction, it should be clear how he used them: to advance his recurring theme of the crucial importance for each of us to strive for connection to the greater whole, which Clark saw—as did Robinson Jeffers—as the magnificent and sacred natural world of which we are a small but significant part. These beings prompt Clark's characters to reflect, when surrounded by astonishingly beautiful and personally humbling natural spaces, upon their own moral and ethical strengths and weaknesses, traits that we acquire through acculturation in human-scaled spaces. These are the reflections that lead to the clear-eyed appreciation of "the nuclear," or the Master-God whose presence animates the world.

⁸³Clark, *Watchful Gods*, 303.

*Samuel B. Doten, Angler Superb,
and the San Francisco Earthquake*
Science Discovers the Cui-ui and the Fishery Crisis at Pyramid Lake

JACQUELYN K. SUNDSTRAND

The devastating San Francisco earthquake of April 18, 1906, and its aftereffects not only destroyed the City by the Bay but also wiped out thousands of historical and scientific records, both written and photographic. Fortunately, copies of texts maintained in other libraries and academic institutions preserved precious threads of knowledge, however less so the photographic records. Also threatened, with some destroyed, were thousands of carefully collected and identified plant and animal specimens, which were difficult to replace once gone. Through an unforeseen turn of events, Samuel B. Doten, a professor of entomology at the University of Nevada came into possession of a specimen of Pyramid Lake's unique suckerfish, the cui-ui. That Doten, whose specialty was insects, recognized the species and its importance to ichthyological science was a sign of the time, when scholarly disciplines had not so narrowed as to preclude cross-disciplinary interest and activity. Doten rescued this important link for the advancement of scientific study.

Samuel Doten was part of an age of American scholarship wherein scholars not only achieved mastery of their own discipline but grasped a breadth of knowledge that stretched across multiple fields of study. Such examples included Louis Agassiz, the great natural historian, and William James, the father of modern American psychology and philosophy. Specialists in one field could expand their expertise into other disciplines. On Doten's own university campus, a professor of classics, James E. Church, curious to know how much water from the Sierra Nevada's snowpack flowed to the arid lands east of the Sierra in the spring and summer months, developed his own research on the question. He became known as the

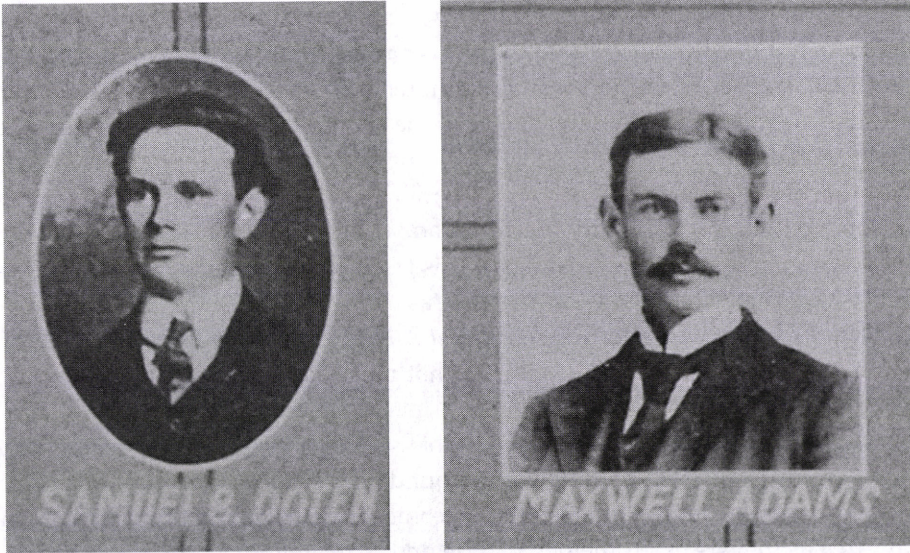


FIGURE 1. Samuel Doten and Maxwell Adams from the faculty page in the 1924 *Artemisia*, the University of Nevada's yearbook. Doten was a professor of Entomology and the director of the Nevada Agricultural Station. Adams was a professor of Chemistry, graduating from Stanford University and had been a student of David Starr Jordan while there. Both men were mentioned in John Otterbein Snyder's footnote in his 1917 report. (1924 University of Nevada *Artemisia* yearbook (UNRA-P1512-1), Special Collection and University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno)

father of snow science, and his techniques for snow surveying and stream forecasting are still used worldwide today. Scholarly breadth powered interdisciplinary inquiry, making it the sine qua non of scientific investigation.¹

Born in 1875, Doten was the second of four children. He grew up in Gold Hill, Eureka, and finally Reno. Both parents, Alfred R. Doten and Mary S. Doten, were figures in late 19th-century Nevada. His father was a Comstock journalist who kept a detailed diary of life in the state's mining society until his death in 1903. His mother was a prominent Reno educator whose name often appeared in newspapers for her efforts on behalf of educational programs and support for women's suffrage.²

Once in Reno, Samuel Doten (FIGURE 1) attended the University of Nevada, a land-grant college, and after graduating in 1898, he was appointed as a meteorologist and an assistant to the department of botany and entomology in the state's federally funded Experiment Station, located on campus. In 1906 he became chair of a newly formed department of entomology, still connected with the state's Experiment Station. During his long university career, Doten

¹Edward Shils, "The Order of Learning in the United States: The Ascendancy of the University," in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860–1920*, eds. Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 25. Those interested in Church's life and work should consult the James Edward Church Papers, MS. NC96, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno.

²Walter Van Tilburg Clark, ed., *The Journals of Alfred Doten, 1849–1903*, three vols. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1973). The diaries offer insights into the everyday life of people in the Nevada communities of the Comstock, Carson City, Reno, and even faraway Eureka; Lynn Bremer, "The Independent Life of Mary Stoddard Doten," *Nevada in the West* 1 (Spring 2010): 23–24; "Mary Stoddard Doten," Nevada Women's History Project, accessed July 7, 2020, <https://www.nevadawomen.org/research-center/biographies-alphabetical/mary-stoddard-doten>.

was author of the compendious 1924 *Illustrated History of the University of Nevada*, became a respected professor of entomology, and then was named director of the Nevada Agricultural Station, retiring in 1946. With this locally distinguished background and his position at the university, Doten understood the importance of the events unfolding around him after 1906.³

While his academic expertise was not fish but insects, Doten's practical knowledge of fishing and his early work in fishery conservation made him an important resource with firsthand connections and familiarity with Nevada fisheries. Outside of his career at the university, Doten's main passion was fishing. In his free time, he hiked so constantly along the streams and lakes of northern Nevada and the eastern Sierra in search of fishing sites that he resembled Izaak Walton's creation, *The Compleat Angler*, from the author's fabled 1653 book. Like Walton's protagonist, Doten recognized that maintaining a healthy environment supports sustainable fish and fishing.

Doten's entomological studies and deep love of fishing in Nevada, and specifically the Sierra, helped him form a vision of the natural world around him. At the same time, his academic position at the University of Nevada enabled him to communicate with other university colleagues in the Bay Area as they assessed the destruction and damage to scientific collections to which they had devoted their lives. In this instance, the person Doten reached out to was Stanford University's first president, David Starr Jordan, whose academic specialty was ichthyology and who had, in fact, developed one of the nation's leading departments of ichthyology at Stanford.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, the task of reconstructing ichthyology collections seemed almost impossible. Reassembling them and gathering replacement specimens from throughout the West involved help from local fish experts, who were often lay scholars. Although he was more than a lay scholar, Doten was one of those experts just across the Sierra, in nearby Nevada, who had special knowledge of Pyramid Lake's rare cui-ui. The reclassification and assembly of specimens not only required gathering the cui-ui but also prompted more study of the lake's fishery and a troubling situation—the deterioration of the lake's aquatic environment. Studies began to recognize new threats to this fishery: overfishing, industrial pollution, and the diversion of water away from the lake for agriculture. The threat of extinction loomed for the cui-ui and other fishes of Pyramid Lake when the U.S. Reclamation Service built the Derby Diversion Dam in 1905 on the Truckee River to route water to a nearby agricultural irrigation project.

Soon after the 1906 earthquake, news came from the California Academy of Sciences that nearly all of its specimens, library volumes, and drafts of ongoing research results were gone, including the academy's entire collection of fish specimens.⁴ As an active ichthyologist of national repute, the enormous loss to that institution must have been particularly wrenching for Stanford University's Jordan, who was closely tied to the California Academy of Sciences and had served as its president from 1896 to 1898 and again from 1901 to 1903.⁵

The collections at Stanford suffered greatly, too. In his "Report of the Stanford University Engineers on the Injuries to the Classrooms and Laboratories for the Earthquake of April 18, 1906," Jordan initially wrote that its one-story buildings, including the Zoology Building, lo-

³"Doten Is Given Chair of New Department," *Reno Evening Gazette*, July 18, 1906, 2; James W. Hulse, *The University of Nevada: A Centennial History* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1974), 149.

⁴"About the Ichthyology Department, Department Milestones," 1906 note, California Academy of Sciences, accessed October 20, 2018, <https://www.calacademy.org/scientists/ichthyology-about>.

⁵"Guide to the David Starr Jordan Papers SC0058," Daniel Hartwig and Jenny Johnson, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University, 2000, https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf3f-59n6bn/entire_text/.

cated around the outer quadrangle, were virtually intact, as were their collections. However, according to Jordan's "Fifth Annual Report of the President" in 1908, about a thousand jars and bottles of zoology specimens had broken, many of them invaluable. The damage to Stanford's Zoology Building was stark. Decades later, in 1953, Stanford professor James Bohlke described the wreckage in the *Stanford Ichthyological Bulletin*. Specimens covered the floor and were kept wet with water from hoses "manned day and night by Professors [John Otterbein] Snyder and [Edwin C.] Starks [the curator of zoology], until new bottles and alcohol could be secured." The cleanup involved an effort to match specimens and data by each member of the entire ichthyologic group who had been working on the specimens.⁶

With his academic credentials as an entomologist, and as an ichthyological amateur savant, Doten quickly found himself in a position to establish communications with the famous ichthyologist at Stanford to offer help in replacing specimens for the damaged collections. In particular, Doten offered Jordan specimens of Pyramid Lake's unique suckerfish, the cui-ui.

Doten's conversations with the scientific community outside Nevada drew attention to the man-made danger to the cui-ui at the time, and to the entire fishery habitat of Pyramid Lake and the Truckee River. In 1903, the newly established U.S. Reclamation Service authorized the building of the Derby Diversion Dam on the Truckee for its Truckee-Carson Project seeking to utilize water from both the Truckee and Carson Rivers to irrigate arid lands in northern Nevada. After the completion of the dam in 1905, nearly half of the Truckee's seasonal flow went to the irrigation project in the Lahontan Valley, near Fallon, Nevada. While some heedlessly dismissed the drawdown of water levels at Pyramid Lake, others foresaw a threat to a fishery that included lacustrine upstream-spawning fish from the lake, notably the cui-ui and, from a sports-fishing standpoint, the more desirable Lahontan cutthroat trout.⁷

Pyramid Lake, located on the western edge of the Great Basin, 45 miles north of Reno, has been important to both the Paiutes and later immigrants of European descent. The lake serves as the freshwater home to both the Lahontan cutthroat trout and the cui-ui, both important food sources for Native peoples. The lake's Lahontan cutthroat trout, often growing to over four feet in length and weighing up to 40 pounds, were also prized for sport fishing and for commercial or local market consumption. For centuries, the Paiute people (now the members of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe) relied upon these abundant fish species as a main source of food.⁸ While undesired by local markets and sport fishers, Pyramid Lake Paiutes prized the cui-ui.

In Euro-American fishery taxonomy, the cui-ui is *Chasmistes cujus* in the family Catostomidae, and it lives only in Nevada's Pyramid Lake and the lower Truckee River.⁹ It lives at great depths in the lake, emerging to spawn in mid-April, running up the Truckee River toward Reno to lay eggs on sandbars. Cui-uies can attain a length of up to 26 inches and weigh from three to five pounds. They have stocky bodies, feed primarily on zooplankton, and have

⁶J. Bohlke, "Catalogue of the Type Specimens of Recent Fishes in the Natural History Museum of Stanford University," *Stanford Ichthyological Bulletin* 5 (1953): 3.

⁷Freshwater lake fish that spawn in adjoining streams are potamodromous and, like the suckerfish cui-ui, are a lacustrine species, relating to or associated with lakes; John Otterbein Snyder, "The Fishes of the Lahontan System of Nevada and Northeastern California," *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Fisheries* 35 (1917): 33; A. J. Liebling, "The Lake of the Cui-ui Eaters," parts 1-4, *The New Yorker*, January 1, 1955, 25-41; January 8, 1955, 33-61; January 15, 1955, 32-67; January 22, 1955, 37-73.

⁸"Lahontan Cutthroat Trout," U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, accessed September 9, 2020, https://www.fws.gov/nevada/protected_species/fish/species/lct.html.

⁹William F. Sigler, Steven Vigg, and Mimi Bres, "Life History of the Cui-ui, *Chasmistes Cujus* Cope, in Pyramid Lake, Nevada: A Review," *Great Basin Naturalist* 45, no. 4 (October 1985): 571.

a life span of up to 50 years. This fish is a prehistoric descendant from a time when Pyramid Lake was part of a much larger Pleistocene lake, named Lake Lahontan by Euro-American explorers. Pyramid Lake itself was named by explorer John C. Frémont in 1844 as he observed a large tufa remnant in the middle of its waters, shaped in the form of a pyramid. Pyramid Lake is fed by the Truckee River at its south end, surrounding springs and small streams, and sporadic rainfall. Like all lakes within the Great Basin, Pyramid Lake has no outlet.¹⁰

As a first-generation Nevadan, Samuel Doten was an early and firsthand observer of the Pyramid Lake fishery's initial decline. In addition to his entomological studies and his fishing pastime, he was appointed director of the U.S. Agricultural Experiment Station on campus. It was his avocational venture into ichthyology, however, that prompted him to interject himself into the regional and national scientific communities' efforts to preserve the existing knowledge about the fishes of the Truckee Basin, including those at Pyramid Lake.¹¹

The study and discovery of the cui-ui by the scientific community as a fish species, however, reaches back to the latter half of the 19th century, before Doten came into the picture. Edward D. Cope, a leading paleontologist, herpetologist, and ichthyologist, was the first scientist to study Nevada's Pyramid Lake suckerfish. In 1879, on his first western trip from his home in New Jersey, Cope visited the dinosaur beds in Wyoming, then headed to Salt Lake City and San Francisco. From there, Cope hoped to go north from California to the Fossil Lakes region of Oregon.

In 1882, Cope made a second trip to the West, again to visit Oregon. On his return journey, Cope wrote to his wife on July 19 about his trek across the desert and how it tired him, complaining about the dust. Speaking of the area, he told her:

One night we stopped at Pyramid Lake, a great sheet of water, long, wide and deep in an utter wilderness of lava and sagebrush. It is full of fishes and during my short stay, I obtained several jars of specimens. A species of trout is very numerous, and I lived on them while there.¹²

Cope did not specifically mention obtaining a specimen of the lake's suckerfish until he published his results the following year. Calling it a "curious genus," he linked this species of *Chasmistes* with two he found in Lake Klamath, Oregon, in 1879 and one in Utah Lake, Utah.¹³ Noting that the fish found in the Great Basin was the largest of these, he then wrote:

I procured but one specimen of this fish from Pyramid Lake, where it is difficult to obtain. The size is large: the specimen I procured measured eighteen inches in length. The head is wide and flat ... the upper lip is very thin.... This fish is said by fishermen to inhabit the deepest water, and to be seen in numbers only at the time of breeding.... The Indian name of the *Chasmistes cujus* is "Couia."¹⁴

After Cope described and named his specimen, no additional information about its life cycle or habits were added to the scientific record until the work of ichthyologist David Starr Jordan.

¹⁰Martha C. Knack, *As Long as the River Shall Run* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 4-5, 7-8.

¹¹Hulse, *University of Nevada*, 149.

¹²Henry Osborn, *Cope: Master Naturalist* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 513-14.

¹³E. D. Cope, "On the Fishes of the Recent and Pliocene Lakes of the Western Part of the Great Basin, and the Idaho Pliocene Lake," *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 35 (1883): 148.

¹⁴Cope, "On the Fishes," 149.



FIGURE 2. In May 1924, Dr. David Starr Jordan (right), President of Stanford University, stands with John Otterbein Snyder (left), Stanford Professor of Ichthyology and author of the 1917 article on the cui-ui. (Stanford Historical Photograph Collection (SC1071), Stanford University Libraries)

While at Indiana University, Jordan and his students developed a reciprocal working arrangement with Spencer Baird at the Smithsonian Institution. Baird, who had a long career in positions at the Smithsonian, became its second secretary in 1878. He had already helped establish and head the U.S. Fish Commission in 1871, where he organized a survey of fisheries in the United States. Baird gave financial support and collecting equipment to Jordan and his students, who in return sent their scientific data and specimens to the Smithsonian. Collecting trips began first in the southern states, where data on the region's freshwater fish were lacking.¹⁵

In 1875, Jordan began a publication called *Systematic Catalogue of the Fishes of North America* with Herbert Copeland, which continued until Copeland's death in 1876. Jordan then worked with Charles Gilbert, completing the first section of the publication in 1883, a "Synopsis of the Fishes of North America." During the course of the surveying, in 1878, Jordan published his "Synopsis of the Family *Catostomidae*," about freshwater suckerfish, in the U.S. National Museum's *Bulletin*. In it he "first characterized the new genus, *Catostomus fecundus*." Jordan characterized the new genus *Chasmistes* as within that family but only very briefly described them as "Big-mouthed Suckers."¹⁶

One of Jordan's students, who became part of the zoology faculty at Stanford, was John Otterbein Snyder (FIGURE 2).¹⁷ In the summer of 1911, Snyder collected specimens in the Lahontan Basin of Nevada and northeastern California. While serving as a temporary assistant of the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries, Snyder published "The Fishes of the Lahontan Drainage System of Nevada and Their Relation to the Geology of the Region" in the 1914 volume of the *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*.¹⁸ After his initial work in Nevada, Snyder returned to extend his inquiries about the fish species found in the Great Basin. In 1915 and 1916, Snyder worked with Carl Leavitt Hubbs on the Lahontan cutthroat trout of Pyramid Lake and its tributary, the Truckee River, which flows from Lake Tahoe.¹⁹ A final comprehensive report on the entire fish fauna, including the cui-ui, was published in 1917: "The Fishes of the Lahontan System of Nevada and Northeastern California," found in volume 35 of the *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Fisheries*.²⁰

Thanks to his fieldwork in Nevada in 1911, and then from 1915 to 1916, Snyder would have been familiar with reports revealing the decline of the fish population along the Truckee River, resulting from the U.S. Reclamation Service's Derby Dam diversion there, completed in 1905. He also knew firsthand about the destruction of fish-specimen collections in San Francisco during the 1906 earthquake. Most important, Snyder and Jordan received an unexpected but most welcome gift, sent to Stanford from Samuel Doten—a cui-ui.

As already noted, "avid" may not be a strong enough word to describe Doten's interest in fishing. It bordered on an obsession. He loved all aspects of fishing, especially trying to outsmart trout. Eating his catch seemed secondary to the hunt. He squeezed in fishing as many

¹⁵David Starr Jordan, "The History of Ichthyology," *Science* 16, no. 398 (1902): 257, accessed September 19, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1627649>; "Spencer Fullerton Baird and the United States Fish Commission," *The Scientific Monthly* 17, no. 2 (1923): 97–107, accessed September 19, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3693026>.

¹⁶Ira La Rivers, *Fishes and Fisheries of Nevada* (Carson City: Nevada State Fish and Game Commission, 1962), 364–65.

¹⁷Martin R. Brittan and Mark R. Jennings, "Stanford University's John Otterbein Snyder: Student, Collaborator, and Colleague of David Starr Jordan and Charles Henry Gilbert," *Marine Fisheries Review* 70 (2008): 24.

¹⁸John Otterbein Snyder, "The Fishes of the Lahontan Drainage System of Nevada and Their Relation to the Geology of the Region," *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 4, no. 1 (June 4, 1914): 299–300.

¹⁹Brittan and Jennings, "Stanford University's John Otterbein Snyder," 26.

²⁰Snyder, "Fishes of the Lahontan System," 31–87; Ira La Rivers, *Fishes and Fisheries of Nevada*, notes that while the rest of vol. 35 of the *Bulletin* was issued in 1918, Snyder's paper was a separate publication issued in 1917, 758.

days as he could during a week.²¹ Aside from his duties at the university, he became president of the Nevada Fish and Game Protective Association in 1908.²² Made up of local anglers, this association's stated purpose was: "Open the dams. Stop pollution. Enforce the law. Restock the streams."²³ With the Truckee the water lifeline of northern Nevada, Doten held a special interest in the habitat of the river for fish life as it flowed from the Sierra through Reno and northeastward into Pyramid Lake.

With a population boom and an irrigation expansion happening in the Truckee Meadows, the fish habitat of the Truckee River became problematic, deteriorating into a trash and sewage dump. Upstream lumber mills clogged the stream with sawdust and chemicals. The influx of other industrial chemical wastes polluted the river, turning it into an unwelcome environment for native fish, let alone the introduction of non-native fish into its waters.²⁴ According to one study, "By 1900, the city of Reno was dumping so much waste in the river that it created a dead zone where fish could no longer breathe."²⁵

The Reclamation Service's Derby Dam on the Truckee, ten miles upstream from the Pyramid Lake Reservation boundary, continued to divert waters to join flows from the Carson River, which then served farms and ranches near Fernley and Fallon, 60 miles east of Reno.²⁶ By 1914, diverted water from the Truckee and Carson Rivers was stored in the newly constructed Lahontan Reservoir, where ditches conveyed water to agricultural lands. Almost all of Pyramid Lake's natural inflow comes from the Truckee River. Historically, rainfall at the lake measured approximately 5.4 inches per year, with an evaporation rate of 52 inches. Clearly the annual rainfall was not enough to sustain the lake's water level, yet between the river's seasonal flow and the scant rainfall, the lake levels fluctuated but remained relatively stable. Diverting nearly half of the Truckee's water, however, threw the lake's level into precipitous decline.²⁷

The location of Pyramid Lake within the Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation posed further complications that in the long run proved essential to saving the lake's fishery habitat. Since 1859, both the War Department and the Interior Department recognized the Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation as the home of the Northern Paiutes. The Paiutes had long-established traditions as hunters and gatherers who also relied upon the fishery of Pyramid Lake for sustenance. While falling lake levels and increased salination threatened a traditional source of Paiute livelihood, the U.S. Office of Indian Affairs generally remained unmotivated to complain about the fate of the lake's fishery in the face of damaging diversions and activities of the Reclamation Service. Beginning with the Dawes Act in 1887, American Indian policy sought through various means to turn Native peoples into farmers, notably by turning reservation lands into private property for individually owned ranches and farms, all of which broke traditions of land held communally through the entity of the tribe. Policies of deriving livings from the land discouraged efforts by the Office of Indian Affairs to protest against the

²¹Doten kept annual fishing journals during the fishing season from 1906 to 1951, Samuel Doten Fishing Journals, MS. 2011-18, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno.

²²"Fish from Pyramid Lake," *Nevada State Journal*, February 15, 1908, 3.

²³S. B. Doten, "Truckee to be Real Trout Stream Again," *Reno Evening Gazette*, April 5, 1909, 2.

²⁴Donald J. Pisani, "The Polluted Truckee: A Study of Interstate Water Quality, 1870-1934," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (Fall 1977): 151-54.

²⁵Knack, *As Long*, 304.

²⁶Knack, *As Long*, 269; John M. Townley, *Turn This Water into Gold: The Story of the Newlands Project*, second edition (Reno: Nevada Historical Society, 1998), 29.

²⁷Knack, *As Long*, 271-72.

depletion of the lake, because the assumption was that the lake and its fishery were not the major source of the tribe's future livelihood. Instead, its future should be tied to agriculture. Still, it was evident that the growth of Reno presented a nearby market with revenues from the sale of fish by Paiute fishermen and others. Heavy commercial fishing and sports fishing contributed to the decline of the fishery, along with lower lake levels as water was diverted to the Reclamation Service's Truckee-Carson Irrigation Project.²⁸

Although a fish ladder was a part of the Derby Dam construction, it was so poorly designed that fish could not breach the dam. Their bodies dotted the riverbanks, and hatchlings found their way into the diversion ditch and irrigation canals, where they quickly died. Also, as the lake's water levels continued to drop, fish could not pass over the sandy delta or sandbar where the Truckee entered the lake. The Lahontan cutthroat trout and the cui-ui could not even approach the mouth of the Truckee, much less ascend to their spawning places upriver.²⁹ As fish populations declined, so did the annual commercial catch by both whites and Natives.

In his 1917 article "Fishes of the Lahontan System of Nevada and Northeastern California," Snyder reviewed the previous research information about *Chasmistes cujus* that mainly derived from Cope's work. However, he remarked that until then, only one specimen was preserved in any museum—it was the one previously mentioned by Cope, which he obtained with difficulty in 1882 and which he placed in the U.S. National Museum in Washington, D.C.³⁰

Because the cui-ui lived in the depths of Pyramid Lake and was considered by most non-Native Americans to be poor eating, most fishing efforts (except those of the Paiutes) took little interest in the cui-ui. Since Cope, the species had escaped rigorous scientific inquiry over the years, but the building of the Derby Dam, with its consequent damage to the fishery, prompted agents of the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries to show an interest in researching the fish of Pyramid Lake, especially in Lahontan and rainbow trout so popular with the sport-fishing crowd, as well with commercial markets in Reno and even San Francisco.³¹

During the annual run of spawning cui-ui in about mid-April 1910, Doten visited Pyramid Lake. It is not clear if he came to see the run for himself to review the inadequacies of the fish ladder or as part of his work as either a Nevada Fish and Game Protective Association member or as the Agricultural Experiment Station director. What is known is that he procured a cui-ui specimen (FIGURE 3) and sent it to ichthyologist David Starr Jordan at Stanford (Doten's most welcome gift).

On May 13, 1910, Doten wrote to Jordan about the cui-ui, though his letter is not extant. However, in a letter dated May 16, 1910, Jordan acknowledged that Doten had correctly identified the fish as a specimen of *Chasmistes cujus*, not *Catostomus fecundus* as Jordan had supposed. Previously, in his 1878 publication about freshwater suckerfish, Jordan had wrongly described the *Chasmistes* genus as being representative of the genus *Catostomus fecundus*, and as Snyder pointed out in his article on the Lahontan system, at that point Jordan had actually not seen a specimen. "It is the only one I have ever seen.... It is a very interesting beast," Jordan replied to Doten. Jordan continued that he would have a description and figure of the

²⁸Knack, *As Long*, 108–09.

²⁹Knack, *As Long*, 274, 277.

³⁰Snyder, "Fishes of the Lahontan System," 50; Cope willed an extensive amount of his findings to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, including his 1898 ichthyological specimens, Osborn, *Cope: Master Naturalist*, 453.

³¹"Gossip Follows Official Visit," *Nevada State Journal*, October 18, 1909, 6.



FIGURE 3. The cui-ui suckerfish of Pyramid Lake can reach a length of 26 inches and weigh from three to five pounds. (Nevada Fish and Game Commission Photo Collection, Nevada Department of Wildlife, Reno, Nevada)

fish published, together with Doten's notes on it. He concluded by acknowledging that none of the suckerfish species available were from Lake Tahoe but were instead from Utah and southeastern Oregon.³²

With an upcoming six-month sabbatical that would take him away from campus and his laboratory, Jordan passed the specimen and the write-up of it to John Otterbein Snyder, as indicated in Jordan's May 20, 1910 letter to Doten. He wrote that Doten's specimen would be sent to Washington, and he requested additional specimens. Doten must have written in one of his previous letters to Jordan that he saw three runs of the cui-ui, as Jordan speculates in this letter that the three runs could indicate three different species. In a letter dated June 9, 1910, he encouraged Doten, if he were so willing, to write up the species himself, which he felt would be entirely fitting.³³

Meanwhile, Snyder was cautious about writing up a description for the cui-ui without more research. In a letter to Doten on June 22, 1910, he indicated that he received additional

³²David Starr Jordan to Samuel B. Doten, May 16, 1910, Max C. Fleischmann College of Agriculture, Agricultural Extension Station Records, AC 0004, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno, hereafter cited as Extension Records.

³³Jordan to Doten, May 20 and June 9, 1910, Extension Records.

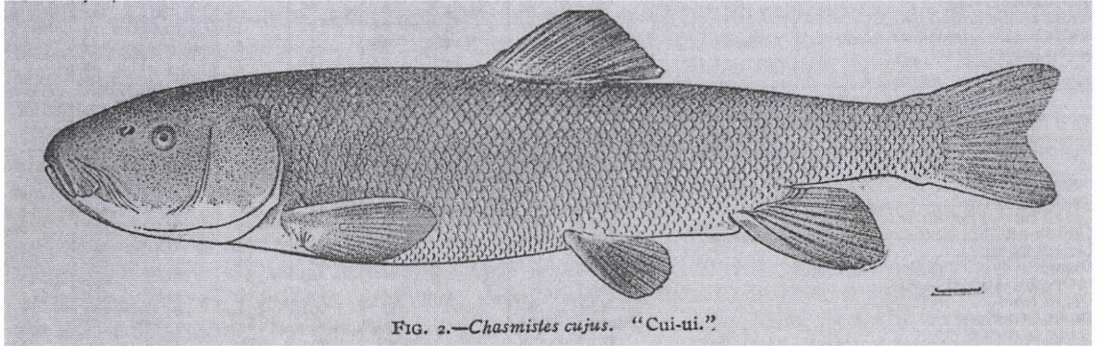


FIGURE 4. Illustration of the cui-ui suckerfish which was included in John Otterbein Snyder's 1917 published article in the *United States Bureau of Fisheries Bulletin*.

information on the cui-ui from Pyramid Lake Reservation Indian agent Lorenzo Creel, who provided Snyder with anatomical information about cui-ui he received from the Indian fishing camps. Snyder was delighted with the information. In fact, he delayed his investigation in light of it and announced his intention to come to Nevada in the spring of 1911 to observe the fish migrations.³⁴

Not only did Snyder come to Nevada in 1911, he also returned during the 1912 Lahontan cutthroat trout migration. Both visits are acknowledged in his 1917 article's footnotes. By delaying his publication of "Fishes of the Lahontan System of Nevada and Northeastern California," the resulting article emerged as the thorough scientific investigation Snyder envisioned (FIGURE 4). Moreover, in the process, Snyder met Doten in person, further cementing an intellectual acquaintance. In the second footnote in his article's introduction, Snyder thanked individual members of the Nevada Fish Commission for their direct help. He especially thanked University of Nevada professors Maxwell Adams, a former student of Jordan's, and Doten, describing Doten as "an enthusiastic angler."³⁵

Snyder's study brought scientific weight to the subject of the Derby Dam's harmful impact on the fish spawn of Pyramid Lake. In a lengthy footnote about his 1912 visit, he described the thousands of dead and stranded fish that had either attempted or were unable to spawn. He wrote: "Trout could not even survive in the deeper pools between Derby and the dam because of their large numbers and the polluted water."³⁶

While Snyder's observations in his 1917 publication did not immediately help to correct the course of destruction of Pyramid Lake's river-spawning fish, his report did lend additional scientific support to the detrimental impact of water diversions on the fisheries of the lake and the Truckee River, more specifically the damages inflicted by diverting water to the Reclamation Service's Truckee-Carson Project. And while it did not call for corrective measures, the evidence presented offered support for later efforts—decades in the future—to save the lake's fishery.

³⁴John Otterbein Snyder to Doten, June 22, 1910, Extension Records.

³⁵Snyder, "Fishes of the Lahontan System", 33. Snyder's document was issued September 28, 1917, as Document No. 843 but is considered part of the *Bulletin's* vol. 35, dated earlier. Maxwell Anderson, a professor of chemistry at the University of Nevada had been a student of Jordan's while at Stanford, graduating in 1895. It isn't clear if he also knew Snyder while he was there. David Starr Jordan, *The Days of a Man*, vol. 1 (New York: World Book Company, 1922), 707.

³⁶Snyder, "Fishes of the Lahontan System," 42.

During his visit, Snyder was able to collect specimens of all the local fish types, placing them in both Washington, D.C., and at Stanford for further research. His report became one of the bibliographic underpinnings that scientists built upon later in the 20th century to argue for providing more water for Pyramid Lake and its fishery. These future studies (often polemical) revealed the disastrous impact on Pyramid Lake when much of the water from the Truckee River was diverted for agricultural purposes. Their arguments also called for federal appropriations to assist in fish migration along bypasses around Derby Dam and the building of the Marble Bluff Dam and its Pyramid Lake Fishway near the entrance of the Truckee River into Pyramid Lake.³⁷

The federal government's early inability to solve the problems associated with the Truckee-Carson Project—officially renamed the Newlands Project in 1919—and its disastrous impact upon the fishery at Pyramid Lake dragged on for decades. Major lawsuits over the distribution of Truckee River waters occurred for most of the 20th century, including the fate of the cui-ui, especially after Congress enacted the Endangered Species Act of 1973. In hindsight, the Newlands Project did not meet many of its expected outcomes in terms of the number of acres to be irrigated and farms established. It did meet the scientific community's studied expectations that it threatened the extinction of the cui-ui, to say nothing of the Lahontan cutthroat trout that did go extinct. Later in the 20th century, Congress provided funds to bring the species back to Pyramid Lake from sources in Utah. While never totally eliminated from the lake, the cui-ui are still listed as an endangered species in accordance with the Endangered Species Act.

The destruction of important scholarly fish-specimen collections during the 1906 earthquake at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, as well as damage to the collections at Stanford University, demonstrated how quickly knowledge could be lost. Scientists needed repeat travels near and far to replace, reinvestigate, and repair the specimen collections. Their tasks often involved assembling new research and publications that in some instances highlighted the environmental challenges that species faced under new conditions of man-made interventions into fishery environments. Such was the case with the cui-ui in Snyder's 1917 article in the *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Fisheries*.

Samuel Doten's well-considered gift of a cui-ui specimen to two of the Far West's leading ichthyologists, David Starr Jordan and John Otterbein Snyder, aided their efforts to simultaneously reconstruct earthquake-damaged collections and promote inquiries into the status of western Nevada fisheries. Although the "enthusiastic angler" Samuel Doten did not write up the reinvestigation of the cui-ui, he did engage the attention of Snyder and Jordan in "the very interesting beast," as Jordan called it. Doten's initiatives attracted additional research and initiated a rediscovery of a unique species of fish. Moreover, the renewed interest brought attention to bear on the threats to the fishery environment of Pyramid Lake and the Truckee River that would only be addressed many decades later.

³⁷Bernard Mergen, *At Pyramid Lake* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2014), 78–79. Marble Bluff Dam and its Pyramid Lake Fishway, constructed in 1975 at the mouth of the Truckee near Nixon, were designed to assist the spawn of both the Lahontan cutthroat trout and the cui-ui. However, the fishway did not work, due in part to a lack of understanding about cui-ui behavior as well as mechanical problems that were not fixed until 1998; some of the scientists who have reported on the cui-ui include Thomas Trelease, Ira La Rivers, David Koch, G. Gary Scoppettone, Peter Rissler, and Thomas A. Strekal, as well as other biologists too numerous to list working in Nevada and federal offices.

Notes & Documents

Sex, Murder, and the Myth of the Wild West: How a Soiled Dove Earned a Heart of Gold

RONALD M. JAMES



FIGURE 1. Julia Bulette (ca. 1832 to 1867) was a midlevel sex worker in the American West. Murdered on January 20, 1867, she emerged in regional folklore as a madam of fabulous wealth. (Nevada Historical Society)

In the summer of 1960, at the age of five, I joined an honored folk tradition by telling my first Comstock lie. It was about a sex worker who had transformed into a legend of the Wild West.

Twenty-five years earlier, George Lyman published *The Saga of the Comstock Lode: Boom Days in Virginia City*. He described an 1859 epidemic in the fledgling town of Virginia City and how a caring woman, a sex worker named Julia Bulette (FIGURE 1),

...turned her palace into a hospital. Caldrons of broth and steamers of rice stewed on her stove. Night and day she went from bed to bed in cabin and tent on her mission of mercy, soothing and comforting, feeding and nursing like a white angel.

Gosh, what a gal, to use the day's vernacular. Proving how remarkable she truly was, Bulette accomplished all this four years before she even arrived on the scene! Not to mention that there was no epidemic.

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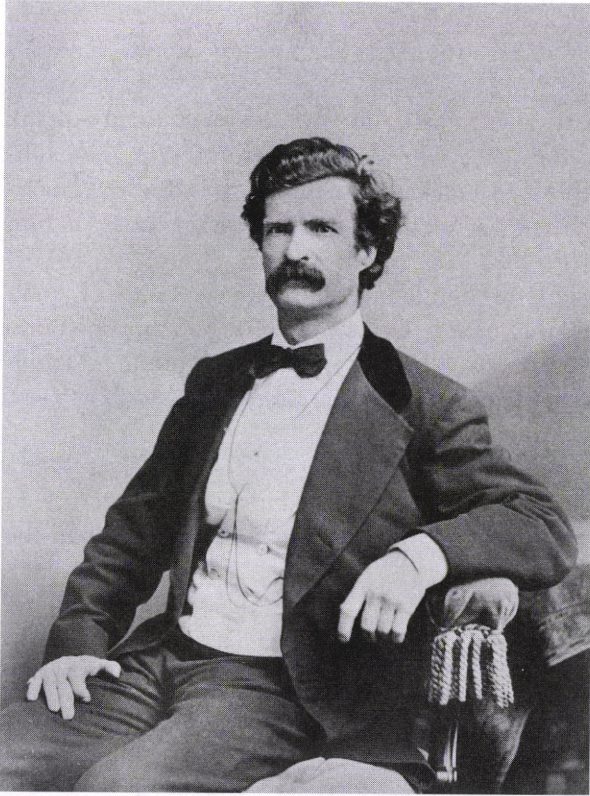


FIGURE 2. A young Mark Twain failed to mention Julia Bulette in *Roughing It*, despite living in Virginia City at the same time as her for over a year. (Nevada Historical Society)

Bulette came to Virginia City in 1863, one of dozens of sex workers from California. Most faded in the historical record and were ignored in local folklore. All except Julia Bulette, who was eventually resurrected in oral tradition.

While still alive, Bulette gained some notoriety as the favorite of Tom Peasley, a popular saloon owner and captain of a volunteer firefighting company, Engine No. 1., of which Bulette even became an honorary member. But with Peasley's death, her fortunes declined.

Although disease dogged Bulette's steps, a grisly murder extinguished her life. On a cold night in January 1867, she was bludgeoned and then strangled in her two-room crib. It became the best-documented part of her existence. Newspapers published the details of her death and funeral, and then the crime receded from public view, replaced with subsequent cycles of news. When Bulette's estate was probated, her limited assets could not cover her debts.

Tracing the roots of Bulette's legend is a challenge for want of sources. Several writers—all men—were able to remember her, but they gave her barely more than a passing nod: the journalist Alf Doten mentioned her a few unremarkable times in his diary. It was only a year after her murder that he wrote about her newly captured killer. This event was key for Bulette's story: because a man was tried and hanged for the killing, the community could revisit the slain sex worker. Despite this brief excitement, however, her legacy sputtered. A few years later, Dan De Quille, another journalist, published a mammoth overview of Virginia City but included no mention of Bulette.

Yet another writer, Samuel Clemens, lived in Virginia City when Bulette arrived, even as he picked his nom de plume, Mark Twain (FIGURE 2), and yet she is invisible in his *Roughing It* (1872), the tale of his western sojourns.¹ Having left in 1864, Twain returned to Virginia City in 1868 to give a lecture, his visit coinciding with the hanging of Bulette's murderer. In a column about it for the *Chicago Republican*, Twain focused on his repulsion over the execution but only wrote of the sex worker in the context of the killer: "He secreted himself under the

¹The assertion that Twain's Buck Fanshaw was based on Tom Peasley is unsubstantiated; assuming the link to be valid, some would further see a reference to Bulette in *Roughing It* with the phrase, "[Fanshaw] had been the proprietor of a dashing helpmeet whom he could have discarded without the formality of a divorce." If we accept the dubious claim that Bulette and Peasley were intended here, she nevertheless remains anonymous in the text. Samuel Clemens [Mark Twain], *Roughing It*, Harriet Elinor Smith and Edgar Marquess Branch, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013 [1872]) 308, 668.

house of a woman of the town, and in the dead watches of the night, he entered her room, knocked her senseless with a billet of wood ... and strangled her." So ends Bulette, a nameless, featureless "woman of the town."

In 1908, an interviewer asked Virginia City newspaper editor Joe Goodman about Bulette. After more than 40 years, Goodman described Bulette with vague, incorrect details. Like others, he fixated on the murder, trial, and hanging, events he knew firsthand. Although Goodman offered no folklore associated with her, the question about the sex worker hinted at oral tradition percolating behind the scenes.

During the 20th century, the image of Bulette changed. The previously quoted Lyman novel advanced an extravagant image of her, far removed from fact. Bulette had morphed into a madam, elevated to a soiled dove with a heart of gold who was wealthy beyond imagination and exhibited the generosity of a saint. Whether Lyman drew on folklore is impossible to say, but his image of Bulette anticipated later oral tradition.

In 1958, a book appeared by Zeke Daniels, the pen name of local historian Effie Mona Mack, the first woman to take on the Bulette story. Her heroine lived in a palace and rode in a gilded carriage, wearing costly jewelry and having earned as much—or more—than the richest silver barons of the Comstock.

We do not know when the fabulously conceived Bulette became part of local folklore, but it was in full force by the mid-20th century, even before Mack wrote as Zeke Daniels. In 1945, the Virginia and Truckee Railroad restored a coach caboose, naming it *Julia Bullette [sic]*, evidence that the long-dead sex worker was winning acclaim in the popular mind.

Beginning in 1949, the American folklorist Duncan Emrich was hot on Bulette's trail during his many visits to Virginia City. Heading the Library of Congress's Archive of Folk Song from 1945 to 1955, he recorded in a local saloon, documenting aspects of her legend. She was no longer the forgotten, murdered sex worker, a sideshow to a hanging. Bulette had taken center stage in the drama.

All this was happening as Virginia City shifted from mining to tourism. Celebrating local folklore in the 1950s, the owner of the Bucket of Blood Saloon created a fake burial site for Bulette in the Flowery Hill Cemetery (FIGURE 3), her actual place of repose long since lost. The community used Flowery Hill until the late 1860s, when another cemetery replaced it, leaving the older burial ground to fall into disrepair.

For folklore, however, things were imagined differently. Bulette's newly created grave shrine or cenotaph resided in a lonely place across the ravine from the respectable cemetery, for now legend maintained that, shunned in death, she could only find eternal rest in the notorious Boot Hill. Her invented grave, with its bright-white fence, could be seen through a coin-operated telescope at the back of the Bucket of Blood (FIGURE 4). For a nickel, anyone could glimpse a reflection of the Myth of the Wild West.

This, then, is the setting of my first Comstock lie, uttered in 1960. Inspired by the hit television show *Bonanza*, which premiered in 1959, my parents took me and my older brother to Virginia City, the place where the fictional Cartwrights rode into town for supplies, a drink, and some trouble.

Although I had not seen it because *Bonanza* was past my bedtime, Bulette featured in her own episode in the first season of the show, giving my father inspiration to feed a coin into the telescope. He quickly found the site, and then yielded the device to my mother. She, too, viewed the gleaming painted wood around Bulette's memorial, the object of so much mythical awe. Then it was the turn of my brother, who also took a gander at the site.

When it was my turn, I failed to see anything. The telescope's timer was clicking down to zero, and we all knew it would shortly go dark, demanding another nickel, which my father



FIGURE 3. The invented location of Julia Bulette's final resting place includes wood likely taken from another grave. The chain-link fence protects the focus of veneration from wild horses who would trample it. (Ronald M. James)



FIGURE 4. Virginia City seen from the invented Julia Bulette burial site. The Bucket of Blood Saloon (the white building within the circle) features a large window that once had a coin-operated telescope used to view the fabled final resting place of a soiled dove with a heart of gold. (Ronald M. James)

certainly would not spend. "Do you see it? Do you see it?" my parents repeatedly asked. Seeking to end the harassment, I finally answered yes. I had lied about the legendary sex worker. Although lacking the artistry of DeQuille or Twain, my fabrication was part of a tradition that has contributed to the Myth of the Wild West.

From the mining district's start in 1859, Comstockers have celebrated tall tales. De Quille called them "quaints" and took delight when people believed his hoaxes. Twain learned from De Quille, discovering how to turn his own "stretchers" into an art form, a cornerstone of his remarkable literary career. To this day, the folk tradition persists as Virginia City residents attempt to "outstretch" one another when describing the past of their mining district. The process keeps the Wild West a vibrant, ever-expanding domain of folklore.

For decades, speakers of tour trolleys have boomed hourly with tales of this imaginary West, complete with stories about Julia Bulette, now far removed from reality. One can still hear local shopkeepers embellishing her legend for eager tourists, just as they have done for



FIGURE 5. Objects left on Bulette's imagined grave. A nearby tree also often has objects of devotion left hanging there. (Ronald M. James)

decades. The process has been unending. A 21st-century ghost tour described a local undertaker who refused to yield Bulette's body, keeping poor Julia on ice for whatever nefarious purpose until he finally surrendered the object of his adoration.

In addition, people have recently taken to decorating Bulette's fictional final resting place with keepsakes (FIGURE 5). A fake grave fit into local legend has become the object of its own tradition. Folklore thrives.

In 1984, Susan James, my wife, wrote the first real attempt to "bust" the myth of Julia Bulette. At the time, I was concerned: as a historian, I have also corrected the record, colored with the fantastic wanderings of oral tradition. As a folklorist, however, I celebrate imagination. Fortunately, I have repeatedly watched the written word fail to undo legend. Folklore is far more powerful than history.

There was a real, nuanced West of wealth and success, failure and disappointment, filled with people who experienced happiness and sadness and then exited the stage. In the end, we must not forget that Julia Bulette was a real person whose occupation was too often dangerous and degrading. At the same time, the Myth of the Wild West dominates perception.

Bulette survives with a double life: historians document a woman who thrived in her own way and then was murdered. Popular tradition remembers the Queen of the Red-Light District, a symbol of glorious wealth, living life to its fullest. Virginia City residents and visitors celebrate a legendary life fit into the mythic Wild West, even as the real Julia Bulette has largely disappeared.

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This article, presented with minor modifications, adapts a presentation by Ronald M. James given at the virtual conference "Business as Unusual: Histories of Rupture, Chaos, Revolution, and Change" (September 15–17, 2020), of the subreddit 'AskHistorians'; it was also posted on the website Folklore Thursday on November 12, 2020.

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Book Reviews

Wicked Virginia City. By Peter B. Mires (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2020), 144 pp.

The slim volume *Wicked Virginia City* (2020), by Peter B. Mires, is a delightful, beautifully written, and amply illustrated overview of vices in a western boomtown. As part of the Wicked series of The History Press, a division of Arcadia Publishing, *Wicked Virginia City* examines the past through a filter, one which emphasizes the sinful and violent aspects of a mining district that flourished from 1859 to roughly 1880. Arcadia Publishing is to be commended for producing thousands of easily consumable books dealing with local topics that are often overlooked.

One of the challenges Mires faced was that, despite all the hype of the Wild West, a place like Virginia City was filled with hardworking and industrious residents, many with families, who wanted prosperity and a safe community striving to curtail violence and sin. It comes as no surprise that historians, like journalists, often seek the sensational while bypassing the mundane—the latter of which fills most lives most of the time. The result is not always a balanced portrait.

Due to its reputation for being “wild,” the West is particularly vulnerable to exaggeration of violence and vice, the very characteristics of wickedness that this series celebrates. And despite the popularity of the subject, we cannot ignore the ongoing discussion among western historians on an analysis that attempts to put this aspect of the region’s past into proper perspective. To be fair, Mires is quick to point out that Virginia City was much more than its dark side. The West, after all, was not always as violent and sinful as its own public-relations campaign would have it. Having stated that sensationalism can be a trap, it is possible to move on and consider the virtues of *Wicked Virginia City*.

Mires does a fine job of accumulating all the greatest hits of Comstock debauchery. Gamblers, sex workers, and saloons are obvious subjects here. Julia Bulette and her murder predictably receive extended treatment, as do the actresses who played on Virginia City’s stages. In a refreshing turn away from the cheaply acquired lurid, Mires also deals with lawyers, politicians, and stock swindlers. Here we can explore something beyond the usual cliché of sex, drinking, and violence. In addressing political and financial corruption, Mires reaches beyond vices that can sometimes be matters of subjective evaluation. Instead, the chapters “Stock Swindles” and “Crooked Lawyers and Politicians” deal with powerful people acting in ways that too often hurt the innocent, victimized by some of the very men often lauded in more traditional histories.

When searching for juicy expressions of wickedness, Mires is sometimes driven to other places in the region. With this geographic sleight of hand, he employs examples of “wickedness” from California. This is a by-product of a scarcity of examples when it comes to the real West as opposed to the Wild West, and yet, something is justified here. People, after all,

saw the Comstock as part of the Pacific-coast community, which shared a great deal during the 19th century. The occasional example from California or elsewhere fits the moment and supplements rather than detracts from what Mires seeks to achieve.

Besides an excellent array of images, the use of primary-source text (reproduced at times extensively) enriches the narrative. These, together with well-chosen images and, as indicated, solid writing, make this book a welcome addition to the field of Nevada history. The casual reader will find *Wicked Virginia City* an entertaining romp. Those who wish to delve into the Comstock with an eye for more detailed research and writing can use this new work by Mires for insight, even as it serves as a good index of the possibilities when considering vice-ridden aspects of the past.

Ronald M. James

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Alliance Rises in the West: Labor, Race, and Solidarity in Industrial California. By Charlotte K. Sunseri (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press and the Society for Historical Archaeology, 2020), 174 pp.

Guided solely by its baffling title, prospective readers cannot possibly guess the topic of this frustrating little book. As it happens, *Alliance Rises in the West* offers a case study of an industrial company town conducted by Charlotte Sunseri, a historical archaeologist searching for signs of interracial “alliance” and working-class “solidarity” in the American West during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. She says she has found them, but readers likely will disagree.

A vanished hamlet whose remains are barely discernable on the landscape today, Mono Mills was a small lumber and railroad town that flourished between 1881 and 1917. Located 20 miles southwest of the Nevada border in Mono County, California, Mono Mills served just one purpose: to satisfy the voracious appetite for wood in Bodie, the fabled mining camp named after prospector W.S. Bodey, who in 1859 struck gold in the rugged desert hills nine miles north of Mono Lake. Perched at an elevation of 8,400 feet and situated on a treeless sagebrush plain, Bodie endures hot dry summers and severely cold winters.

In this remote and barren corner of the Great Basin, the Bodie Mining District grew slowly until 1877, when the discovery of fabulously rich ores sparked the storied stampede to Bodie that lasted five glorious years. In 1880, near the height of the rush, Bodie boasted a population of 5,400 people, almost half of them foreign-born immigrants from Ireland, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Mexico, and China.

That diverse multitude burned enormous quantities of cordwood for cooking and heating, and it required plenty of boards and shingles for construction. So, too, did Bodie’s mines, which demanded cordwood to fuel the steam engines that powered stamp mills and hoisting works, along with heavy timbers to shore up nearly 60 miles of subterranean tunnels. All told, booming Bodie devoured five million board feet of cut lumber each year, and 300 cords of firewood *each day*.

When the nearby forests of the eastern Sierra Nevada proved insufficient to meet the town's needs, mine owners teamed up with Carson City railroad executive Henry Yerington to tap the Jeffrey pine forest south of Mono Lake. Incorporated as the Bodie Railway and Lumber Company in February 1881, the investors secured 12,000 acres of federal timberland on the east flank of the Mono Craters. There they erected a state-of-the-art two-story mill, with five steam-powered saws capable of cutting 80,000 board feet every 10 hours. To connect mill and market, the company built a narrow-gauge railroad that ran north for 32 miles, skirting the desolate eastern shore of the lake before climbing the steep 2,000-foot grade up to Bodie. Completed in November 1881, the railroad delivered five million board feet of lumber and 27,000 cords of wood during its first full year of operation, in 1882.

Meanwhile, the company town of Mono Mills quickly sprang up to accommodate the 25 men employed at the saws and the 200 workers who felled trees and hauled logs. Two bunkhouses and 30 small cabins provided free housing for a heterogeneous workforce that included Chinese immigrants and local Kutzadika Paiutes, who resided in segregated sections of an industrial village also home to a general store and a company commissary complete with a mess hall and saloon. A locomotive enginehouse, blacksmith shop, machine works, and turntable comprised the railroad-station complex.

Dreams of linking Mono Mills to Nevada's rail network via eastward extensions to Benton or Sodaville never materialized, so the community's fortunes rose and fell directly with those of Bodie. Ironically, Bodie slipped into a long and gradual descent almost as soon as Mono Mills began operations. A declining population and shuttered mines, coupled with the advent of hydroelectric power in 1892, drastically cut Bodie's wood demands. A temporary shutdown at Mono Mills between 1890 and 1893 became permanent in 1917, when the rechristened Mono Lake Railway and Lumber Company ceased operations for good. The tracks were pulled up the following year and the sawmill dismantled. The remaining structures fell into ruin or were carted away.

Today Mono Mills stands deserted, except for an informational kiosk erected in 2008 alongside U.S. Highway 120. Twice, in 1998 and 2012, teams of archaeologists surveyed and excavated the grounds. Sunseri, who led the most recent fieldwork there, and having carefully cataloged an extensive trove of recovered artifacts, argues that although "nature has returned" to "cover and obscure" the once -thriving company town, it has not entirely erased telltale evidence of significant "working-class struggles" at Mono Mills (p. 121), "an archaeological microcosm of Gilded Age social issues" (p. xxv).

Indeed, according to Sunseri, her "archaeological study at Mono Mills shows that workers resisted capitalism's impacts, or accommodated and embraced them, to serve their own purposes" (p. 30). Unfortunately, her frequent claims of proletarian "agency" and "solidarity" rest on extremely thin evidence and overreaching speculations. To offer one typical example: a porcelain Chinese spoon unearthed in the Paiute residential area and a cache of pine nuts retrieved from a Chinese cabin site are optimistically interpreted as indications of an interracial "politics of alliance" that supposedly united nonwhite workers at Mono Mills against presumed "company attempts at fragmentation and segregation" (pp. 70-74, 87).

Perhaps. But without corroborating documentary evidence, it remains impossible to sustain such an argument or to rule out any number of equally plausible alternative interpretations. As a historical archaeologist, Sunseri should have spent as much time in the archives and libraries as she did in the lab and field. There is simply too little history in her study, which contains only 30 scattered pages of historical narrative focused on Mono Mills or Bodie.

Missing from the author's reference list are many indispensable primary sources, including the 1880, 1900, and 1910 U.S. Census schedules for Bodie and Mono Mills; the five newspapers once published in Bodie; data-rich documents generated by the Mono County assessor, clerk, and recorder; and W.S. Langille's 1904 U.S. Forest Service reports on Mono Mills. Also absent are numerous relevant secondary sources examining California politics, Chinese immigrants, and Native Americans. Most damaging is the strange omission of Roger McGrath's landmark comparative study of Bodie and its Nevada neighbor, Aurora.

Greater attention to the historical literature would have saved Sunseri from recurring factual errors, such as her repeated assertion, based on one failed protest demonstration in 1881, that Bodie was the scene of violent anti-Chinese riots and expulsion campaigns. McGrath, however, found no evidence whatsoever of organized violence in Bodie directed by whites against the Chinese or any other peoples of color in his richly detailed *Gunfighters, Highwaymen, and Vigilantes: Violence on the Frontier* (1984). This point is critical, since much of Sunseri's analysis of Chinese and Paiute artifacts assumes a pervasiveness of racial violence and hostility at both Bodie and Mono Mills.

In the end, the most important lesson taught by *Alliance Rises* has nothing to do with Mono Mills but rather the professional methods of historical archaeology. For historical archaeology to succeed, it cannot be practiced as it is here, namely, as 95 percent archaeology coated with just a thin and decorative veneer of history. If this promising interdisciplinary marriage is going to last, both partners must live and work as equals. Otherwise, Clio should file for divorce.

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Lakes and Watersheds in the Sierra Nevada of California: Responses to Environmental Change.
By John M. Melack, Steven Sadro, James O. Sickman, and Jeff Dozier (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 202 pp.

The Sierra Nevada runs north to south for hundreds of miles in California, largely just west of the Nevada-California state line. Scenic attractions include Mount Whitney, Lake Tahoe, Yosemite National Park, and Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park. This book focuses on Emerald Lake and the mountains that John Muir described as a "range of light."

For 30 years, scientists have gathered hydrological and limnological data at this lake and its watershed. The longevity of these studies allows for documentation of air and water quality and how these might impact climate change. This release, volume five in the Freshwater Ecology Series published by the University of California Press, is authored by four distinguished scientists who have organized the book into seven chapters, beginning with an introduction to the Sierra Nevada ecosystem, with information on its physical features, ecological aspects, and cultural history. Chapter two focuses on the high-elevation lakes of the range, with specific descriptions of lakes and watersheds. Snow, the main water source for Sierra lakes, is the topic of chapter three. Chapter four, watershed hydrology, presents measurements of water

and runoff balances. Chapter five examines watershed biogeochemistry. Chapter six focuses on long-term limnological and ecological data from Emerald Lake. The final chapter delves into future scenarios that have been considered in relation to climate-warming trends and changes in precipitation and snow- and ice melt.

Each chapter begins with a short abstract and a listing of key words related to that section's information and topic. The entire work is well written, in a scientific style that includes extensive and thorough in-text citations. The authors rely on their combined years of research in the presentation of their findings. Their goal is to illustrate and explain the importance of the Sierra Nevada lakes, which are a water source for millions of people and thriving agricultural businesses that supply an important percentage of the nation's food. The assembled data serve as a foundation to predict the trends and possible outcomes of climate change and water quality and availability in this region.

Numerous captioned black-and-white photographs and a plethora of charts, graphs, and mathematical formulas enhance this volume, as does its extensive bibliography. It is important to note that this book is not for casual readers but for scientists and those with a considerable knowledge of science; that said, readers will be impressed by the authors' analysis of data collected over three decades and quickly come to understand how vital such a long-term project is for interpretation and predictions in this time of global climate change.

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This Land Is My Land: Rebellion in the West. By James R. Skillen. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 280 pp.

In a wide-ranging article in a 1997 issue of *Western Historical Quarterly*, historian Richard White asked, "What are we to make of the current outbreak of weirdness in the West?" (p. 111). He pointed to the horrific bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and a potentially lethal bombing of a U.S. Forest Service office in Carson City. He also noted county independence movements spanning from New Mexico to Nevada, and some of the extreme views of the so-called Wise Use Movement that advocated a privatization of public lands to achieve optimal use of their resources and ostensibly their conservation. The latter echoed demands of the failed 1979 Sagebrush Rebellion, launched by the Nevada State Legislature. The "rebellion," which other western states mimicked, argued that most of the federal government's vast public lands in the West should either be ceded to the states or privatized. Now, in the wake of a fretful series of weird happenings in the West, more than four decades after the initiation of the Sagebrush Rebellion and two decades after White's 1997 article, a new voice has appeared on the scene to address the weirdness once again.

As an emerging authority with two previously well-received books, *The Nation's Largest Landlord: The Bureau of Land Management in the American West* (2009) and *Federal Ecosystem Management: Its Rise, Fall, and Afterlife* (2015), James R. Skillen gives Nevada public-lands issues substantial coverage. And well he should, with nearly 57 million acres of it—or over 80 percent

of Nevada—under the mortmain or unalienable ownership of the federal government and its management agencies. Heading the list of controversies are grazing issues that historically address grazing fees, numbers of allowed stock on allotments, whether grazing permits are a right or a privilege, and, more recently, complaints of the ranch community that are centered on environmental regulations and restrictions. The protection of wild-horse populations on public lands present problems for ranchers and agencies, as do the demands for recreational land use (for off-road vehicles, hikers, and hunters). The four major federal land managers in the state, the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and National Wildlife Refuge System, often find themselves caught in the middle of conflicts as they seek to carry out long-standing multiple-use mandates from Congress. Additionally, beginning in the 1970s, the demands of the Environmental Protection and Endangered Species Acts—to say nothing of the presence of vast military lands, including the Atomic Energy Commission's nuclear testing grounds—further complicate matters.

Skillen features the epic flash points that have occurred in Nevada, including the Dann Sisters' contention from their Crescent Valley ranch in Eureka County that traditional Native American land claims invalidate federal regulations imposed by the BLM; Wayne Hage's suit in Nye County contending in a finely threaded argument that the BLM cannot deny his stock a right of way to water sources that he owns inside federal land boundaries; protests over the closure of roads to establish "roadless areas"; and the Bundy family's refusal to pay past-due grazing fees, and their unfounded assertion that the federal government's expansive land ownership in Nevada is unconstitutional. Most dramatically, outside Nevada, in 2018, members of the Bundy family played a major role in a dispute at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in southern Oregon after an almost violent standoff with the BLM near their ranch properties in southern Nevada four years earlier. The complete list of events, taken together, challenge any attempt to form a coherent story about the problems facing federal land management in the West over the past 50 years.

Skillen rises to the challenge in this study. His narration yields studied judgments when he notes (with some satisfaction) that the multiple suits against the federal government by innovative and clever lawyers at the conservative Mountain State Legal Foundation have generally failed. Principally, the suits have neither dislodged the federal government from its historical ownership of western public lands, nor have they succeeded in breaking the back of federal authorities to impose rules and regulations to protect the resources of these lands. Skillen minces no words when he dismisses the much-fabled Sagebrush Rebellion in Nevada as "a dramatic piece of political theater" (p. 59).

In fact, that remark reveals much about the tenor of this book. It is neither a tract railing against the federal government, nor a complete veneration of the policies and actions of federal land-management agencies. Its title, *This Land Is My Land*, draws upon the words of folk singer Woody Guthrie's 1940 socialist workers' song, "This Land Is Your Land," the first line of which is: "This land is your land, this land is my land." A conservative reading of its meaning suggests there is room for both public and private property in the nation, with an emphasis placed on "my land," but the two claims to possession, by the pronouns "your" and "my" in the context of Guthrie's radical politics, are just another way of saying that this land is *our* land. With that understanding of the title, this latest book from Skillen offers a defense of the status quo. If it comes down to a question of whether the federal government should be divested of its millions of acres in the West, his answer is no. While acknowledging a history of sporadic conflict, there is an underlying confidence that solutions can be achieved. Still, Skillen sounds certain alarms. He notes that troubles have subsided during

the Trump administration but asserts that this is largely because Trump has sided with the hate-the-federal-government crowd and even violence-prone militia groups, who have long wanted to throw a wrench into public-lands administration. He warns that an insurrectionist direction may continue: "The next rebellion is likely to erupt as soon as a Democrat moves into the White House and enjoys Democratic support in the Congress. The infrastructure for rebellion is stronger, rather than weaker, than ever before" (p. 212).

The statement underlines a major contribution of Skillen's analysis: his success at connecting local public-lands issues with divisions in national politics and the underlayment of the culture wars that mark rural-versus-urban tensions. And while national party conflicts and issues of culture wars fanned by talk radio (abortion, gun rights, and both racial and gender politics) tend to inflame rural white voters and right-wing advocacy groups, Skillen's work stands for calmer heads to prevail. He urges collaborative approaches to the challenges of administering public lands, certainly not their abandonment by the federal government in the face of extremist and crazy outbursts in the West.

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Errata

The article "Defining Modern Las Vegas: Helldorado and the West, 1934-1945," published in the Fall/Winter 2020 issue of *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, contained some incorrect dates. The first Helldorado celebration in Tombstone, Arizona, occurred in 1929, not 1928. The first Helldorado celebration in Las Vegas occurred in 1935, not 1934. The first Helldorado celebration was a four-day event, not three days. The first rodeo held in conjunction with Helldorado occurred in 1936, not 1935. Roy Rogers did not participate in the 1945 Helldorado; he did participate in the 1946 celebration. The filming of the movie *Heldorado* occurred in 1946, not 1945.

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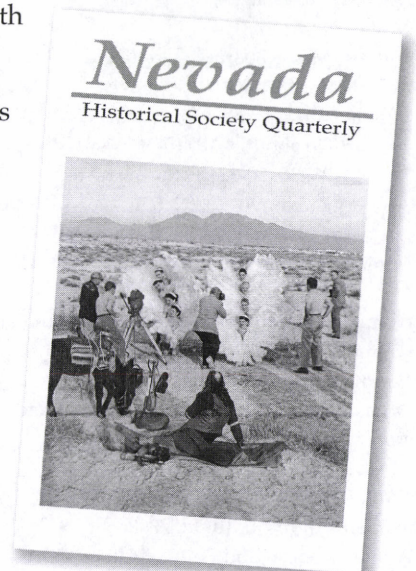
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¹Michael W. Bowers and Larry D. Strate, "Judicial Selection in Nevada: An Historical, Empirical, and Normative Evaluation," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 227-45.

²Elliot Lord, *Comstock Mining and Miners* (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1959), 172.

³*Independent News*, January 13, 1965, 4.

⁴James G. Scrugham, ed., *Nevada: A Narrative of the Conquest of a Frontier Land* (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1935), 3:398-99.

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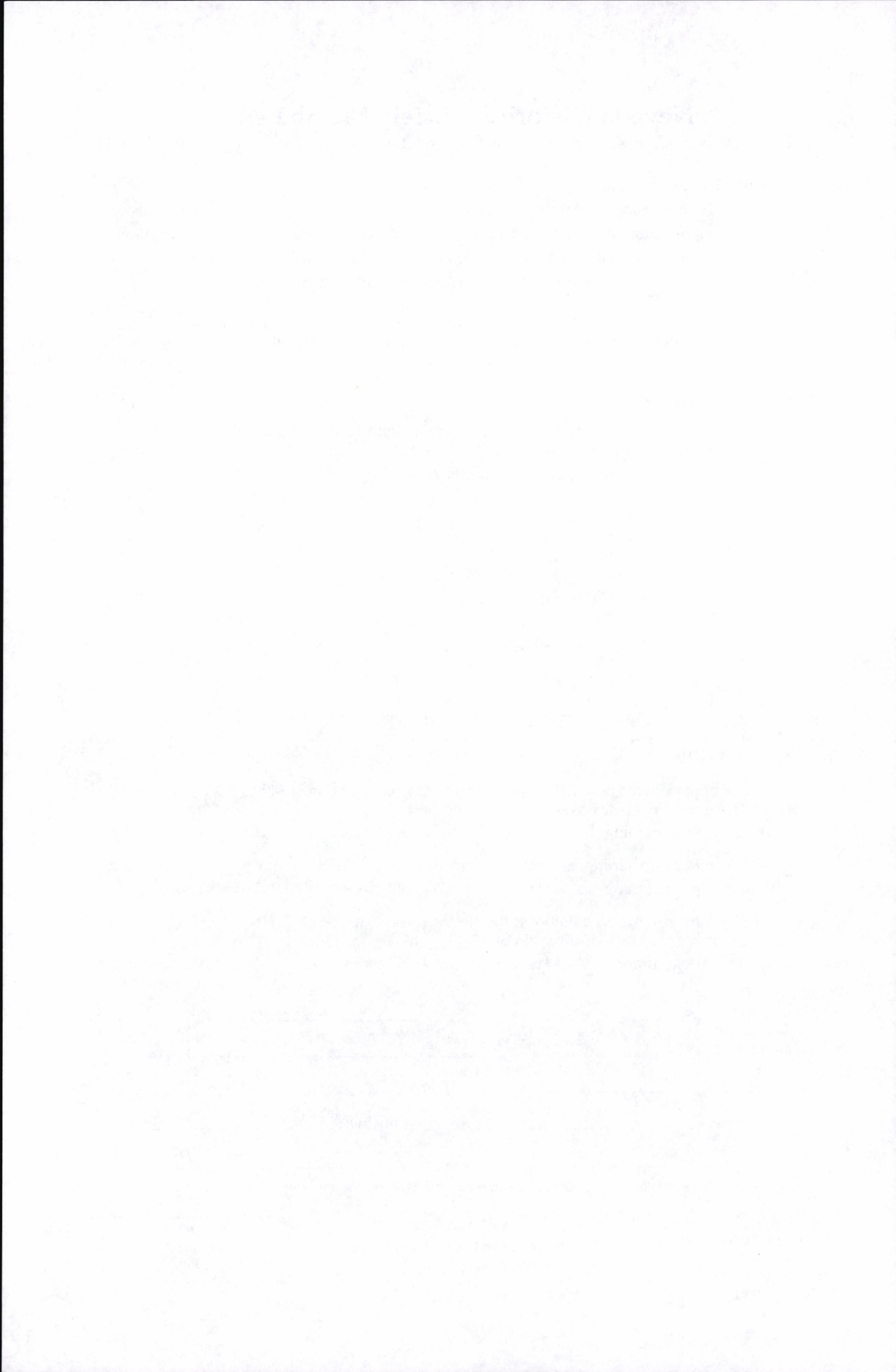
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