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The American West: An Analysis of the Development of Myth as
Portrayed in American Literature

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I would like to take this chance to thank the numerous groups of people who have helped me. The person who is largely responsible for the completion of this independent study is, of course, Professor Charles Bassett. He is the intellectual and motivational inspiration behind the entire work, and for that matter, my four years at Colby. The following people typed portions of this paper and have my sincere gratitude: Carol Kennerson, Dan Brandeis and Katie Patterson. Katie Patterson deserves special thanks for the proofreading of my paper. Doug Wilde, Matt Elders and Lalyn Ottley also deserve thanks for allowing me to use their computers. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my parents for everything, and then some.

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The American West immediately brings to mind a variety of associations and images. One of the difficulties in describing the American West, or any single aspect of it, stems from the differences between myth and fact. Coming to terms with the American West necessitates an understanding of the numerous cultural myths which evolved from the frontier and the unexplored territory which lay beyond. Throughout the development of the West, various cultural myths were created by adventurers at first, and later by the settlers which followed, for consumption by an Eastern literary audience. In attempting to analyze and portray my version of the American West I must deal with these various cultural and literary perceptions which evolved through the exploration and settlement of the frontier. Essentially I am analyzing the various cultural myths of the West. In particular, I am interested in coming to grips with the "Wild West." In the twentieth century we have come to accept a mythic West portrayed through television and literature without realizing why. In this essay I will separate what I have discerned as substantiated fact from the cultural myths which have influenced our perceptions of the American West, and I will explain why these myths were extended to the West.

Perhaps the most influential force in the development of the West was
The continent was only barely explored, yet settlers preceded explorers. Their maps were few and poorly drawn. Mapped in myth, mountain ranges, rivers, lakes, deserts, all became figments of optimism or of desperation: an Eden or a Hell -- the Great American Garden or the Great American Desert.¹

This quotation shows us that growth and discovery were synonymous from the beginning of the American experience. Unlike Europeans, Americans could only speculate about what lay west of the established communities. Because so many Americans remained ignorant of the geographical makeup of the continent, various myths were created to encourage, or discourage, settlement as well as the potential for prosperity. This ignorance also generated an unacknowledged source of imagination and energy.

For example, the Puritans considered the frontier a "howling" wilderness, suitable only for pagan Indians and godless Europeans. Other settlers were deterred from settling too far into the interior by the English Parliament for two reasons. First, because the interior of the continent was originally considered French, and settlers would need protection. Secondly, agricultural commodities were far too bulky to be transported from the interior to the seacoast; to try and do so would obviously not be in the best interests of British mercantilism. Despite these negative signals...
from Parliament, the sheer abundance of land attracted settlers and adventurers alike.

The first myth of the unexplored West, which motivated the early Spanish and Portuguese explorations, was the possibility of a "Passage to India" and trade with the Orient. The idea of unlimited wealth waiting to be tapped via trade with the Orient migrated from Europe and fascinated Americans too. Henry Nash Smith comments about these images of wealth:

So rich and compelling was the notion that it remained for decades one of the ruling conceptions of American thought about the West. It was almost an obsession with Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, who during the thirty years following the death of Jefferson was the most conspicuous and best informed champion of westward expansion in Congress.  

The possibility of the passage to India, later known as the Northwest passage, consumed the efforts of countless explorers. The economic potential for opening up trade with the Orient prompted every seaboard European nation, as well as America itself, to seek a trade route. The existence of the belief in a westward waterway somewhere "out there" was widespread and respectable. Boorstin writes, "when the North American continent was found to be an obstruction, the waterway was only more eagerly sought." One of the first rumors to circulate throughout America and Europe, one that enhanced the illusion of infinite wealth in the West,
was the discovery of the "Empire" of Quivira, which in reality proved to be nothing more than a small village of Wichita Indians in central Kansas. The best example of the lures of the West taking on mythical qualities is the tale of the mythical River of the American West -- the "San Buenaventura" -- which survived well into the nineteenth century. The San Buenaventura was first documented by the 1776 Dominguez-Escalante expedition, which hoped to find a route from Santa Fe to the Spanish settlement of Monterey.

This mythic river, which supposedly flowed directly from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, appeared on maps made by the most respected adventurers and explorers of the day. Humboldt, Zebulon Pike, Lewis and Clark, and fur traders like William Ashley all documented the existence of such a waterway. Political leaders like Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Hart Benton promoted westward exploration in the hope of locating the passage to India and discovering the true shape of the continent. Not until 1844 was the San Buenaventura, almost reluctantly, dismissed forever through the exploration efforts of John C. Fremont, commissioned by Thomas Hart Benton. The mythical San Buenaventura provides just one example of the myths inherent in the settlement and exploration of America. The fact that the belief in this mythical river lasted so long only testifies to man's limitless capacity to believe totally unsubstantiated rumors with a
romantic twist. Equally as important, the legend of the San Buenaventura displayed the peoples need to mythologize and romanticize about the unlimited potential of this newly discovered land. So much remained unknown about an incredibly vast amount of land that myths naturally evolved from an intense human willingness to believe in the unknown. Myths such as the San Buenaventura not only found their way onto important maps but also became a part of our cultural heritage and literature.

Although Westward migration was originally frowned upon for reasons already mentioned, American political leaders of the latter eighteenth century not only encouraged Westward migration, but exalted the possibilities. The magnetism of the frontier and the unlimited economic potential derived from the abundance of raw materials drew people West.

Frederick Jackson Turner and other intellectuals described the lure of the frontier in quite elegant terms. Nevertheless, I believe Turner to be correct in his analysis of the frontier as a magnetic force offering freedom from economic and social oppression. As Turner told his audience in 1896:

Americans had a safety valve for social danger, a bank account on which they might continually draw to meet losses. This was the vast unoccupied domain that stretched from the borders of the settled area to the Pacific Ocean...Here was an opportunity for social development continually to begin over again, whenever society gave signs of
Benjamin Franklin first articulated this same point, over a century earlier, while trying to persuade the British government to support westward migration. Although Franklin's safety valve theory differed slightly, he encouraged settlement of the interior because, "free land will constantly attract laborers from the cities and thus keep wages high." High wages would make American manufacturing unprofitable, and thus the British merchant would continue to enjoy a natural monopoly. While Franklin persuaded Parliament of the benefits of Westward expansion, future leaders of America looked toward the West not only as a safety valve, but as a possible trade route with India and China (as well as a necessary ingredient for American democracy.) Whether one looked at the frontier as a source for personal rebirth, as an economic savior, or as a potential trade route, the American West seemed to embody unlimited potential. The second cultural myth which I will deal with is the possibility of a passage to India.

Henry Nash Smith, in *Virgin Land*, documents the development of this cultural myth which consumed the passions of America's earliest statesmen. Smith credits Thomas Jefferson with being the intellectual father of America's advance to the Pacific. Jeffersón organized the Lewis
and Clark expedition with the specific intention of confirming the existence of a Westward seaway. He instructed Lewis and Clark: "the object of your mission is single, the direct communication from sea to sea formed by the bed of the Missouri, and perhaps the Oregon." Jefferson also engineered the Louisiana Purchase, one of the single largest land transactions in America history. Equally as important, he encouraged fur traders such as John Jacob Astor to challenge the Hudson's Bay Company and other Canadian companies for the pelts of the upper Missouri River region.

Jefferson's support of westward expansion ideologically agreed with his agrarian philosophy of the yeoman farmer. He imagined the whole Mississippi valley populated by farmers, owning and working small plots of land near their agrarian communities. Ideally, these yeoman farmers would trade with the Eastern seaboard, and with India and China as well. Thomas Hart Benton echoed Jefferson's ideas in this statement:

The Atlantic coast, for father and daughter alike, is identified with the European tradition: it is 'the English seaboard', and is viewed as an influence stifling the development of the American personage by imposing deference to precedent and safe usage. By contrast access to Asia becomes a symbol of freedom and of national greatness for America.

These early statesmen continually advocated the necessity of an
American break with Europe and the development of uniquely American institutions, economy, and social thought. Jefferson, Benton, and William Gilpin shared a similar dislike for Britain, the Hartford Convention, and the Southern secessionists. Manifest Destiny and the future greatness of America depended upon westward expansion and trade with the Orient, not on a continual reliance upon Europe. These great statesmen saw westward expansion evolving into a succession of republics modeled after the great Roman states. Smith attests to William Gilpin's, "certainty that the Asiatic trade will bring incalculable wealth to the United States; and his vision of magnificent cities springing up along the Pacific railway." American leaders, knowing a minimal amount about the true shape of North America, and even less about the possibilities of trade with the Orient, prophesized future republics built around centers of wealth and commerce springing up as the population moved west. The original leaders of America helped create and encourage cultural illusions, although not with the intention to deceive. Today we know them to have been fictitious; however, to the American public these illusions offered only hope and promise. Boorstin comments, "this providential half-knownness of the American scene helps explain the energy and the passions, the obsessive singlemindedness and the fickle shiftiness, with which Americans so quickly moved their hopes from
These visions of the early statesmen slowly faded from American consciousness as the industrial revolution generated the railroad and various other technological innovations which drastically changed frontier life. At the same time the true shape of North America was determined and the elusive Northwest Passage dismissed forever. Simply put, as the geographical limits of the continent were realized, the myth of trade with the Orient and the establishment of a succession of republics yielded to newer and more appropriate myths. For example, essentially two visions of the American West dominate our consciousness. We think of the West as both the setting for wild adventure stories of frontier life and also the landscape for settled agrarian communities. Two subgroups exist within the modern day vision of the Wild West. On the one hand our history and literature suggest a "Wild West" composed of hunters, trappers and pathfinders of overland expansions. At the same time we have an image of an exaggerated lawless state based on priority rule with a potential for evil and violence, as well as prosperity and benevolence. Obviously, these cultural perceptions, even though exaggerated, are much more relevant to mid-nineteenth century society than the myth of the San Buenaventura.

In contrast with these perceptions of the wild West is the pastoral
image of the great "American Garden," composed of yeoman farmers happily coexisting in established frontier communities. Each of these perceptions is based largely on historical precedent; however, they all have been exaggerated in one way or another to satisfy an uninformed audience. I believe these perceptions have been romanticized or sensationalized for literary audiences of the East. Although these myths may be based on historical fact, American literature has still used the frontier setting and these cultural myths to romanticize a story. I will now deal with the manner in which these Western myths evolved and why each has remained a part of America's cultural heritage.

The myth of the American West which has been celebrated most completely is the "Wild West." Dime store novels, television series, and movies have dramaticized the West for whatever purposes necessary. For example, Andy Adams in his The Log of a Cowboy, portrays a much different wild West from James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales. Andy Adams relates his impressions of life on a cattle drive from the Texas Panhandle to the territory of Montana. His narrative depicts both the boredom and the excitement of leading several thousand head of cattle over two thousand miles of rugged terrain. Physical as well as natural violence are an accepted part of life on the range. The country is often harsh and
trouble comes in the form of Indians, desperadoes, and drunken comrades. Adams simply describes life as he knows it; only rarely does he dramatize or romanticize it. Cooper, on the other hand, creates a whole symbolic characterization of the American frontier. The Leatherstocking Tales romanticize conflict and obscure fact with myth.

Henry Nash Smith deals extensively with Cooper's Leatherstocking character because he is the archetypal hero from whom practically all Western literary heroes have evolved. Leatherstocking is an important character because he embodies many of the forces shaping America, and Cooper, at this time. Smith writes:

The character was conceived in terms of the antithesis between nature and civilization, between freedom and law, that has governed most American interpretations of the Westward movement....But he [Cooper] was at once strongly devoted to the principle of social order and more vividly responsive to the ideas of nature and freedom in the Western forest than they [his contemporaries] were.13

Leatherstocking is a popular frontier hero because he elects to find order in life through nature rather than participating in the growing industrial complex. As the industrial revolution slowly began to shape the lives of Americans, Leatherstocking's experiences become attractive to ordinary people whose lives are becoming increasingly routine and dull. Nature is Leatherstocking's religion and the forest is his church. In Leatherstocking's
world nature is purely benevolent, and after every courageous exploit, he returns to nature and is reborn in his own way.

Interestingly, Leatherstocking never marries, although his bachelorhood may derive from his lowly social origins; for him to marry too far above himself would be in poor taste. At this point in the development of the frontier tale, (the 1860's), the protagonist most in some way be associated with a member of the upper class. The importance of this affiliation is paramount because the Eastern literary audience was not ready to accept the Western hero without romanticizing his or her social position. Usually the protagonist was never even romantically involved; at most he was affiliated with a prominent member of society in a respectable way.

The dime novels which evolved from the Leatherstocking mold only grudgingly allowed the hero to begin some sort of romantic involvement. Only in the latter half of the nineteenth century could the Western hero experience romance with a lady of higher social distinction. Conversely, only in the last fifteen or twenty years of the nineteenth century could the western hero be portrayed in all his crudity and poverty. Hamlin Garland's characters are representative of an American West completely stripped of all the romanticism, sensationalism and social
distinction prevalent in Cooper’s tales and the dime store novel which followed his example.

An important aspect of Leatherstocking, on the other hand, is that he is the mythical hero who supports the social status quo through his noble deeds, while maintaining his own natural and pure way of life. He is an extraordinary character, but entirely too romantic and sensational. I agree with Mark Twain’s criticism of the Leatherstocking character in his “Literary Offenses of Fenimore Cooper.” Twain criticizes Leatherstocking because he is essentially not human. On the one hand he talks in an almost incomprehensible drawl, while, in later conversation with a woman, he sounds practically poetic. Twain also criticizes Cooper for creating totally unrealistic action scenes. For example, whenever a twig breaks, trouble is coming usually in the form of the “bad” Indian. Cooper has created a myth which embodies the complexities of an industrial society encroaching on what Cooper depicts as a pure and benevolent wilderness. However, Leatherstocking is simply too heroic. He was the nineteenth century’s superman capable of any deed and braver than any man. Granted, Twain wanted Cooper to be a late nineteenth century realist; however Cooper was an early nineteenth century romantic and, consequently, Twain’s criticism must be taken with a grain of salt.
While Cooper was writing his frontier tales, actual historical personages like Daniel Boone were performing heroic deeds and receiving some national attention. Daniel Boone was famous not only because he killed bears, but because he rescued women from Indian captivity and opened the Kentucky frontier for settlers. In fact Fenimore Cooper used one of Boone's famous rescue efforts as a scene for a particular episode of *The Last of the Mohicans*[^14]. A certain ambiguity surrounds Daniel Boone as a historical figure, mainly because his peers portrayed him as a Leatherstocking hero who resented the advancement of the frontier. Other biographers depicted him as the harbinger of civilization. Another biographer commented that Boone would "certainly prefer a state of nature to a state of civilization, if he were to be confined to one or the other."[^15]

The main reason why so much controversy surrounded the true nature of Boone is that most Americans preferred the heroic myth because it was more exciting. Whether the heroic myth was based on fact or not was irrelevant. Cooper, too, used the frontier hero myth to the best of his abilities and in the process created one of the most influential frontier heroes. The myth may have been based on historical fact, but authors like Cooper distorted the historical realities for their own purposes. Smith writes:
Leatherstocking was a child of the wilderness to whom society and civilization meant only the sound of the backwoodsman's axe laying waste the virgin forest... The static ideas of virtue and happiness and peace drawn from the bosom of the virgin wilderness... proved quite irrelevant for a society committed to the ideas of civilization and progress, and to an industrial revolution.  

Henry Nash Smith asserts that the contemporary Western hero is a direct descendant of the Leatherstocking myth and the numerous Western heros which followed. Also, if he is correct in his classification of the contemporary Western novel as a natural progression from Leatherstocking and the product of an "unbreakable pattern," than the importance of Leatherstocking is greater than we realize. Leatherstocking and his followers are not realistic depictions of frontier men, but mythical representations of a hero. When trying to separate fact from myth, remembering that Leatherstocking was created as a mythical symbol of the various economic and social forces at work in America is essential. These forces consist primarily of the growing industrial complex which is threatening rural America.

So far I have discussed only the hunter, trapper, and partially alienated pathfinder who reinforces the existing social order through his deeds. This character differs considerably from the mythic hero of the
plains. As mentioned earlier, Leatherstocking is an appropriate hero for a pre-industrial America. However, as settlers fill the Ohio Valley and push forward to the great plains and beyond, a new hero evolves who is better suited to the industrial age. Like Leatherstocking he aids society through his noble deeds, but, unlike Cooper's hero, he does not have the same relationship with nature. Similarly, this frontier hero, based on historical personnages, is transformed into a mythic hero by contemporary writers.

Leatherstocking belonged in the Eastern Mississippi Valley, living and hunting among the tall trees and rich vegetation and soil. Although Cooper's hero faded into obscurity, the new hero of the plains resembled him and acted in a similar heroic fashion. Men like Erastus Beadle published dime novels which used many of Cooper's plot variations; for example, the rescuing of young women from Indian captivity. Beadle's editor admitted that the Beadle stories "followed right after 'Cooper's tales,' which suggested them." As the industrial revolution led to more and more frenzied competition amongst publishers, the Western dime novel was forced to become even more romantic and sensational. "The outworn formulas had to be given jest by a constant search after novel sensations Circus tricks of horsemanship, incredible feats of shooting, more and more elaborate costumes....[etc.];" The mythic hero evolved into the
nineteenth century's version of superman, capable of accomplishing anything. Interestingly, this new mythic hero was usually a member of the upper class, who was either in disguise, had been kidnapped, or lost and raised in less fortunate circumstances. This gave the hero the social background necessary to appeal to an Eastern literary audience. The Western hero of the plains was also unable to stand by himself as a crude representation of frontier life. Rather, in order to appeal to an Eastern audience, he had to have some association with a more dignified and established "Eastern" society.

Kit Carson and Buffalo Bill Cody provide two excellent examples of actual historical figures who found fame through the popular literature of the day. Both characters were depicted by Eastern novelists for the purposes of mass consumption, and both men had little control over their own characters as depicted in this literature. In fact, Buffalo Bill was so good at exploiting his literary fame that he made an excellent living off his Wild West Show, which traveled around the country selling the frontier image of fast-shooting cowboys and tough women. Kit Carson and Buffalo Bill soon became as popular frontier figures as the heroes of the previous generation, Daniel Boone and Charles Fremont. These new literary heroes became the central figures of the Beadle Western, as well as such other
characters as Deadwood Dick and Calamity Jane. All of these characters live on the "Great American Desert" and would not be at home in the eastern Mississippi Valley where Leatherstocking so fittingly belongs.

The land west of the Mississippi River is symbolically quite different from the land to the east. For example, because the land is so vast and ground cover so sparse the hero uses different means of accomplishing his heroic deeds. For example, the vastness of the land requires the protagonist to travel on horseback rather than by foot, Western distances being extensive. This simple change in locomotion changes the whole image of the frontier hero. No longer does Leatherstocking quietly stalk through the woods like an Indian; rather, the new hero charges across the plains exhibiting amazing courage and daring.

Symbolically, the great plains do not have the same benevolent qualities of the Eastern Mississippi Valley. No longer can the hero experience rebirth through nature. Nature is often times indifferent, even unfair, and the hero must resolve more complex conflicts. These conflicts are a synthesis of problems stemming from the influx of settlers and the economic problems which accompanied the railroads. Henry Nash Smith tells us:
The wild western hero has been secularized...and magnified. He no longer looks to God through nature, for nature is no longer benign: its symbols are the prairie fire and the wolves. The scene has been shifted from the deep fertile forests east of the Mississippi to the barren plains....It throws the hero back in upon himself and accentuates his terrible and sublime situation. 19

Kit Carson, Buffalo Bill and Calamity Jane were all real people who differed quite considerably from their literary images. Smith writes: "the literary development of the Wild Western hero in the second half of the nineteenth century made the divergence between fact and fiction even greater." 20 Kit Carson achieved cultural fame by leading groups of settlers across the Great Plains as well as guiding John C. Fremont throughout his numerous exploratory expeditions. However, in the popular Beadle dime novels he achieved fame through killing Indians, Mexicans or bandits, as well as rescuing maidens in distress. Reportedly, both Boone and Carson resented their literary image. 21 Usually, the general public paid closer attention to these men's literary reputations.

Buffalo Bill is an example of a man who used his literary reputation to enhance his reputation as an entertainer. Buffalo Bill would never have been the cultural success he was if Edward Z. C. Judson had not met him and decided to mythologize Cody in an article entitled "Buffalo Bill, King of the Border Men." 22 "The persona created by the writers of popular fiction was
so accurate an expression of the demands of the popular imagination that it proved powerful enough to shape an actual man in its own image. Buffalo Bill catered to the public in his "Wild West" Show, precisely what the public expected, which was often times far from the truth. His Wild West Show sensationalized the frontier in an uncharacteristically romantic manner.

The "Wild West" is an appropriate image for a relatively short segment of our national history. However, the American West was continually changing and by the mid-nineteenth century the forces of industrialism and progress necessitated a more relevant myth for the settlement of the American West. This new image, known as the Great American Garden, was created to entice reluctant homesteaders to venture out into a territory which had been known as the Great American Desert. The wild West image remained a central image of the frontier; however, Americans venturing West needed a more soothing and inviting symbol to risk their lives for the sake of opportunity. Inevitably, the myth of the Garden would give way to the stronger economic and natural forces which had influenced the shattering of previous myths. The myth of the Garden of the World and its subsequent shattering through economic and social forces marks "for the history of ideas in America, the real end of the frontier period."
The myth of agrarian utopianism is both the culmination of the symbols representing the forces of frontier development and the shattering of the same myth which could not accommodate the harsh realities of nature and industrialism. What could be more perfect and ideal than the Garden of Eden? And, because this image is so powerful and perfect, the expectations of the great plains being nothing less than an agricultural utopia only set this perception up for a tragic fall.

Ever since Lewis and Clark crossed the continent the great plains were considered unsuitable for farming, and, in most cases, uninhabitable. Zebulon M. Pike published his journal of his travels across the plains of the upper Rio Grande Valley and compared the plains to the sandy plains of Africa. Early Americans imagined semi-barbaric nomads, and various Asiatic representations of chaos, inhabiting what was considered worthless real estate.

At the same time the American farmer evolved into a central and most important image of the Mississippi Valley. John Locke, in his doctrine on the rights of property, specified that when a man applied his own labor to the cultivation of a field he had a valid title to that land. This notion was expounded by Franklin, Jefferson and de Crevecour. In their eyes, the man who labored in the fields not only owned his land but was the staple of
American democracy: a yeoman farmer. The yeoman farmer ideologically fit the notion of a republic modeled after the famous Roman republics, to which so many early American statesmen continually referred. Similarly, these early statesmen regarded the frontier as potential farmland which would support democratic farming communities, not bands of desperados raping and pillaging the countryside. A serious dichotomy existed between the down-to-earth benevolent image of agrarian paradise perpetually rejuvenating itself as the frontier moved West, and the malignant view of the Great American Desert as an agriculturally unproductive area. The solution was to promote the settlement of the Great American Garden as a natural and economic opportunity not to be missed.

The end of the Civil War is a pivotal point in the history of the West because slavery and all its associations with a cavalier and aristocratic society finally succumbed to the Republican party's ideology of an agrarian and egalitarian West. The end of the Civil War also marks the beginning of a marked increase of settlers in the Mississippi Valley and an increase in the federal government's role in the allocation of land. By the middle 1870s lands were being taken up in areas where the rainfall was likely to decline below the level necessary for cultivation through traditional farming techniques. This development posed a serious threat to the myth of the
Garden of the World because settlers in these regions were obviously not experiencing the same productivity as they would in the rest of the Mississippi Valley. Eventually technology and irrigation would eliminate this inequality. But the first step was to replace the image of the desert, even if it was not true. "The imaginary figure of the wild horseman of the plains would have to be replaced by that of the stout yeoman farmer who had for so long been the protagonist of the myth of the garden."26

The crux of the matter was rainfall; this factor was the significant factor in distinguishing the fertile plains of eastern Kansas and Iowa from the arid plains to the west. The imaginary conquest of the desert accordingly took the form of the proliferations about an increase of rainfall on the plains. The construction of the Union Pacific Railroad brought significant attention to the West. Journalists eventually traveled onto the plains and wrote to Eastern newspapers, especially Horace Greeley's New York Tribune, suggesting the possibility of an increase in rainfall because of the influx of settlers and the subsequent growth of trees which were planted. Two noted rain experts of the day, Ferdinand V. Hayden, who worked for the Geological and Geographic Survey of the Territories, and Charles Wilber, promoted the feasibility of rain following the settlers westward. Slogans like "rain follows the plow" helped suggest the foolish
notion that through the planting of trees and crops, rainfall would actually ensue in these dry areas. These scientists and others provided the scientific proof necessary to entice reluctant pioneers. The myth of the Garden soon became as entrenched in the consciousness of the nineteenth century as the image of the American Desert. Railroads, speculators and political leaders echoed the possibility for the settlement of this ambiguous country by supporting the Homestead Act.

As with every other myth mentioned so far, the myth of the Garden soon faced natural and economic obstacles which shattered the idyllic belief of yeoman farmers existing happily in a land of plenty. Henry Nash Smith writes:

The final merging of the notion of an American continental empire and the myth of the garden yields a single image of great imaginative force. But in the process the idea of empire has lost its transitive reference. It no longer beckons onward toward the Pacific and the Far East, but becomes, like the Myth of the Garden, an introspective, even narcissistic symbol.27

The image of the Garden offers no possibility for anything other than prosperity and happiness. In reality, the land speculator and the railroad monopolist transformed the image of prosperity to a reality of exploitation. "The Homestead Act failed because it was incongruous with the Industrial Revolution."28 In practice the Homestead Act was designed
to work as a safety valve for the crowded industrial centers of the East. Ideally, the land reform system would alleviate the poverty and economic oppression of the Eastern cities. In reality the Act benefited those who arrived first--speculators and the railroads--and the possibility of the poor from industrial centers actually leaving the cities to gamble their entire pitiful fortunes was practically nil.

After the Civil War the Republican party favored the city against the country, the banker and the merchant against the farmer the speculator against the settler.... The Western farmer found that instead of independent, he was at the mercy not only of the Chicago and New York and Liverpool grain pits, but also of the railways and elevator companies and steamship lines upon which he must rely to get his crop to market.29

The Populist Movement of the latter nineteenth century and the dry years of the 1930's exemplify the harsh realities of farm life. The myth of the Garden glossed over all the hard work necessary for farmers to survive in a harsh agricultural climate. Granted, irrigation and seeds better suited for dry climates helped cultivation, yet problems of immense proportions were inevitable.

The Homestead Act, like most events in the development of the West, is somewhat controversial. Smith is quite critical of the exploitation on the part of the land speculators and the railroads. Not all share his
critical viewpoint: Emerson Hough in *The Passing of the Frontier* acknowledges the dubious nature of land speculation, but also praises the railroads for their role in the settlement of the West. He writes: "In short, the railroads, in their own interests, did all they could to make prosperous the farms or ranches of the West." In particular, he cites the railroads as responsible for the great land boom of 1886, which was particularly clear in the state of Kansas. The railroads transported numberless settlers westward for virtually nothing, knowing full well that the farmer would eventually be totally dependent on the railroad. "They, [railroads] knew the profit to be derived from the industry of dense population raising products which must be shipped." The question, then, comes down to how much profit the railroads actually made after transporting so many people for virtually nothing. Hough seems to view the railroads as profit-oriented, but equally considerate of the plight of the farmer.

Both Hough and Smith agree on the negative influence of the land and irrigation speculator. Unlike Smith, Hough believes the foul play on the part of the speculators only brought these small communities closer together. He describes the after effects of the irrigation speculator, "the recovery was slow, although usually the result of that recovery was a far healthier and more stable condition of society." Two noted Western
authorities have two distinct views of the Homestead Act and its social effects. I will now examine the literature of the latter nineteenth century. These two diverging historical interpretations are evident in both the popular Western novels and the more elitist works of Willa Cather, Stephen Crane, Hamlin Garland and others.

The literature depicting the agricultural West generally presented a very dismal outlook of the farmer of the "Great American Garden." However, all was not total misery and exploitation. Obviously, a significant portion of the western farm communities were doing well. Interestingly, authors like Willa Cather depict a benevolent and prosperous agricultural frontier, whereas Hamlin Garland and Caroline Kirkland give us a very pessimistic view of farm life. Henry Nash Smith traces the development of the agricultural hero from Fenimore Cooper to Hamlin Garland, and with Garland the Western farmer finally comes to terms with his relationship to nature and his position in society. No longer is the American farmer a symbol of irrational social progress; Cooper's pioneers chopping down trees for no reason. Rather, Garland celebrates the farmer simply for what he is--a man who works with nature to achieve a better life, but also victim of social forces such as "hard money" or the whims of nature. However, the agricultural hero evolved as slowly as other Western
heros. Smith suggests that a dichotomy exists, because novelists "faced a continual struggle to reconcile their almost instinctive regard for refinement with their democratic theories and their desire to find some values in the unrefined West." Nevertheless, eventually Garland portrays the farmer as a victim of what he considers an unjust land system. The protagonist of the "Under the Lion's Paw" comes across in all his vulgarity and diligence as a victim of an exploitive land system.

Two stories, one by Willa Cather and another by Steven Crane, illustrate the ambiguity of the different cultural myths which I have been discussing throughout this chapter, as well as the contrast between the "Wild West" and "The Great American Garden." Stephen Crane's short story "The Blue Hotel" is an excellent story revolving around the true nature of the wild West and man's responsibility to his fellow man. Willa Cather's "Neighbour Rosicky" depicts a pastoral and benevolent frontier experience which differs considerably from Stephen Cranes or Hamlin Garland's vision. These stories and others further illustrate the ambiguity surrounding the true nature of the American West for American writers and critics.

Both Willa Cather and Hamlin Garland write about agrarian life in the Mississippi Valley, but these authors have two distinct views of the Great American Garden. Willa Cather's "Neighbour Rosicky" depicts the American
farmer embracing the myth of the Garden. Rosicky is a Czech immigrant who, through hard work and the necessary moral attitudes, has come to acquire a prosperous farm and a large and happy family. More importantly Rosicky is a successful farmer who might have enjoyed more success had he been less warm hearted and more concerned about profit. Cather comments about Rosicky and his wife: "They had been at one accord not to hurry through life, not to be always skimping and saving. They saw their neighbors buy more land and feed more stock than they did, without discontent." I believe that Cather is making the point that Rosicky is a special kind of person, rare to the world, one who is genuinely concerned with living a full and benevolent life. The conclusion of the story alludes to Rosicky and his family finding happiness in life through their farming experiences. The central issue of "Neighbor Rosicky" is not the economic hardships inherent in agrarian life in the Mississippi Valley, but rather the advantages of rural life versus the dehumanizing qualities of urban or city life.

Cather wrote this story in 1932. Granted she is writing about a slightly later period of the American West than Garland or Crane; nevertheless, Cather's nostalgic tone clearly suggests that farm life is to be preferred both morally and socially over life in the city. The voice of the
narrator unfolds the drama of the story in a reminiscent fashion, a technique which infers a vanishing way of life. Because Cather portrays Rosicky's farm life as so rewarding and so basically ethical, she is either consciously or unconsciously promoting the image of the Mississippi Valley as the breadbasket of the world. Cather also makes the point that, although city life offers the young the potential to make more money, the rewards of growing up on a farm far exceed the possible monetary benefits of growing up in the city. She writes:

... It was a hardship to have the wheat freeze in the ground when seed was so high; and to have to sell your stock because you had no feed. But there would be other years when everything came along right, and you caught up. And what you had was your own. You didn't have to choose between bosses and strikers, and go wrong either way. 35

Since the story confronts the issue of urban versus rural lifestyles, or Eastern finance capitalism compared to Western agrarianism, and since Cather obviously favors farm life, I think she has a totally different perception of Western life than Crane, Garland, or other critics of the Westward migration have. Cather conceives a symbolic interpretation of the American West which is a product of the myth of the Garden of the World. The fictional world Cather creates is, therefore, based on three essential premises: a genuine love for the land, the ability to work with the
land, and a warmhearted and loving respect for humanity.

Rosicky symbolizes the numerous foreign immigrants who came West with little money and an intense desire to create something that they could call their own. The economic and social structure of the old world prohibited this yeoman's dream. Cather comments about Rosicky:

His people had always been workmen; his father and grandfather had worked in shops. His mother's parents had lived in the country, but they rented their farm and had a hard time to get along. Nobody in his family had ever owned land—that belonged to a different station of life.36

Rosicky had grown up on a farm in Czechoslovakia, and his lasting memories of rural life eventually prompted him to move West to try to make it on his own. At a very early age Rosicky had become tied to the earth and the cycles of nature. I believe Cather is using Rosicky's early exposure to farm life to further illustrate the inevitably of Rosicky's reunion with agrarian life. This is especially important to Cather because before Rosicky moves West he experiences poverty and degradation while working in industrial centers like London and New York. These few years in the city evoke in him the realization that no matter how much money can be made, city life is dehumanizing and exploitive. Cather has neatly arranged for Rosicky's journey to the city to expose him to an alien way of life which he cannot
abide. "To work on another man's farm would be all he asked; to see the sun rise and set and to plant things and watch them grow. He was a very simple man."^37

Farm life has not always been rewarding and profitable for Rosicky. He has met with adversity, in the form of crop failure, but he has survived. However, the most outstanding aspect of Rosicky's character is how he deals with life's failures and successes. Rosicky's wife, Mary, relates the story of how he acted when a summer heat wave burned his entire crop of corn. Rosicky did not even mention the catastrophe until Mary asked about the corn crop. "An' that's how your father behaved, when all the neighbours was so discouraged they couldn't look you in the face. An' we enjoyed ourselves that year, poor as we was, an' our neighbours wasn't a bit better off for bein' miserable."^38 The beauty of Rosicky is that he rises above the competitive and very selfish nature of man, found not only in the cities, but in the country as well. Cather is also demonstrating that the cut-throat and competitive nature of the city has now come into the country. Cather's agrarian ideal envisages a farm community composed of hard working and loving people who are not materially oriented. In "Neighbour Rosicky" the competitive and individualistic qualities of city life have come to infect the country as well. Some of Rosicky's neighbors wonder why he never really
improves his material position in life, despite the fact that he works so hard. The doctor reflects:

"Sometimes the doctor heard the gossipers in the drug-store wondering why Rosicky didn't get on faster.... They were comfortable, they were out of debt, but they didn't get much ahead. Maybe, Doctor Burleigh reflected, people as generous and warmhearted and affectionate as the Rosicky's never got ahead too much; You couldn't enjoy your life and put it into the bank too."

Importantly Rosicky's neighbours are the ones who are worried about his financial situation, not Rosicky.

Rosicky is the ultimate product of the Great American Garden; his naturalness and benevolence affect everyone he meets. He is a simple man, whom Cather describes almost like an agricultural product. "He was like a tree that has not many roots, but one tap root that goes down deep." As a natural product of the earth, Rosicky's values and actions symbolize the pure and natural life he chose to lead. The best example of his good nature can be seen in his relationship with Polly, his daughter-in-law. Polly comes from the nearby town and does not quite feel comfortable in her new role as a farm wife. Recognizing her discomfort, Rosicky, now old and sick, makes a special effort to gain her love, and also to share with her the lessons he learned about the evils of city life. He tells the story of his
poverty-stricken days in London, thus dramatizing the exploitive and alienated life so many industrial workers must endure. This lesson is especially important because Randolph, his son, and Polly are contemplating a move back into Omaha for higher wages in a meat packing house.

Symbolically, Rosicky's death inspires a deeper understanding between Rosicky and Polly. Through his death Polly realizes her own love for Rosicky, and equally as important, her love for a more fulfilling and rewarding life in the country.

Interestingly, Cather's vision of the West neglects the economic determinism prevalent in Hamlin Garland's stories. Her characters are symbolically linked to the soil they labor on, and they enjoy a rewarding life regardless of their economic position. The ending of "Neighbour Rosicky" implies an optimistic and happy future for Rosicky's descendants, as well as an inevitable end to the "complete and beautiful" life of Rosicky. While Cather's fiction largely promotes the myth of the Garden, Hamlin Garland, Caroline Kirkland and their peers write about the failure of this same myth.

In particular Garland's "Up the Coule" and "Under the Lion's Paw" illustrate the poverty and frustration experienced by the hardworking farmer of the Mississippi Valley. Both stories are particularly pessimistic about the future of the American farmer; however, his characters do not
give in to economic deprivation. There is something romantic about Garland’s characters continuing to strive and endure despite their economic situation. Garland’s characters continue to persevere and toil largely because of their undaunted will and pride.

Garland’s “Up the Coule” is one of his most powerful and autobiographical stories from the book Main-Traveled Roads. This story is about two brothers: one is an actor in the East who has made a successful career for himself, the other never had the chance to leave the West and has subsequently spent his life trying to hold together the family farm. After many years away from home Howard McLane returns to the dismal home of his brother Grant. Significantly, Grant was earlier forced to sell the old family house owing to hard times, and Grant holds Howard responsible because he unknowingly neglected to send money.

In this story Garland sets a number of forces to work, all of them connected to the issue of economic determinism. For example, Garland contrasts the economic success of Howard with the poverty of Grant. These differences in social development and material taste become evident as Howard discusses his life back East and relates what he has done for the past years. The frivolous way that Howard has spent his money appears especially foolish, even immoral in the face of the hardships that Grant and
his family have experienced. Finally, Garland is contrasting an artist's appreciation of the beauty of the land, as seen through Howard, to the toil and drudgery of farm life as seen through the eyes of Grant. All of these images were intended to alter the cultural perceptions that Americans had of the Garden of the World. Joseph McCulloch tells us why *Main-Travelled Roads* expresses the social outrage suffered by the American farmer:

Perhaps because, from the time of the nation's first settlement, America had been viewed as a land of boundless opportunity for which the West symbolized an Edenic paradise, Garland felt compelled to inform Eastern readers about the true realities of farm life. Garland's tendency to destroy this myth is clearly present in all of the stories as they depict the ugliness, monotony, and hopelessness of the average American farmer.  

"Up the Coule" is a particularly sensory story, and Garland portrays the landscape and his characters in particularly memorable scenes. Early on in the story Garland presents us with this image:

The horses had a sullen and weary look, and their manes and tails streamed sideways in the blast. The ploughman clad in a ragged gray coat, with his head inclined towards the sleet, to shield his face from the cold and sting of it. ... Near by, a boy with tears on his cheeks was watching cattle, a dog seated near, his back to the gale.

This scene is about the most convincing visual image of the drudgery involved in farm life. Without any character opening his mouth Garland has created a vision of the Mississippi valley which is extremely depressing.
Throughout *Main-Travelled Roads*, and this story in particular, Garland uses visual images which illuminate the romantic and beautiful side of the Mississippi valley. Garland writes: "A few scattering clouds were drifting on the west wind, their shadows sliding down the green and purple slopes. The dazzling sunlight flamed along the luscious velvety grass, and shot amid the rounded, distant purple peaks, and streamed in bars of gold and crimson across the blue mist of the narrow upper coules." This passage is not only alive with color, but vividly paints an idyllic picture of the same land which in an hour could be destroyed by dust storms and locust swarms.

Garland's consistent critical treatment of land ownership in the Mississippi valley should not be overemphasized in such a way as to discount the beauty inherent in the land. From Garland's point of view, the American farmer is not responsible for his position in life, nor is nature entirely to blame. Rather, an unjust system of rent created by self-centered Easterners is the villain. The passages I have quoted help illustrate the noble effort the American farmer makes to survive an unjust land system, which, according to Garland, prohibits the common farmer from enjoying a life which has the potential to take advantage of natural wonders.

In "Up The Coule," Grant, due to the death of his father, was unable to experience the same chance in life that Howard had. As the
younger brother, Grant assumed responsibility for the family farm when his father died, sacrificing his education and a possible future other than farming. Howard, on the other hand, got an education and pursued a successful acting career. Garland tells us in the beginning of the story: "He was one of those actors who was always in luck, and the best of it was he kept and made use of his luck." We learn that Howard dresses in fancy clothes, spends his summers in Europe or the Adirondacks, and he has enough money to finance his own dramatic productions in New York City. His wealthy lifestyle contrasts vividly with the level of poverty Grant and his family must endure.

Upon Howard's return, Grant makes no effort to hide his disdain for Howard's neglect of the family. Howard evidently did not receive the letter from Grant asking for money; nevertheless, at no point in his life does Howard make the effort to send his family any money, even when he clearly has enough. Ultimately the two brothers are able to reconcile their differences only because larger economic forces at work in the Mississippi valley are primarily responsible for Grant's financial situation, and both brothers recognize this fact. Nevertheless Howard's guilt for neglecting his family never wholly diminishes nor does Grant's sense of personal failure.

The most powerful aspect of Garland's story is his portrayal of the
failure of the myth of the Garden. Early in the story Grant exclaims: "I wish I was in somethin' that paid better'n farmin. Anything under God's heaven is better'n farmin." Grant is emotionally and physically crushed by his life of toil, and he expresses his frustration throughout the story. Grant tells one of his friends, "the worst of it is a man can't get out of it during his lifetime, and I don't know that he'll have any chance in the next—the speculator'll be there ahead of us." This statement is about as pessimistic an outlook as possible. Apparently the only thing keeping these farmers alive is their pride and their noble desire to survive and persevere. To Garland the American farmer is, "just like a fly in a pan of molasses. There ain't any escape for him. The more he tears around the more liable he is to rip his legs off." Clearly Grant and his fellow farmers have little chance of improving their position in life, and the return of the "prodigal son" only heightens Grant's awareness of his own economic failure.

Importantly, Grant's economic failure seems to be symbolic to Garland of the failure of the myth of the Garden.

"Up the Coule" does contain a few reconciling qualities. For example, one is the romantic futility with which Grant struggles to make his farm successful. I believe Garland is proud of these economically ruined people, and his characters continue to work despite the obvious injustices.
Furthermore, the story ends with an understanding between Grant and Howard. In order for the brothers to reach such an understanding, they must resolve their anger toward one another. Howard really does feel superior to his brother and farm life. He says to himself: "He, a man associating with poets, artists, sought after by brilliant women, accustomed to deference even by such people, to be sneered at, outfaced, shamed, shoved aside, by a man in a stained hickory shirt and patched overalls, and that man his brother."49 Behind this sense of superiority is Howard's tremendous guilt for neglecting his family. In order for Howard and Grant to come to a resolution of their differences, Howard must absolve himself of his guilt and sense of superiority. He offers to buy back the farm he and his brother grew up on, and this offer opens the door for communication. Grant and Howard are able to reach an accord; however, Grant refuses his offer to buy back the farm. He says: "I mean life ain't worth very much to me. I'm too old to take a new start. I'm a dead failure. I've come to the conclusion that life's a failure for ninety-nine per cent of us. You can't help me now. It's too late."50

Hamlin Garland's vision of the West is at once critical and depressing. Stephen Crane, on the other hand, has a different and more complex vision of the American West. His two stories, "The Blue Hotel" and "Bride Comes to
Yellow Sky" are the most complex and paradoxical stories I will analyse. Both of these stories deal with the wild West and address the question: What was the sparsely settled American West really like? I think Crane sees the wild West as anything we, or anyone else, wants it to be. As mentioned earlier, the image of a wild and lawless frontier dominated the American consciousness, largely because people had no definitive source of information about what exactly occurred west of established society. Popular literature and folk heroes like Buffalo Bill Cody advertised the image of a lawless frontier only to encourage their respective economic interests. "The Blue Hotel" wrestles with the ambiguity of the violence of the Western experience and raises questions regarding differing perceptions of reality.

In "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" we are confronted with two symbols of the inevitable decline of the wild West: marriage and the encroachment of established "Eastern" society. These two stories complement each other because in "The Blue Hotel" Crane compels the reader to ponder the true nature of Fort Romper and to question who is responsible for the Swede's death. I think Crane is asking how wild and dangerous actually is Fort Romper, and to what degree is the Swede in charge of his own destiny? In "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" Crane sets the scene in
the same kind of frontier town, only in this story he introduces a new person into the action: a woman. I believe Crane is interested in examining the possibilities of the inevitable influx of women and established social customs into the frontier town. For example, why did Potter actually marry when he probably could have guessed the consequences? I see Potter trying to recreate the myth of the Garden in a different socio-economic environment, either consciously or subconsciously.51

Throughout the American frontier experience, settlers risked their lives and their savings attempting to create something for themselves. This yeoman's dream was virtually impossible to realize in Europe and the growing industrial cities of the East. Jack Potter of "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" has simply done what millions of Americans dream of doing: settling down, perpetuating the family unit, and maintaining economic security. Yet Jack Potter is considerably different from Rosicky or Grant McLane. Jack Potter does not belong to the Mississippi valley; rather, he is best suited to the cattleman's frontier. Potter is a part of an entirely different economic system: the cattle industry. (Some individuals, however, engaged in farming in arid parts of the Great Plains, and I have already documented some of the literature promoting the farming of these arid areas.) Stephen Crane, nevertheless, is writing about cattle country and the
stereotypical cowboy town. My thesis is that Jack Potter and Rosicky are undertaking the same symbolic gesture; they are, in their respective socio-economic environments, proceeding to create something for themselves. Before examining Jack Potter an analysis of "The Blue Hotel" is necessary because in this story Crane raises many of the issues which he will symbolically resolve in the "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky." I interpret "The Blue Hotel" as a story examining the relationship between the mythic West of gunslingers, gamblers, and whiskey, and the actual day to day and generally boring West lacking in culture. Consequently, "The Blue Hotel" forces the reader to question the true nature of the wild West, while the "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" depicts the inevitable conclusion of any Western town: the arrival of traditional Eastern society.

The Swede is one of Crane's most complex characters. I believe the Swede to be a "frightened man" who ventured West with preconceived notions of the dangers inherent in the West. Literary critics, on the other hand, are unable to agree upon the Swede's motives and personality. Joseph Katz refers to the Swede as a madman. Donald B. Gibson classifies the Swede as "among the worst of mankind." Other critics interpret the Swede as merely a frightened man who is victim to the evil exploitation of the other self-serving characters in the story. I will not discuss the story
in terms of who bears the responsibility for the death of the Swede. Rather, I will show how Crane plays the different cultural perceptions of the West off of one another and why the Swede is really a symbol for a mythic West, one which has been dramatized by popular literature and the various folk heroes of the day.

When the Swede arrives at Fort Romper, he immediately meets the proprietor of the Palace Hotel. "Pat Scully, the proprietor, had proved himself a master of strategy when he chose his paints," comments Crane. This comment alludes to the manipulative greediness of Scully, and I think Crane wants us to question what role Scully and the other locals play in the action. As Scully shows the three customers he met at the train depot around the hotel, we learn:

The Swede said nothing. He seemed to be occupied in making furtive estimates of each man in the room. One might have thought that he had the sense of silly suspicion which comes to guilt. He resembled a badly frightened man.

Consequently, Crane immediately establishes the potential unreliability of Scully; however, at the same time, the Swede is just as complex and unreliable.

The Swede is obviously frightened and his actions convey his anxiousness. His quick and strange laugh coupled with his eye movements
prove unsettling for those around him. The first time the Swede speaks, "he said that some of these Western communities were very dangerous; and after his statement, he straightened his legs under the table, tilted his head, and laughed again loudly." Although his actions convey an anxiousness, the Swede is a complex character to pinpoint. He acts strangely, however there is no apparent reason for his behavior and his bizarre comments about what he expects from this Western town. The only logical conclusion for his unsettling behavior stems from his distorted expectations of the West, which ultimately dictate his death. An interesting question is how does his vision of the mythic West influence the other characters?

"The Blue Hotel" is such a great story because the Swede and the other characters are open to a number of interpretations. The Easterner interpretes the Swede as a frightened man too. He says: "He's clear frightened out of his boots... oh, I don't know, but it seems to me this man has been reading dime novels, and he thinks he's right out in the middle of it--the shootin' and stabbin' and all." Why then is the Swede so frightened, and if he is so afraid of his destiny, why must he do everything in his power to fulfill his own death? As has been previously mentioned, he is genuinely afraid of this new environment. The Swede has failed to
comprehend the differences between myth and reality. Fort Romper could not be a more sedate and boring town. The Swede confuses the placidity and tranquility of Fort Romper with all the dangers inherent in the West. Still, the external calm of Fort Romper may not be an accurate indication of what actually happens. The Swede, however, is preoccupied with his role in his own private Western, and he fails to understand the true nature of this particular town.

The Swede is an inexperienced foreigner unfamiliar with the West. Unfortunately all of the Swede's fears are confirmed upon his arrival. Scully immediately comes across as a slightly ambiguous character. Crane reminds us of the general impressions of the travelers when Scully met the train and enticed them to his hotel: "Scully practically made them prisoners. He was so nimble and merry and kindly that each probably felt it would be the height of brutality to try to escape." This impression is followed by the Swede witnessing Johnnie cheat an elderly man at cards. Ironically the Swede is the only one to notice. We learn:

The play of Johnnie and the graybeard was suddenly ended by another quarrel. The old man arose while casting a look of heated scorn at his adversary. He slowly buttoned his coat, and then stalked with fabulous dignity from the room. In the discreet silence of the other men, the Swede laughed.
The Easterner, and the cowboy also confirm the Swede’s worst fears. When Johnnie fights the Swede, the cowboy cheers on Johnnie with cries of, “Kill him, Johnnie! Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!” The cowboy also attempts to enter the fight and aid Johnnie, but Scully quickly keeps him from doing so. Finally, the Easterner betrays the Swede by not informing him of Johnnie’s cheating. Consequently, all of the characters, at one point or another, act in an immoral way. This seemingly boring Western town immediately lives up to the dime store impressions of the Swede. In a very subtle way, Crane renders a characteristically boring town in a complex and deceiving manner. The Swede is a confused man, and I believe he is responsible for his own actions; however, these first impressions only reinforce his confusion and sustain his illusions of a mythic West which exists only in his mind.

“The Blue Hotel” includes all of the necessary props of the wild West. The story features a large and blue hotel. The protagonist does not fit into the Western environment, assuming the role of the unknowing stranger. In fact, he is not even American, which defines him as more of an alien than the cowboy or the Easterner. The story also has whiskey, a saloon, a gambler, and cards which ultimately decide the fate of the Swede. All of the characters, aside from the Swede, stereotypically keep to themselves as
most travelers in an alien environment would do, and this only makes the
frightened actions of the Swede that much more profound and bothersome.
The Easterner and the cowboy basically mind their own business, and, except
for the cowboy's tendency to slap his knee, they cause no scenes. Also, the
name of the town itself implies a certain amount of childish playfulness.
All of these literary devices complicate the plot, because on the surface
Fort Romper is a dull town. In reality Fort Romper is not the idealized
farming community which we see in Cather's work, nor is it an economically
destitute Garland town. I see Fort Romper as an average frontier town made
up of a large number of unrighteous individuals. Most importantly, the
Swede is not the typical unknowing stranger; his actions are governed by his
story book intellectualizations of a mythic West.

Crane is noted as a realist as well as a naturalist, and I think this
piece of work is quite pessimistic, intertwining a bit of naturalism with
realism. He writes as the Swede leaves the hotel:

One viewed the existence of man then as a marvel, and conceded a
glamour of wonder to those lice which were caused to cling to a
whirling, fire smitten, ice locked, disease stricken, space-lost bulb.
The conceit of man was explained by this storm to be the very engine
of life. One was a coxcomb not to die in it. However the Swede found
the saloon.61

This is quite a pessimistic view of mankind. All of Crane characters,
especially the Swede, embody this pessimism. Crane not only compares mankind to lice swarming on a space-lost bulb, but he compares the conceit of man to the raging storm outside the hotel, which is the "very center of life." I believe the Swede to be a conceited man, and for that matter, conceit characterizes other people in the story as well. The Swede's egocentricity, in particular, revolves around his obsession with his own dime store vision of the West. James Nagel interprets Crane's earlier cited passage:

This extraordinary passage suggests both a cosmic and local application: that people in general delude themselves by seeing their lives and activities as important in a scope far beyond their true status; that the significance of the fight over the card game is in fact a petty squabble of little consequence beyond the 'conceit' of those involved.62

Fort Romper is certainly not a humane and brotherly community. I interpret the death of the Swede as a pessimistic message about experience and reality. The Swede's inexperience and warped vision of the West are his fatal flaws. Consequently, the Swede's actions force the other characters to act in a peculiar manner. "The refusal of the gambler to drink with him is too small of an insult to precipitate physical contact when viewed with balance and detachment."63 Crane has created a peculiar environment in which one is not likely to encounter danger unless one asks
for it. I think Crane is showing us that humanity is not basically benevolent; a person will indeed find trouble when looking for it. The Swede definitely asks for trouble through his mannerisms, his actions and his accusations. After all, the name of the town suggests children playing games, and I read the Swede as playing the biggest game of all: interpreting reality with a story-book vision of the West. Again, he lives in a fallen world; however, in a fallen world, one minds one's own business. Frank Bergon writes: "The Blue Hotel' reveals how the mythical Wild West often became reality in unexpected places because its true locale was a country in the mind."

Stephen Crane's "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" is similar in the respect that it deals with a frontier town in the late nineteenth century. The themes and issues the story deals with, however, are quite different. "Yellow Sky" is a short comic story interpreting the inevitable arrival of women on the frontier. Equally as important, the story is about the impact the marriage of Jack Potter has on Scratchy Wilson and the future of Yellow Sky. Crane is especially aware of the incongruity between men alone and the changes in their environment owing to the inevitable encroachment of women and other civilizing forces. Originally, frontier towns were predominately male, and the first female arrivals were generally not the
most virtuous of women. This story is about the arrival of the first
"virtuous" women on the West Texas frontier. "The Bride Comes to Yellow
Sky" is as much a story about the frontier town as it is about the effects of
established society on Jack Potter and Scratchy Wilson. The story also
subtly integrates the differences between East and West. My purpose in
choosing this story is to illustrate what I term "a recreation of the myth of
the Garden," only in a different economic environment.

The story begins with Jack Potter and his new bride traveling
eastward across the vast state of Texas to the town of Yellow Sky where
Jack is the sheriff. Symbolically they seem to be traveling in an "easterly"
direction. The East immediately connotes images of established society,
business, education, church and any other "constricting" force one cares to
think of. As the train approaches Yellow Sky, Jack grows increasingly
uneasy as the full implications of his marriage permeate his consciousness.
The average inhabitant of Yellow Sky can marry at will, as can the rest of
American society. But Jack Potter is an entirely different case, not only
because he is employed by the town, but because he is responsible for
governing the wild and dangerous elements of the mythic West.

Crane masterfully manipulates Potter's natural male intuitions to
stay loyal to his playmates on the one hand, and to accept the responsibility
of the adult world on the other. I believe Crane is dealing humorously with a very serious subject. He reminds us, "historically there was supposed to be something infinitely humorous in their situation," important because for years Potter has been "out with the boys." Now, for the first time in his life, both the relationships he maintains with his friends and with antagonists as an enforcer of the law have changed. With marriage Potter has unknowingly accepted the adult role of responsibly keeping a new kind, an "adult" kind of law and order in Yellow Sky.

In a way this story is a growing up story for Scratchy and Potter, but also for the town of Yellow Sky. With the maturity of the frontier towns the old wild West must vanish forever. Crane writes:

He had committed an extraordinary crime. Face to face with this girl in San Antonio, and spurred by his sharp impulses, he had gone headlong over all the social hedges. At San Antonio he was like a man hidden in the dark. A knife to sever any friendly duty, any form, was easy to his hand in that remote city. But the hour of Yellow Sky, the hour of daylight, was approaching.

The hour of daylight is the hour when the town must hear of the marriage of Jack and, therefore, the hour when, the ritualistic playfulness of Yellow Sky society must come to an end. "Yellow Sky is still Western at the end of the story, but the barricades—both the physical ones set up against the ritual gunfight and the illusory ones Potter sets between his conception and
the reality of his position--have fallen for ever." After Jack's marriage, Yellow Sky can no longer be the same.

Scratchy Wilson is the last of the desperadoes, the last of the badmen in an excitement-starved town. Aside from the ritualistic shootouts between Scratchy and Potter little of consequence occurs. The bar-keeper tells the unknowing Eastern drummer about Scratchy: "He's about the last one of the old gang that used to hang out along the river here. He's a terror when he's drunk. When he is sober he's all right--kind of simple--wouldn't hurt a fly--nicest fellow in town." Interestingly, Scratchy's clothes are described as having an Eastern and boyish associations. His maroon-colored flannel shirt was made by a New York Jewish women and his boots are the kind beloved by New England school boys sledding.

However, as Scratchy walks about town challenging anything to fight, in the typical Western fashion, "He swore at himself and went away. Later, he comfortably fusilladed the windows of his most intimate friend. The man was playing with this town. It was a toy for him." Not only is this passage incongruously funny, but again, Crane is stressing how playful the ritual between Scratchy and Potter actually is. Neither man has ever been seriously hurt by their escapades; Scratchy received a wound on his leg once, but this "scratch" obviously has no effect upon them. Scratchy is
little more than a man enjoying himself much like the New England "sledding boys" who wear the same kind of boots. I believe the subtle references to the East only foreshadow the inevitable migration of Eastern culture and material goods to Yellow Sky. These references could also symbolize the eventual economic domination on the part of the East as well.

"Bride" is a beautifully constructed story because Scratchy and Potter must complete their ritual with Potter's wife in attendance. As Potter and his wife walk to their house like "a pair walking against a strong wind," they turn the corner and meet the drunken Scratchy. After explaining Potter's marital status, Scratchy, "was like a creature allowed a glimpse of another world."71 "I s'pose it's all off now" is Scratchy's response. Crane writes:

He was not a student of chivalry; it was merely that in the presence of this foreign condition he was a simple child of the earlier plains. He picked up his starboard revolver, and placing both weapons in their holsters, he went away. His feet made funnel shaped tracks in the heavy sand.72

The terminology "simple child of the earlier plains" implies a fusion between the mythical wild West and Crane's depiction of a vanishing West which is largely playful and exclusively male. Scratchy's understanding of marriage means essentially one thing; he and Jack Potter can not continue
their playful ritual. "Wilson's shock of recognition brings him awareness of a social relationship which is necessary when men have to live with one another as adults, and which is not so necessary on 'the earlier plains' where a man had room and opportunity to act like an overgrown child without hurting anyone." Also, because Crane uses the word funnel to describe Scratchy's footprints, I interpret Scratchy's way of life being sucked right out of him into a new and more responsible West. This new West is not, and can not, be confused with the mythical wild West. The West which Scratchy must either assimilate to, or disassociate himself from, is one of two Wests. Scratchy must adapt either to the myth of the Garden, which I have been discussing up until this point, or to a settled cattleman's frontier. (Obviously a third alternative remains: to continue moving West where Scratchy will hope to find an environment free from the cultural restrictions of the East.)

I see Scratchy Wilson as the symbol for the American West. The encroachment of established society, and all the economic, political and social ramifications of this inevitability, ultimately will change the West, just as they shaped Scratchy Wilson and Jake Potter's life. I see the East coming West and subsequently changing the West, and these characters are the victims. Simply, the wild West must come to its historical conclusion;
the industrial, social and political forces of mid-nineteenth century America are too dominant.

Regardless, Western myths live on. In particular, of the three myths I have mentioned, the myth of the wild West is still an influential cultural phenomena. The wild West has long since vanished from a historical perspective; however, the myths live on, and Western novels and films are as popular today as ever. Each author—Crane, Garland, and Cather—has incorporated his or her vision of the American West into their fiction, and, as I have demonstrated, each vision is markedly different. What I am interested in is comparing the works of these great authors to the popular Western novels of the twentieth century.

Scratchy Wilson and Jake Potter are excellent characters for discussing the implicit irony and tragic sense of loss involved in growing up, not only for each character but for the American West as a whole. Scratchy Wilson is such a significant character because, on the one hand, he embodies the childish playfulness of youth; however, he, like Jake Potter, must accept the role of responsibility and adulthood. Similarly, the American West could not remain lawless, unsettled and isolated forever. The influences of East will come West; and, from a technological and economic perspective, the potential for the development of this new
territory is unlimited. Ironically, the myths which have evolved out of the Western migration continue to exist despite these inevitable changes.

Essentially, my paper thus far has concentrated on the imaginative works of literature of three distinguished and elite authors. These authors have based their depictions on historical reality as well as myth. Cather's agricultural and pastoral West was just as much of a reality as Garland's economically destitute West. Interestingly, both Garland and Cather grew up in the West, and their works authentically convey the tone of experience. In other words, I think each author has lived, to some degree, in the literary world he or she has created. Clearly Cather's nostalgic tone implies approval of a way of life which can never be achieved again. Both authors depict a sense of change, largely as a negative development. Stephen Crane, on the other hand, grew up in the East and came West only as a visitor. I believe Crane's fiction reflects his experiences as a visitor to the West and also his familiarity with the pulp Western novel and with the myth of the wild West. Crane's works are important because they compel me to ponder the historical accuracy of each author.

To what degree do these authors paint an authentic and/or realistic representation of the West? Or, are they recreating a myth from their own experiences? I believe they are doing a little of both, because, as Crane
shows us in "The Blue Hotel," fundamentally we perceive the American West as we want to perceive it. The Swede, for example, enters an alien environment with the knowledge of a mythical wild West, and, because of this knowledge, he has a warped perception of his environment. The American West is not completely imaginary either. As each of these authors have demonstrated, forces from the East, whether they be social, economic or technological, ultimately shape the development of the West.

The ending of "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" provides an excellent starting point for the final segment of this paper. In the last segment I will discuss the cattleman's frontier and, in particular, how the popular Western portrays the wild West. Jake Potter is appropriate not only because he belongs to the cattle towns that so many popular Western romanticize, but because Potter has finally reached that point in his life when he feels that he needs to join mainstream America. The wild and lawless features of Yellow Sky are gone forever. Jake does not head off to the territories and try to recapture the spirit of the old Yellow Sky in another frontier town; instead he decides to marry. A number of popular Westerns conclude on a similar note: the hero resolves a conflict and, depending on when the novel was written, either dies or settles down and marries a virtuous female, usually an Easterner.
The Virginian by Owen Wister is the first and most influential of the modern Westerns. The ending of this novel, and two others I will analyze, deserve attention because they reflect the same pattern; a hero resolves a conflict and in some way reconciles himself to society, either through marriage or through death. Like "The Bride," popular Westerns also foreshadow the ending of a historical period. Most novels conclude with the resolution of a conflict. Because the resolution of this conflict is usually in favor of the traditional and conservative social forces in America, I believe Westerns as a whole can be interpreted as a kind of denatured growing up experience. Popular Westerns, I probably overgeneralize here, for the most part reinforce the traditional values of established society while embellishing the romantic qualities of Western life.

This last segment will be an attempt to understand the growing up qualities of Western myth and how the Western novel characterizes the maturation process. By growing up I mean the ironic nature of maturing and losing an innocence which can never be duplicated. In this sense growing up is almost tragic, too. For Scratchy Wilson, growing up means accepting a new way of life without his wonderfully playful rituals with Jake Potter. For Garland's Grant McLane, growing up means understanding what has happened to the West of his youth, compounded by an intense sense
of guilt for neglecting his family. For Wister's Virginian, growing up means abandoning his autonomous bachelor style and probably putting away his gun forever, or at least until it is absolutely necessary to get it out to fight evil. What is also interesting is how the American West in literature matures from the wild and lawless territory of the early nineteenth century to the settled and slowly urbanizing country of Willa Cather. Even Cather's pastoral community, however, is affected by urban forces, (it is also too good to be true). An integral aspect of the maturing process is the influx of the capitalistic economic system of the East. I will now proceed to define the cattleman's frontier and discuss three popular Western novels.

Numberless novels have chosen the West for a setting, one in which an archetypal cowboy resolves the conflicts inherent in the settlement of a vast and dangerous territory. Similarly, both elite and popular novelists have portrayed the West as a territory in which characters can experience rebirth, and thus escape the limitations of established society. The archetypal Western hero has been, until recently, the character whom Americans have most often chosen to identify with, whose experiences are vicariously imitated across generations. Implicit in understanding the archetypal hero is understanding a realistic depiction of frontier life because, although we often think of our own maturity with some sadness and
fondly remember earlier days for their simplicity, earlier Western life was not necessarily any better or simpler. As Andy Adams writes in his narrative, the “good old days on the range” presented their own problems and complexities. An analysis of Andy Adams’ The Log of a Cowboy is necessary to establish an accurate understanding of a West which is too often shrouded in myth and unreliability. Moreover, we need to understand the American West in its infancy, when Eastern influences had not yet reached the frontier.

The dominant cultural and financial force shaping the American West was the cattle industry. Andy Adams’ The Log of A Cowboy embodies the historical realities of the West. This narrative does not feature the romantic wanderings of an alienated protagonist, nor does the book integrate the mythical moral forces of good and evil or the inate depravity of the wilderness. Rather, Andy Adams successfully draws a telling picture of day-to-day life, with all its boredom and humor, of a cattle drive from Texas to Montana. Adams’ factual narrative, unlike the majority of Western fiction, popular and elite, shows us the importance of the cattle industry in relation to the development of the frontier and the growth of the “civilized West.”

Popular literature oftentimes neglects the historical forces shaping the West for good reason: Economic realities have little relevance to the development of the romantic novel.
Before I begin to analyze Andy Adams' narrative, I think a historical review of the cattlemans frontier is necessary. Daniel Boorstin reminds us of the dietary revolution which occurred during the nineteenth century in America. Before the opening of the American West, red meat was an entre most often eaten by kings and aristocrats. The abundance of rich grazing land and the immensity of the West gave Americans the ultimate natural feedlot. What had once been called the "Great American Desert" proved to be an open range capable of supporting millions of cattle. Boorstin writes: "We read with incredulity how the buffalo dominated the life of the plains Indian, yet the Texas longhorn wielded similar power over thousands of Western Americans." He continues: "When the railroads came, the whole Eastern market was suddenly opened to western cattle. And it took beef to build railroads through the West." The railroads transported cattle to Midwestern and Eastern markets and returned with settlers eager to start their own small farms and cattle herds.

American writers have chosen to romanticize aspects of the American West which were very rare indeed. Hundreds of Western novels concern the individual who overcomes incredible odds to defeat the forces of evil and bring justice and peace to a frontier community. Novels such as Shane, The Virginian, and Passin' Through provide excellent examples of the alienated
hero who confronts injustice and savagery in order to bring peace to established society. Although this theme provides excellent entertainment, actual historical events suggest that the hero of the West was a different man. Certainly alienated individuals traveled through the West, and many may even have performed an occasional noble deed; still, the exploits of these individuals are celebrated chiefly through romantic fiction. Daniel Boorstin tells us:

In traditional, settled communities, many qualities--noble ancestry, landed property, wealth, bravery, military prowess, learning, shrewdness, or eloquence--might make a man a leader; among the transients in sparsely settled America, the leader was the persuader and the organizer.80

The organizer, not the alienated cowboy hero, is the type of man who more nearly embodies the spirit of the "real" American West. Examples of the organizer are folk heroes like Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett, who in fact dominate American history. Charles Fremont, Brigham Young and John Jacob Astor are famous because they led and organized men in the achievement of a goal. Their goals were all highly ambitious, involving challenging an unknown environment in order to create a community.

The American and Canadian fur trade is an excellent example of their kind of organization. Granted, trappers and hunters spent a majority of the
year in the wilderness; nevertheless, each spring all the trappers and fur
trade entrepreneurs convened at a prescribed location to trade furs for
necessary supplies. J. Astor ran a successful fur company because he
continually sought new hunting grounds and outwitted his competition.
These yearly rendez-vous were quite similar to a corporation’s annual
meeting because each trapper returned with reports about the success or
failure of an area; much the way new business “territories” are discussed
today. Daniel Boorstin comments:

The successful organizer of Western exploitatons was likely to have
some ambition and considerable aptitude for democratic politics. The
reputation of many of these men for being “lovers” with a taste for the
unpopulous backwoods was acquired only later, often as an
embellishment by Eastern literary men and journalists who from their
city offices cast Westerners in picturesque roles.81

This American hero, after achieving distinction through the strength
of his leadership of others, did not vanish into the wilderness or live
happily ever after with a spouse. Often, these men entered politics and
tested their organizational and leadership skills in the political arena. For
example, Charles Frémont daringly led an expedition across the Sierra
Nevada Mountains and later was a key figure in the Bear Claw Rebellion
which overthrew the Mexican government in present-day California. After
these exploits he became the first Republican candidate to run in the
presidential election of 1856. Daniel Boone, famous for his bear-hunting exploits, was twice elected to the Virginia legislature and served as magistrate for the territory of Missouri. Brigham Young, with considerable help, settled the Utah territory and orchestrated its entrance into the union. Examples of the "organizer" may dominate our national history, but our popular literature focuses on the alienated hero and in particular his ability to resolve a conflict.

An excellent example of the dichotomy between the historical cowboy hero and the mythical cowboy hero is found by comparing Andy Adams' *The Log of a Cowboy* with the popular westerns *Shane*, *The Virginian* and *Passin' Through*. The cattle drive, like the successful exploring expedition, is another example of a Western enterprise demanding considerable skills. As Boorstin argues: "The successful drive had to be sober and orderly, drivers like Goodnight forbade liquor, gambling, and even swearing on the trail." Oftentimes a man's entire fortune rested upon a successful delivery of cattle to the train depot. The dangers inherent in a cattle drive on several occasions resulted in tragedy. The only insurance against failure was the proper selection of foreman and working hands. Andy Adams describes his foreman this way: "Born to the soil of Texas he knew nothing but cattle, but he knew them thoroughly. . . . He never crossed a bridge 'til he reached it,"
was indulgent with his men, and would overlook any fault, so long as they rendered faithful service. Flood, Adams' foreman, successfully led over 3,000 cattle and close to twenty men from Texas' San Antonio Valley to the Yellowstone River in Montana. Flood's responsibilities varied from chasing off cattle rustlers, to engineering a bridge capable of holding upwards of 6,000 cattle, to rescuing his hands from drunken excursions into the few "cattle towns" on the trail.

Obviously Flood would be unable to travel this distance without the cooperation and expertise of the cattle hand. A certain camaraderie existed within the entire outfit, particularly among the transient workers. A majority of Flood's hands had previously worked for various employers in a number of different occupations; nonetheless, all of them were experienced cow hands. Flood learns of the drinking problem one of his hands has and responds, "I'm glad to hear he is [a drunk]. I don't want to ruin an innocent man, and a trail outfit is not supposed to have any morals. Just so the herd don't count out shy on day of delivery, I don't mind how many drunks the outfit takes." The hands may enjoy their whiskey, but when they are in the saddle attending to the cattle, nothing else is of consequence.

Perhaps one of the more frightening and commonplace dangers of the cattle drives is the stampede. A stampede is the natural result of a herds'
fears of weather, of predators, or of any unforeseen disturbance. At night particularly, the men must ready themselves for the possibility of a runaway herd. Flood’s men successfully handle two stampedes, one caused naturally and another artificially by rustlers. Andy comments after spending an entire night chasing the herd of stampeders: "This was my first trip on the trail and I was hungry and thirsty enough to hope something would be done about eating, but that seemed to be the last idea in our foreman’s mind." Adams was compelled to work almost the rest of the day before the hands were allowed to eat a hearty meal.

Andy Adams depicts a west full of uncertainties, vastness and boredom. His cattle drive lasted for over five months. Moments of social diversion were few and far between. Brief layovers at Dodge, Ogalalla, Frenchman’s Ford, and other two-bit towns provided the drover’s only amusement. The narrator writes: "Our long hours in the saddle, coupled with the monotony of our work, made these supply points of such interest to us that they were like oases in the desert land to devotees on pilgrimage to some consecrated shrine." Other forms of entertainment included yarns around camp fire and poker.

Interestingly, almost every drover confessed to having fallen in love at least once, only to be "saved" through providence. One hand remarked, “I
used to know a foreman up in DeWitt country--'Honest' John Glen they called him. He claimed the only chance he ever had to marry was a widow and the reason he didn't marry her was, he was too honest to take advantage of a dead man.

The cow hands humorously confess their ultimate rejection of what I have previously discussed as the "recreation of the myth of the Garden." The tone with which so many of these hands recount their failed love lifes alludes to a certain sadness on the one hand, but also a confession of their true love: cattle.

Still, these men are alienated from established society in some ways similar to the archetypal Western hero. The principal difference between the real cattle man in Adams' narrative and the mythical hero is that the real cattle hand belongs to the open range and his fellow workers. Much like Scratchy Wilson back in the "wild days" of Yellow Sky, Adams' colleagues prefer male companionship and the adventures of life on the range to settling down and marrying. Adams' accurately portrays the seemingly boring life of the cattle man; however, these men enjoy their work and their lives on the range. When Rebel kills a man in Frenchman's Ford, his comrades come to his defense, although he needs little help. Compared to the mythical cowboy "hero", Adams cattle hands are boring. They do not resolve a conflict in favor of the established community, nor do they
reinforce the cultural values of bourgeoise America in the ante-bellum period. Adams and his friends are largely transients making a living the only way they know how—by working with cattle. In his book, Daniel Boorstin quotes the comments of Charles Goodnight, the first man to drive cattle along the route followed by Andy Adams and thousands of others. "All in all my years on the trail were the happiest I have lived. There were many hardships and dangers, of course, that called on all a man had of endurance and bravery; but when all went well there was no other life so pleasant." 88

The American West was successfully settled by virtue of the group or "corporate" efforts of daring and bold men and women. As I have already argued, historical figures like Charles Fremont, Brigham Young and Daniel Boone completed their goals only with the assistance of numerous other people. A serious dichotomy exists between the narrative of Andy Adams and the romantic popular literature, and even the elite literature I have discussed so far. The American West, especially during the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was continually changing. Technology, mainly in the form of railroads and farm equipment, weighed heavily in the transformation of the American West. The popular novel, and to some degree the elite works of Crane, Garland, and Cather, all portray the American West in a moment of transition. Andy Adams' narrative is not
concerned with the social forces at work in America, but merely delineates his experiences. Fiction, then, not only romanticizes personalities and the beauty of the Western landscape but also condenses history into a limited perspective accentuating the incumbent changes. Moreover, the fiction I have chosen is strongly influenced by the cultural myths of the West; this is especially true with the popular Western novel.

John G. Cawelti's definitive analysis of the Western novel is called The Six Gun Mystique. Cawelti immediately cautions the reader about "the central difficulties and possibilities in the interdisciplinary interpretations of popular artistic forms." Such a holistic interpretation, however, is precisely one of the methodologies he employs to help us to understand the Western. Cawelti claims that the Western is a varied and complex art form which responds to changing cultural themes and concerns. To classify the Western simply as an expression of individualism, Puritanism or psychoanalytical neuroses is a gross simplification. Cawelti's book discusses the Western as a synthesis of convention and formula, the opposites of invention and structure. Cawelti writes: "Conventions represent familiar shared images and meaning and they assert an ongoing continuity of values; inventions confront us with a new perception or meaning which we have not realized before." He defines his central
thesis in this way: "A formula is a conventional system for structuring cultural products. It can be distinguished from invented structures which are new ways of organizing works of art." The Western is conventional because, like other popular novels, it reinforces traditional values; rarely are we confronted with new kinds of characters or ideas. The continual repetition of conflict followed by some sort of resolution in favor of traditional values is central to any Western.

Three popular Western novels demonstrate my case: The Virginian, Shane, and Passin' Through. Each of these novels was written during different periods of American history. I believe that the cultural and historical forces at work at the time these novels were being written either consciously or subconsciously influenced the authors' work. Owen Wister wrote The Virginian in 1903, Jack Shaeffer wrote Shane in 1949, and Louis L'Amour wrote Passin' Through in 1985. The early years of the twentieth century were a period of intense industrial and economic growth. Darwinian thought justified this growth, but its contradictions were symbolized by the incredible individual fortunes accumulated by men like Carnegie and Stanford, in contrast to the intense poverty both in urban and rural America. A considerable portion of the rural population vented their frustration through the Populist movement. The Populists resented
industrialism and believed that agrarian problems stemmed directly from this Eastern economic growth.

Post-World War II America was the most powerful nation on earth and had sole control over nuclear weapons. The thousands of soldiers returning from Europe and Asia experienced difficulty adjusting to society and perhaps some even felt guilty about the slaughter of so many men, especially when the bomb was dropped. Today's society is a bit harder to judge; however, I believe our culture to be recovering from the liberal 1960s and moving towards conservative attitudes. Granted I have made gross generalizations of complex historical time periods, yet I hope to prove how each novel was influenced by the changes taking place in American society at that particular moment. Consequently, not only are the forces of change a necessary consideration, but also, in terms of how this loss is interpreted, I see the changes and the consequent adjustments as a natural part of the growing-up process.

Both The Virginian and Shane deal with Wyoming's Johnson County Wars of the 1890s. In both novels the archetypal Western hero resolves a conflict between the good guys and bad guys, however, the endings are completely different. Daniel Boorstin argues that truth was not easily attained: "The settlement of the West like so many other central events in
American history occurred in an atmosphere of pregnant legal ambiguity." The Johnson County Wars developed over the problems created by the small farmer or rancher whose very existence threatened the open range and consequently the larger ranchers. The first ranchers to settle the plains of Wyoming created the Wyoming Stock Growers Association to regulate and protect the registered ranchers in Wyoming. Obviously, the first ranchers to settle Wyoming claimed the open range as their own and resented the inevitable influence of small-time farmers and ranchers. These new settlers built fences and oftentimes confused their own non-registered cattle with those of the established ranchers. The tensions increased as cattle rustlers made the distinction between the cattle of small-time and big-time ranchers increasingly ambiguous. Since Wyoming was barely a state and had no effective legal authority, the Wyoming Stock Growers' Association declared war on the struggling farmers of Johnson County. Boorstin writes, "seldom before or since have the agents of law been so thoroughly confused with the agents of lawlessness. Even at this distance it is no simple matter to tell which were which." The Johnson County War concluded with the acting governor of Wyoming appealing to President Benjamin Harrison to send in the troops from Fort McKinney to restore order. Ironically, the acting governor of Wyoming called in the troops because the
supposed rustlers had formed a citizen’s army numbering some two hundred strong which had forced the “law enforcement” army of the Wyoming Stock Growers’ Association to flee for their lives.

Shane deals with the ambiguity of this conflict, eventually coming to support the small-time settler. These settlers are portrayed in Joe Starrett and his friends. Starrett epitomizes the hard working common man who gave up security back East to carve a new life for himself further West. Shane, the archetypal hero with a mysterious background, rides into the fertile valley and begins to work for Joe Starrett. As the tension augments between Luke Fletcher and the leader of the small farmers Joe Starrett, Shane is forced to help the ranchers fend off the powerful Fletcher, who wants to buy out all the settlers in the valley and return to the days of the open range.

Shane neatly fits the characteristics of the archetypal hero. His first appearance immediately indicates that he is different. He dresses in a peculiar fashion suggesting that he comes from the rugged gambling towns, and we eventually learn that he is a noted killer, something we are led to suspect from the beginning. This novel was written after World War II and, as is the case in many other post-war Westerns, the hero is alienated to such an extent that he must leave after resolving the conflict between
Fletcher and Starrett. I believe the ending to be a reflection of America's involvement in World War II and our realization of ultimate power. Shane, like America under Roosevelt, entered the conflict only when necessary and killed only when necessary. However, Fletcher, like Hitler, was a threat to the peaceful existence that the new settlers had briefly enjoyed and deserved. America experienced a psychological crisis because of our role in the war and our new-found power as the sole possessor of the atomic bomb. I think Shane might also symbolically represent the American soldier who returned to America alienated from society after so much killing and perhaps even guilty about how powerful a nation we were.

Ultimately Shane conquered the forces of evil; however, his actions, like America's use of the atom bomb, alienated him from established society. Although historians emphasize the warm welcome given to the war heros, novelists like J.D. Salinger in *Catcher in the Rye* deal on a symbolic level, with most of American's desire to remain young and innocent. America, after winning the war could no longer remain innocent. No American, was innocent after Hiroshima.

This thesis ties in precisely with what I have been asserting throughout this essay because Shane reinforces the traditional social forces at work in American society. Joe Starrett's frontier community has
matured from a frontier town where the earliest, but not necessarily the most virtuous, settlers rule, to a more democratic and egalitarian community where responsible men like Joe Starrett can raise a family and recreate the myth of the garden of the world. Joe Starrett and his fellow ranchers would enjoy nothing more than to live in the pastoral and benevolent community Willa Cather creates in "Neighbour Rosicky." The only problem remains the ambiguous and arbitrary use of power on the part of Luke Fletcher. The solution to this problem can only be achieved when Shane performs his heroic deeds in the name of established society and reinforces traditional social values. In a sense, this dream of a peaceful valley full of yeoman farmers and small time ranchers is within the grasp of the characters; they need only the assistance of a hero, and Shane fits the bill.

The final pages of Shane reflect the dream-like quality of peace which has suddenly settled over the Valley after Shane has departed. In a sense the Valley has been reborn through the violence as well as the heroism and good nature of Shane. Bob, the narrator of the tale, reflecting on the experiences of Shane from the perspective of his boyhood, comments on Shane's "meaning": "He was the man who rode into our little valley out of the heart of the glowing West and when his work was done rode back whence he had come and he was Shane." Not only does Shane possess superhuman
heroic qualities, as seen through the final confrontation with Luke Fletcher, but he comes from and returns to "the great glowing West," which to me implies that he represents ultimate freedom. He is an expression of eternal freedom, much like the eternal flame which can only be found in the West. The "little valley" is obviously a peaceful and benevolent place where narrator Bob, remembering his youth, "had a chance to live out his boyhood and grow straight inside as a man." I believe that Bob's nostalgia involves the idyllic qualities of the agrarian life that he was able to enjoy because of what Shane accomplished.

Even more implicit in the ending of the novel is the suggestion that Shane is responsible for allowing the traditional forces of society to exist naturally, because he defeated the forces of evil, arbitrary power. Shane defeated the forces of evil at the cost of his own position in that society. Shane for all his honor and goodness is too much associated with violence and lawlessness. Thanks to Shane, the "little valley" Bob Starrett refers to has conformed to mainstream America and recreated itself in the form of the myth of the garden. The last line of the book, "and he was Shane," also reminds me of the passage from Genesis 9, when "God called the dry land Earth and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas: and God saw 'that it was good.'" I believe Schaefer compares Shane's mission to the
work of God; Shane turns out to be a sacrificial victim making the valley safe for democracy.

Although The Virginian portrays the Johnson County Wars in a whole different way from Jack Schaefer's version, the ending of the novel implies a similar recreation of the myth of the garden. In The Virginian Wister depicts a homogeneous community threatened by cattle rustlers. A few large ranches exist in The Virginian, but they are managed by benevolent ranchers concerned with the welfare of the nearby community and the betterment of their employees, unlike Luke Fletcher. The majority of the community is composed of hard-working farmers and ranchers whose lives are disrupted by the cattle rustlers. The cattle rustlers are portrayed as the scum of Western society with no morals and no ambition. Cawelti describes the Virginian this way: "Wister combined aspects of the Leatherstocking tradition with the newer image of the heroic horseman of the Great Plains and created a figure and a type of story so successful that it can be called the basis of the modern Western." The Virginian eventually resolves the conflict between the established ranchers and the immoral rustlers who menace the peaceful and benevolent ranching community. Originally from the wilds of Virginia, the Virginian is the classic American hero who migrates West because he can not stand all the
"older brotherin'" he received. Furthermore, the Virginian has lived the life of an outlaw, "and his knowledge of evil made innocence doubly precious to him."98 Because he has lived as an outlaw, the Virginian is consequently a true mythical hero who transcends the social barriers of established society and savagery. The Virginian, despite his knowledge of evil, is a manifestation of all that is righteous in a cowboy. After resolving the conflict between Trampas, the leader of the rustlers, and the ranchers, the Virginian eventually marries an Eastern schoolmarm, Molly Wood. The symbolic implications of this union, which I will treat later, are important.

Owen Wister, author of this traditional yet archetypal novel, is an interesting man who grew up a privileged child in Philadelphia, attended the finest schools, and went West for health reasons. He knew the most influential writers and thinkers of the day, his mother was quite close to Henry James, and William Dean Howells was a close friend, and later, a critic of his work. The auspices of Eastern society, more specifically of the literary aristocrats of Eastern society, never left him, and I think his fiction reflects this attachment to the East on the one hand and his love for the vast and scenic West on the other. As a matter of fact, Wister spent a considerable amount of time gathering material for his novels at the Cheyenne Club in Wyoming, the headquarters for the Wyoming Stock
Growers' Association. Not coincidentally, the Cheyenne Club is where the Association organized and financed a rumored $100,000 war chest to evict problematic newcomers to Johnson County. Equally as interesting, three of Wister's Harvard classmates were Wyoming ranchers and members of the Wyoming Stock Growers' Association. Consequently, these associations may show us why the novel portrays the real threat to established society as the evil rustlers; Wister's threat is completely opposite to the one in *Shane*, where the threat to established society is the wealthy and powerful rancher. *The Virginian* was written in 1903 and contains no hint of the agrarian problems of the 1890s, the popularity of Populism and rural America's fear of industrialism. Rather, Wister emphasizes the traditional bourgeois values of community and social class.

Consequently, I believe Wister migrated to Wyoming to gather material for his novels, coming eventually to agree with attitudes of his old "classmates," the established ranchers. Wister creates a novel in which the newcomer is not the hard-working common man but the lazy and predatory bad guy who rustles cattle. To the members of the Cheyenne Club, the chief threat to the open range and to the security of the Wyoming Stock Growers' Association was the inevitable incursion of small-time farmers and ranchers whose fences threatened the open range.
The ending of *The Virginian* only further proves Wister's loyalties toward his social values and his sense that the "old" West, consisting of an open range presided over by no centralized authority, was coming to an end. The newcomer to the Wyoming frontier represented change, and the last thing these wealthy ranchers wanted was a threat to their property and their semi-aristocratic lives. Owen Wister was a conservative man who either consciously or subconsciously resented the encroachment of the population and technology. John Cawelti believes that the Western:

"presents, for our renewed contemplation, that epic moment when the frontier passed from the old ways of life into social and cultural forms directly connected with the present... Moreover, while the Forth of July ceremony has no room for dramatic conflict and ambiguity of values, the Western is able to explore not only what was gained, but what was lost in that moment of American history." 100

Both *Shane* and *The Virginian* are conventional Westerns, and I credit both novels with depicting that "epic moment" when the frontier grew from a lawless and uncivilized community to a respectable community dominated by contemporary social values and rigid law enforcement.

Louis L'amour's *Passin' Through*, although not as well known as *The Virginian* and *Shane*, reinforces contemporary social values and also captures that "epic moment" of frontier maturity. Louis L'amour is the author of close to one hundred popular Western novels and *Passin' Through*
was, in November 1985, number two on the New York Times bestseller list. The novel is another example of a conventional formula, and the optimistic ending is typical both of many of L'amour's other works and most Western novels. The ending is also a growing up experience because the main character, nicknamed Passin' Through, has, for the first time in his life, felt the desire to settle down.

Passin' Through is unmistakably a gunslinger who has lived alone all his life, and he insinuates that for a significant portion of his life he has been hunted for crimes he was not entirely responsible for. Passin' Through is a man not to reckoned with, because in the first pages of the novel he kills a man within the first three minutes he walks into a bar. Like all Western heroes, Passin' Through has a code of honor. When foolish men continue to bother him, he responds as any archetypal hero would--with violence. For example, he describes himself:

There had been nothing ahead to look to, and nothing behind I wanted to remember, so I'd headed west into new country simply because it was new country. Wild and reckless and hard I was, and quick with a gun to shoot, with a face honed down by sun, wind and hardship, and eyes, some said like chunks of blue ice. 101

This description immediately tells us that while Passin' Through may not be exactly a model citizen, more importantly he is the embodiment of Western
freedom and naturalness. He has probably lived most of his life outdoors, and he describes himself almost as he would a wild animal, moving wherever the wind or country may take him. In the first scene of the novel, Passin' Through comes into a bar in an anonymous frontier town where a drunk man begins pester ing him beyond endurance; Passin' Through kills his opponent. Passin' Through tells us: "'A damned fool' he calls me, and he's wearing a gun, too. He dropped his hand to his gun and I killed him." 102

Passin' Through, after escaping death by the revengeful friends of the man he killed, starts traveling west to the town of La Plata where he uncovers a group of Californians trying illegally to inherit a ranch which rightly belongs to a lovely and strong willed young lady. These Californians, three in number, learn of the abandoned gold mine on the ranch, and by forging a will, attempt to assume ownership of Janet Le Caudy's rightful property. Being this is a conventional novel, the plot is wholly predictable. When Passin' Through uncovers this deceitful plot of Charles Pelham Clinton, he heroically risks his life for the young lady, Janet Le Caudy.

The ending of the novel deserves attention because the hero settles down and marries Janet Le Caudy. He says to Janet, "'I was just passin' through when I rode in here, so I reckon I'll just tip my hat to the hills, roll up my ball of yarn, an' keep on passin.'" She looked at me then, and said, 'I
don't want you to go." No women had ever said that to me before."

Passin' Through clearly will be staying to recreate the myth of the Garden, and we know that after the final confrontation between Passin' Through and Charles Pelham Clinton takes place, Janet and the Cowboy hero will get married. Unlike Shane, Passin' Through, although alienated from society, is able to return to society after he resolves the conflict. The hero reflects the more conservative and traditional values of our culture; rather than embodying alienation, Passin' Through can eventually deal with society, proved when he stays and marries Janet. Conveniently, peace falls over the town of La Plata, Passin' Through and Janet are married, and they have a beautiful ranch (with a gold mine).

To me this novel symbolizes a growing up process which anybody would enjoy. However, Passin' Through must change, no longer can he describe himself as a wild and reckless drifter. His natural and free way of life has been sacrificed for a sense of security for himself and for the town of La Plata. Growing up is not an easy process, and, as I suggested earlier, there is something tragic about it. Although Passin' Through has been a drifter all his life with no responsibility and attachment, his new life will be so totally different it is almost too hard to imagine. John Cawelti talks about American innocence and the tragic nature of growing up when
something special is lost:

How many major American novels by writers like Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, James, Hemingway and Faulkner have dealt with our culture's failure to provide meaningful patterns of initiation into the responsibilities and limitations of adulthood? How many youthful protagonists from Melville's Pierre, through Twain's Huckleberry Finn to Salinger's Holden Caufield have faced the tragic complexities of loss of innocence and knowledge of evil. The Lone Ranger and other Western heroes disguise this fear of the complexities and corruptions of the adult life by combining moral purity and separation from society with adult power and potency... Particularly in a culture where social values are so confused and ambiguous about the relation between the individual and society, where some values place a great emphasis on individual aggressiveness and others emphasize social responsibility and conformity, the fantasy of the hero who reluctantly, but nobly aids the cause of social order by acts of individual violence probably corresponds to a widespread fantasy of legitimated aggression.104

This lengthy passage is particularly revealing because violence and American's reluctance to grow up are an integral aspect of every work of fiction I have discussed. Granted, the violence of Cather's world is really nonexistent except in terms of the potential for the forces of urban and industrial life to ruin agrarian life, and thereby to cause death.

However, each story turns on the problems and fears of change. In "The Blue Hotel" we see how the Swede comes to understand the changes in his perceptions of the mythical West, a misunderstanding that costs him his life. Growing up is a necessary fact of human existence, and often times the
fear of this process of change, as the popular Western proves, results in violence. However, change is constant. Passin’ Through cannot remain a drifter all his life, nor can Shane be a killer until he is eighty. In fiction, American authors at least allow their characters the chance to recreate the myth of the Garden. The difference between Shane and Passin’ Through is that Shane is too alienated from society, and as I have indicated, the historical period accounts for a significant amount of what motivates an author. In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Henry Fleming longs for a peace and tranquility he will probably never achieve. The myth of the Garden is very powerful and the possibility of achieving a benevolent community of yeoman farmer’s rarely happens in elite literature.

Part of the growing up process means understanding that the Garden is only a symbolic myth which is nearly impossible to achieve in America. Ever since Jefferson’s vision of the yeoman farmer populating the mid-West, Americans have been looking to return to the “simpler” days of his vision. This nostalgia stands at odds with the American love of progress and invention. Western literature, whether popular or elite, is essentially dedicated to recreating the myth of the Garden. In all the literature that I have analyzed, the potential for achieving this ideal was there. However, part of the growing up process is understanding that we can never return to
the past. Progress is inevitable and we all must grow up. At least we must unless we can escape into the West...
Footnotes:

7. Smith, *Virgin Land*, p. 16.
24. Smith, *Virgin Land*, p. 188.
Footnotes:


42. McCullough, Garland, p. 41.


44. Garland, Roads, p. 82.

45. Garland, Roads, p. 84.

46. Garland, Roads, p. 93.

47. Garland, Roads, p. 127.


51. This idea evolved out of my conversations between Professor Charles Bassett and myself, and, respectfully, he deserves the credit for this idea.


Footnotes:

73. LaFrance, *A Reading*, p. 935.
75. The whole theme of growing up and extending the metaphor of maturity to the literary characters and to the American West as a whole came out of my conversations with Professor Charles Bassett; again, he deserves the credit for this idea.
78. Boorstin, *Democratic Experience*, p. 11.
79. Not only did the cattle industry attract Eastern investors, but English and other European capitalists soon followed suit. Interestingly, this period of Western history lasted for a relatively short period of time, beginning just after the Civil War and concluding in the 1890s with the slow and deliberate decrease in open grazing land.
Footnotes:

87. Adams, *Cowboy*, p. 82.
92. The whole theme of America's reluctance to deal with its powerful position in the world, and in particular Holden Caufield's love of innocence comes from one of Professor David Lubin's lectures during the Academic Year 1984-85.
100. Cawelti, *Six Gun*, p. 73.
List of Works Consulted:


List of Works Consulted, Cont’d.


