Space, Place, and Literary Representations of the Landscapes of California, 1880-1917

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Space and place are foundational concepts in geography and the humanities more broadly, but usable, concrete definitions for them have yet to be pinned down. This dissertation begins by offering one such approach, where a place is the material result of the convergence of myriad spatial factors upon a particular geographical and temporal location, and space is the immaterial effect that a place becomes when it exceeds its locationality to affect another remote location and in so doing ceases to be a place. I then put these ideas to work by analysing the landscapes of three Californian novels: Jack London's *The Valley of the Moon* (1913), Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901, set in the early 1880s), and Mary Hunter Austin's *The Ford* (1917). My dissertation argues that each novel adopts a distinct method of constructing geography, which enables them to articulate their respective politics – individualist white supremacy, naturalistic anti-corporatism, pro-industrial environmentalism – and to express their conceptions of the different Californian landscapes in which they are set.

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Introduction

Space and Place: a Framework for California

'It was invariably the landscape they inhabited that Californians referred to when they wanted to describe who they were', observes Kevin Starr in the first instalment of his multi-volume history of the state.[1] Yet for all the scholarship on cultural representations of the environment of California and the mountainous range of writings on spatial theory, critics have yet to be provided with a clear understanding of 'space' and 'place', the two foundations of our conception of geography. 'In much academic usage, […] space and place are either not distinguished at all, but viewed as synonyms, or one is seen as trumping the other', John Agnew wrote in his overview of scholarship on the subject.[2] 'Despite th[e] general enthusiasm for the study of places there is very little considered understanding of what the word "place" means', wrote Tim Cresswell as recently as 2004; 'no-one quite knows what they are talking about when they are talking about place'.[3] In the social sciences and to a lesser extent history, the differentiation of the two terms is generally quantitative, if indeed they are not being used interchangeably. Space tends to refer to an indeterminate number of places, collected into one entity for the ease of analysis; it represents the medium through which social relations are formed and enacted. Therefore, Agnew suggests, place is neglected in much economic, historical, and social criticism.[4]

[1] Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 208.
[2] John Agnew, 'Space: Place', in *Spaces of Geographical Thought: Deconstructing Human Geography's Binaries*, eds. Paul J. Cloke and Ron Johnston (London: SAGE, 2005), 73.
[3] Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 1.
[4] Agnew, 'Space: Place', 76-78.

Approaching a more substantive qualitative distinction between the two terms and pioneering the field of humanistic geography, Yi Fu-Tuan produced 'the "classic" statement of the inevitable duality of space and place, emphasizing what each has to offer separately but committed to relating them to one another'.[5] His work provides the foundations for concrete definitions of each idea, although he himself might view such an approach as overly prescriptive and narrow, given his criticism of the social sciences for supposedly ignoring the complexities of lived human experience.[6] He writes for example that 'the scientist and theorist, on his part, tends to overlook human diversity and subjectivity because the task of establishing linkages in the nonhuman world is already enormously complex'.[7] Essentially, Tuan distinguishes place from space on an individual, phenomenological basis. Space is an unknown and unlived expanse, 'like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed'; it is 'transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning' through lived experience.[8] In short, 'when space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place'.[9] Tuan embellishes this basic dictum with the more specific characteristics of each concept – 'space […] suggests the future and invites action' whereas 'place is a calm center of established values' – and in doing so narrows the political scope of his framework.[10] For instance, Tuan fundamentally views place as an extension of the idea of home, but there are no doubt ways that familiarity with a location can be fostered other than it serving as a site 'where biological needs, such as

[5] Ibid., 84. Subsequent work in humanistic geography has been accused of going too far the other way and over-emphasizing human experience at the expense of social critique: see ibid., 78-79.
[6] 'A large body of experiential data is consigned to oblivion because we cannot fit the data to concepts that are taken over uncritically from the physical sciences. […] [T]his blindness to the depth of experience afflicts the man in the street no less than it does the social scientist': Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 201.
[7] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 2.
[8] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 54 and 136.
[9] Ibid., 73. Numerous other passages scattered throughout the cited work also provide slightly varied and usually more descriptive definitions of 'space' and 'place', esp. on 54, 138 and 161, but the quoted example is the broadest and seems to capture best Tuan's overall argument.
[10] Ibid., 54

those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied'.[11] A sense of being unwelcome that is rooted in experiences of exploitation, oppression, and violence can surely prove just as powerful a basis for place-making as its antithesis of homeliness, yet Tuan offers only a diagnosis of 'claustrophob[ia]' in cases where place is understood as 'oppressive containment'.[12] The preference for place as home, rather than a neutral abstract familiarity (which is all that the theoretical framework suggests and requires), persists in more recent criticism. It is true that 'each home is a place in space', but it does not then follow that 'home [is] especially so' a place, as though certain forms of familiarity and experience are more valid than others.[13] Even in his politically-conscious survey of the field, Agnew summarises place-making by listing only 'the projection of feelings of attachment, comfort and belonging'.[14]

The neglect of the role of social structures in an individual's relations to space and place reflects a broader tendency in Tuan's work. Non-male perspectives are marginalised, from gender-exclusive pronouns (most glaringly perhaps when referring to all children as *he* and *him* in a chapter on infancy and spatial learning) to the assumption that going to work is a male activity while staying at home and raising children is the mother's *place*.[15] Tuan even quips that 'a man can fall in love at first sight with a place as with a woman'.[16] Where Tuan encounters inequalities and hierarchies, he often assumes that their origins are innate and subjugation is consensual. He claims, for example: '[i]n Western industrial society, working-

[11] Ibid., 6. He reiterates this in *Topophilia*, p. 247.
[12] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 54. Tuan also appears to pathologize those who contradict his assumptions when he identifies those who 'have difficulty integrating large space into familiar place' as 'small children and mentally retarded people': ibid., 73-74. This follows the tradition of David Lowenthal's important early essay on the subjectivity of geographical experience, which attributes various non-conforming examples of geographical perception to myriad mental illnesses: David Lowenthal, 'Geography, Experience, and Imagination: Towards a Geographical Epistemology', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 51, no. 3 (1961), 244. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2561658.
[13] Robert David Sack, *Homo Geographicus: a Framework for Action, Awareness, and Moral Concern* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 16.
[14] Agnew, 'Space: Place', in *Spaces of Geographical Thought*, 75.
[15] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 19-33, 127-28, and 29.
[16] Ibid., 184.

class families are known to tolerate a much higher residential density than do middle-class families. And the reason is not simply because workers have little choice. Proximity to others is desired.'[17] The Malthusian view of population, that impoverishment is simply nature responding to resource scarcity in which the 'tyranny' of charity or state aid should not interfere, 'commands special respect', according to Tuan.[18] Such a recurring lack of social and political consciousness calls for a significant re-examination of Tuan's basic formulation of space and place. This is particularly pressing in the case of California, a region steeped in racial and colonial struggles over territory – not only between American expansionists and Mexican missionaries and rancheros but also Russian fur trappers and imperialists from Britain and France – and whose indigenous people were dispossessed in a manner that Benjamin Madley contends amounted at times to genocide.[19]

Numerous subsequent critics have redressed the oversights of Tuan (and indeed entire generations and traditions of critical thought in the humanities) and put gender, race, and class at the heart of discussions of space and place.[20] Even so, fundamental contradictions remain unresolved in his formulation of space and place and the scholarship that has followed, most significantly those pertaining to temporality. Tuan insightfully attends to the processes of arriving and being through which experience makes space into place but appears to neglect the implications of departure. Does the severance of a tangible link between individual and location mean place can decay back into space? Just as Tuan refuses to pinpoint the moment when enough experience has accumulated for space to become place, so

[17] Ibid., 62.
[18] Ibid., 66
[19] Starr, Americans, 12-48 and 8-12; Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016). Madley provides a survey of the contentious historical debate about use of the term in the context of the United States as a whole in: 'Reexamining the American Genocide Debate: Meaning, Historiography, and New Methods', *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 1 (2015): 103-08, doi: 10.1093/ahr/120.1.98.
[20] For example: Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

too it is unclear how much memories can fade before place becomes space again through the unfamiliarity caused by forgetting.[21] This issue is particularly critical in the context of significant historical change when the same period of absence will yield a far greater disparity between the past experience and present reality of a location. Tuan appears quite conscious of this historical limitation of his framework: 'place […] is essentially a static concept. If we see the world as a process, constantly changing, we should not be able to develop any sense of place'.[22] But it is no more possible to examine the world abstracted from time as it is from space itself: they are the two fundamental dimensions of existence, and explanations of place – indeed any concept – must take account of them. Instead of recognising it as a theoretical *impasse*, however, subsequent scholarship has only incubated Tuan's temporally flawed understanding of place. As Agnew notes, 'place is often associated with the world of the past … nostalgic, regressive and even reactionary'.[23] This caricature has perhaps contributed to the neglect of place in much social science, whose interests in economic, political, and historical processes might be taken as exclusive to the realm of space. That the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century saw no less than the 'unfolding of California as a regional culture' only makes more pressing the necessity of refined definitions of space and place, ones which expand rather than limit our understanding of temporality and historical change.[24]

[21] Interestingly, Tuan does pursue these kinds of critical issues when dealing with collective memory. The penultimate chapter of his work in question includes a discussion of how modern Western societies construct idealised narratives of their history, especially through the built environment. See Tuan, *Space and Place*, 193-98.
[22] Ibid., 179. This might go some way to explain his propensity to refer to non-Western and pre-industrial tribal societies, which he says can be viewed as 'timeless' because of their geographical and historical remoteness: ibid. 122. Indeed, it is not until this ninth chapter of the work, over halfway through, that Tuan pays serious attention to time; see: 118-135.
[23] Agnew, 'Space: Place', 74.
[24] Starr, *Americans*, vii.

The starting point for understanding space and place – particularly their interrelation, which Agnew sees as the most pressing area for future scholarly discussion – are the two implicit axioms that hold across the social sciences and humanistic geography.[25] The first is that place is in some way smaller than or contained by space, a distinction of quantity. 'Place is specific and space is general', says Agnew in locating a slither of consensus amidst the disparate scholarship on the two concepts.[26] Second, space and place fundamentally refer to the same thing, namely, the world in the geographical as opposed to temporal plane, but it does not follow that space and place themselves are the same. Identical entities become separated by situation and activity – in linguistic terms, the same subject coupled with different verbs. So it is with space and place: they refer to a thing *and* a process, for if it were the former alone they would be synonyms. For Tuan and those following in his wake, that process is experience, which necessitates the intervention of a human agent. Any subsequent analysis of society more broadly can therefore only occur by projecting the phenomenological perspective of the individual onto the collective whole, hence the polarisation of the study of space and place into objectivist and subjectivist schools, each seemingly incompatible with the other.[27] To move towards an approach which ties together the two critical traditions – a requirement for the study at hand given its interest in landscapes in literature as a site of intersection of the individual and the social – it is necessary to reframe human experience as

[25] Agnew, 'Space: Place', 82-83. I am not seeking to define space and place in an etymological sense: it would be clearly fruitless to attempt to assign consistent meanings to each term based on their usage in language, given the inconsistency of that usage. Consequently, I might at times use space and place in a manner and context quite counterintuitive to those accustomed to their use not only in everyday parlance but also academic writing. I clarify this where confusion is likely to arise in specific cases.
[26] Agnew, 'Space: Place', in *Spaces of Geographical Thought*, 74.
[27] Ibid, 73.

just one, not the exclusive, example of a formative process from which space and place branch off as a differentiated geographical duality.[28]

For simplicity, take a newly built and settled suburban subdivision. What was once empty on a map has now been filled—the undifferentiated has become particularised—and a *place* has been made, a location indelibly bound to certain geographical and temporal coordinates. This is a material and thus objective process of formation which occurred independently of any human experience of the location (the individual construction workers can be abstracted from the example as I shall explain in due course; this is fundamentally different from traditional humanistic understandings of place, in which 'without subjects, there can be no theory of place').[29] But what was the motive force for the creation and from where did it originate? If we preclude creation *ex nihilo*, the cause for the development of the suburb must originate from another source, a remote location, say a proximate city centre that required an increase in its surrounding population.

Place-making therefore requires at least two separate locations to enter in relation with one another: places cannot make themselves. Henri Lefebvre recognises this in his influential *The Production of Space*, writing that 'things could not be created independently of each other in space … without taking into account their interrelationships and their relationship to the whole.'[30] But, in so far as we have just come to understand locations as places, this is an immanent contradiction.[31] Places exist only at their coordinates, yet in some

[28] Tuan too recognised that '"space" and "place" require each other for definition', though his approach is not strictly dialectic because in his framework each idea can be seen as existing on a spectrum separated by degrees of familiarity: Space and Place, 6.
[29] Roger Friedland, 'Space, Place, and Modernity: The Geographical Moment,' review of *The Betweenness of Place: Towards a Geography of Modernity*, by J. Nicholas Entrikin, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, by David Harvey, and *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, by Edward W. Soja. *Contemporary Sociology* 21, no. 1 (1992), 14. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2074695.
[30] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 124.
[31] There also appears to be a second contradiction—how can an absolutely isolated location be a place if it is not in relation with anywhere else—which is solved on pp. 10-11.

capacity the city centre has defied its locationality to exert a formative and material influence at the point of the suburb. On the one hand, to revert to a real-world case, San Francisco is only San Francisco at San Francisco.[32] On the other hand, it shapes entirely remote locations; from the traffic, rent, and air pollution in neighbouring Bay Area cities to literary cultures across the contemporary anglosphere and even plastic in oceans, in myriad ways San Francisco exists in some transmuted, disembodied form the world over, just as the fictional city centre does at the new suburb. That incorporeal form represents a second mode of existence of geography, counterpart to place, namely, *space*.[33] This should not be misunderstood as a subjective truth: the relation between the two locations is an objective one, and it presupposes the capacity of the suburb and city centre to defy their locationality – the basis from which place-ness arises – by exerting an influence on an entirely remote area.[34] Lefebvre suggests this relationality and consequent immateriality when he describes his conception of space:

> (Social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistance and simultaneity … It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object.[35]

So far, the suburb has been positioned as the subject, but we can do the same for the city centre and ask how it is shaped in turn by the suburb. Take it that the suburb provides additional commuters to the city centre, increasing the available labour-power there but also

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[32] The triple tautology says more than appears at first glance. Its structure is: 'place-name (or, more accurately, place-subject) is only place-adjective at place-location'. The second of those, the adjectival form, refers broadly to the identity, culture, feeling, zeitgeist of a place. In the given example, therefore, San Francisco-ness can exist in its totality only at San Francisco and nowhere else.

[33] If this approach appears to be dialectical, then it would be exactly what Andrew Merrifield prescribed when he called for a new way of understanding space and place and their interrelatedness. See: Andrew Merrifield, 'Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 18, no. 4 (1993), 516-17. doi: 10.2307/622564.

[34] In other words, the objective approach here places the suburb as subject, whereas the subjectivism of the likes of Tuan would use an 'intermediary' human agent and use their perspective, not the location itself, as the basis of place.

[35] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 73.

increasing congestion in its transport networks; these are the material effects of the existence of the suburb at the city centre, which is clearly an entirely different mode of existence for the suburb than that which it possesses at its own location in the form of place. There is no contradiction in saying that the suburb and the city centre are each a separate place with respect to their independent and unique locationalities and that they are simultaneously both spaces in so far as each exerts a formative influence on the other. Space is place in motion, the antithesis of place whose basis is geographical and temporal fixity.[36] In his attempt at a dialectical approach to geography, Andrew Merrifield draws a parallel between this aspect of space and place and the wave-particle duality described by quantum theory: 'all matter […] is a *particle* (a concentrated entity in space) [akin to place] and a *wave* (a dispersive non-spatially concentrated process) [akin to space] at one and the same time'.[37]

For this definition of space to appear more intuitive, closer to the real world and indeed the language we use to describe it, the present illustration must be sketched with further detail. Obviously, the suburb and the city centre are not the only locations in existence. Let's say that close to the suburb are a steep hillside and a wooded area. The former fans a persistent, cooling wind through the suburb while wildlife strays into it from the latter. The climate of California, as an 1891 survey for the U.S. Army Signalling Corps described, is the net result of the clashing, intermingling influences of the ocean to the West and precipitation induced by mountains to the East.[38] These characteristics of the suburb

[36] Tuan comes to a quite similar understanding: 'if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause'. The important difference is that his approach centres on the human subject and thus seeks to identify the utility of space and place for the individual—the provision of movement and of pause, respectively. My interest is in conceptualising space and place independently of any human subject, which can then be incorporated later once a consistent understanding has been reached. Tuan, *Space and Place*, 6.
[37] Merrifield, 'Place and Space', 521. Original emphasis.
[38] W. A. Glassford, 'Appendix No. 67: Climate of California and Nevada, with Particular Reference to the Rainfall and Temperature and their Influence upon the Irrigation Problems of the Two States', in *Irrigation and Water Shortage in the Arid Regions. Letter from The Secretary of War Transmitting A report of the Chief Signal Officer of the Army in response to House resolution dated May 23, 1890, relating to irrigation and water shortage in the arid regions*, by A. W. Greely, 51st Cong., 2d sess., 1891, H. Ex. Doc. 287 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), 334-40. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo1.ark:/13960/t07w6zx3b.

constitute elements of its place-ness and, just like the development of the new houses caused by the city centre, originate from entirely separate locations; they too, in so far as the construction of the suburb as a place is concerned, are space. The specific examples of wind and wildlife also show that, insofar as we are concerned here purely with the formation of landscapes, the human-nature dichotomy is utterly immaterial: individual and social activity are just specific modes through which geography is shaped, and there is no need to distinguish them from non-human and environmental factors to understand space and place. Lefebvre likewise criticises the 'unjustified barriers between creation and production, nature and labour', but then formulates only a *social* space and neglects what makes space *per se*, inclusive of human and non-human factors.[39] Space is therefore the collective influence of innumerable other locations (whose remoteness means that they cannot exist here as place) on a particular geographical point, namely place. This in turn allows us to define place as the sum product of all the myriad spatial forces acting upon a given location.

Space is the fabric through which places materialise, and that fabric is nothing other than the objectified capacity of places to exceed their locationality, that which makes them place, and shape the world around them. 'Space is at once result and cause, product and producer.'[40] This interdependency of space and place, which are really two antithetical modes of geography – one that is disembodied, in motion, and *formative*, versus one that is material, static, and *formed*—allows us to see past the hierarchies in which the two concepts have been, as Agnew laments, unhelpfully and repeatedly situated by scholars.[41] We can see now that the subjectivists' treatment of space as a mere *tablua rasa* from which human experience creates place utterly ignores how a multitude of spatial factors—economic, environmental, cultural, and ideological—are actually the foundations for individual engagement with

[39] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 75.
[40] Ibid, 142.
[41] Agnew, 'Space: Place', 76-79 and 82-83.

geography. Conversely, economists and social critics responding to the modern globalised world are increasingly adopting a rigidly 'top-down' view, focusing only on spatial relations as though they emerge out of nothing, dismissing the role that places must continue to have in producing them.[42] Of this tendency, Agnew mourns that 'Place is dead'.[43] Space without place is as fanciful as levitation, while place without space is akin to being one's own creator. Robert Fairbanks II goes as far to say that this critical division over space and place is 'illustrative of a wider debate between the grand narratives of modernity and the fragmented localisms of postmodernity' – the former is the consequence of conceptualising space without place, and the latter place without space.[44] This illustrates the importance of moving past hierarchical formulations of space and place and instead approaching them dialectically as co-dependent pillars of geography.

Literature provides an ideal form through which to demonstrate and refine the spatial framework outlined above. Texts of any artistic or cultural medium record yet reduce otherwise ephemeral *place* and reveal but partition otherwise ubiquitous *space*. Because place is objectively unique to each point in time and space (meaning it vanishes the moment it materialises with the inexorable march of time) and is perceived subjectively by every individual, writing and other forms of representation allow a vision of place to be stored, defying its absolute transience, at the cost of its real totality: it is impossible to convey all the spatial agents that produce a particular place, so representations of it are condemned to be reductive to some extent. Likewise, space is imperceptible and hidden: writing, both in fiction and scholarly inquiry, communicates through words representing ideas rather than in physical

[42] See for example: Robert P. Fairbanks, II, 'A Theoretical Primer on Space.' *Critical Social Work* 4, no. 1 (2003). http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/a-theoretical-primer-on-space.
[43] Agnew, 'Space: Place', 77.
[44] Fairbanks, 'A Theoretical Primer'.

objects as is the 'language' of geography and nature. It can thus remove the veil of space at the cost of compartmentalising it, failing to convey that space comprises a multitude of overlapping structures and forces that cannot be isolated without blurring the window on the world. These reductions are not unique to fiction but rather inherent in any method of representation, and they are always political: 'maps and rational representations of space cause a way of being in the world to be forgotten, in that those with the power to map are oblivious to the operations of daily users'.[45] Take the example from which the present understanding of space and place was developed. 'City centre' and 'suburb' are labels that emphasise certain aspects of those locations while concealing others. Each subsequent provision of detail (the wind from the hills and the wildlife from the woods in this case) moves the representation ever closer to the real place, but it can only ever be an approximation. Unlike the real place, which is consigned to history as it inevitably changes over time, its portrayal in writing is a permanent record (casting aside for one moment questions of reading and interpretation). Likewise, writing enables otherwise hidden relations between two locations – economic development, the expanse of the ecosystem, and so on – to be laid bare while also being isolated from the multitude of other spaces that create place.

This dissertation apprehends its literary case study texts by broadly identifying which central objects and inhabitants in each of their landscapes are constructed as place and which are depicted as spaces. What in the geography of the text is present and material, and what is exceeding the bounds of its materiality to influence and shape other objects? By responding to this key overarching question, I untangle the social, political, and environmental implications of the landscapes in each literary work. The three novels that I have chosen each depict a different region of California and exemplify the different possible formulations of space and place. The first chapter discusses Jack London's *The Valley of the Moon* (1913), in

[45] Fairbanks, II. 'A Theoretical Primer on Space', 10.

which figures of authority function as spaces that reshape place according to their own interests, primarily and conspicuously through the act of looking. In the first half of the novel, such power is malevolently commanded along class lines, with the working-class protagonists Saxon Brown and Billy Roberts being constantly surveilled and thus regulated by the myriad watching eyes of industrial Oakland. They then quit the city to pursue an agrarian ideal in the Sonoma Valley, which renders them the ones who do the looking, becoming spaces that mould the environment according to (what the novel portrays as) a supposedly benevolent racial ideal of white separatism. I then study a novel that operates with the opposite spatial priorities: Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901), an epic on the dispossession of ranchers of the San Joaquin valley by the railway monopoly in the 1880s. Whereas London focuses on the experiences and perceptions of urban and rural places, Norris's more naturalist preoccupation is with the structures and forces, the *spaces*, that determine historical events. Using my geographical framework, I identify a commensurability, long neglected by critics, between the two ostensibly conflicting objects in the text: the farmers' wheat and the capitalists' railway. Each are spaces, and Norris's treatment of them as such constructs a worldview based neither on the division between worker and capitalist nor rural and urban but instead, more abstractly, geographical *effect* and *cause*. Having analysed one text focused on place and another in pursuit of ephemeral space, my final chapter explores a novel that synthesises the two, Mary Hunter Austin's *The Ford* (1917). Austin fictionalises the bitter water disputes between Los Angeles and the rural farming community of the Owens Valley in the Sierra Nevada. The text works towards a settlement between the two sides and more broadly a sustainable relationship between society and environment. This positive trajectory, I argue, is grounded in Austin's treatment of place as both a product and producer of space.

Chapter One

‘Oakland is just a place to start from’: seen and seeing in the San Francisco Bay Area of Jack London’s *The Valley of the Moon* (1913)

	Alberich:
(*lachend, unsichtbar*) …	(*laughing, invisible*) …
Überall weilt er nun,	Now he is everywhere,
euch zu bewachen;	watching and waiting;
Ruh’ und Rast	Rest and peace
ist euch zerronnen;	have melted away;
ihm müsst ihr schaffen,	you all must toil for him
wo nicht ihr ihn schaut;	where you cannot see him;
wo ihr nicht ihn gewahrt,	where from you he is hid,
seid seiner gewärtig:	from him you’re not hidden:
unterthan seid ihr ihm immer!	Slaves to him are you forever!

—The dwarf Alberich enslaves his kin with the power of invisibility bestowed by a magic helmet that he coerced them into crafting for him. Richard Wagner, scene three, *Das Rheingold*, prelude in the music drama tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.[1]

> [S]uch a climate [as California’s] permits one to be a great deal out of doors in the midst of nature. It permits wide views, where the outlines are vast and in general clear. … You get a sense of power from these wide views, a habit of personal independence from the contemplation of a world that the eye seems to own.

—Josiah Royce, ‘The Pacific Coast: A Psychological Study of the Relations between Climate and Civilization’, 1908.[2]

Echoing other contemporary reviews, *Punch* magazine concluded that Jack London’s 1913 novel *The Valley of the Moon* ‘is really two stories—one grim, one pleasant, both brilliantly successful’.[3] The ‘grim’ story occurs in the industrial city of Oakland, the ‘pleasant’ in the

[1] German text: Richard Wagner, ‘Das Rheingold’, in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1876), 42, https://www.loc.gov/item/2010657308. The English is based on: Charles Henry Meltzer trans., *Das Rheingold (The Rheingold). A Music-Drama in Four Scenes. Prelude to the Trilogy “Der Ring des Nibelungen” (The Nibelung’s Ring)* (New York: F. Rullman, 1904), 29, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uva.x004596356.
[2] In Josiah Royce, *Race Questions, Provincialism, and Other American Problems* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1908), 201-02. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/yale.39002000963265.
[3] Mr. Punch’s Staff of Learned Clerks, ‘Our Booking-Office’, *Punch* 146, 7 January 1914, 19. For more reviews of the novel, see Susan M. Nuernberg, ed., *The Critical Response to Jack London* (Westport, CT: 1995), 167-76.

titular rural utopia of Sonoma Valley.[4] Leaving the first for the second of those locations preoccupies the working-class protagonists, Saxon Brown and Billy Roberts, as their urban condition worsens. As a critic for *The Atlantic Monthly*, most likely Cornelia Comer, proclaimed, 'this book is a chapter from the pilgrimage of our nation back to the land'.[5]

London's bleak depiction of Oakland encompasses several locations, from the factory floor to the home, entertainment venues to the streets. What these diverse places share – the quality that incorporates them into and thus constitutes urban space – is surveillance. In the city, Saxon and Billy are ceaselessly *seen*. By regulating their interactions with the environment, this scrutiny appropriates the spatial agency of the protagonists, space being the influence of one place on another. Saxon and Billy therefore exist as places, instruments in larger relations: they enact the command of one space, the watching city, in service of another, capitalist production. This treatment of the urban as observed space largely obscures the Californian particularities of Oakland. Indeed, until the transformations wrought by the second world war, local histories concurred that it was a 'typical' industrial town.[6] In 1937, Gertrude Stein even jibed that 'there is no there there' in Oakland.[7]

An inversion of the urban visual relation demarcates the pastoral. By offering seclusion and sweeping views of their surroundings, the idyllic countryside transforms Billy and Saxon into the ones who *see*, inviting them to look upon, experience, and ultimately possess the landscape. Rather than the coercive force that the reader finds in the city, the environment in rural space is a material form, a place, to be shaped by the newly empowered

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[4] White Europeans erroneously translated the indigenous tribal name 'Sonoma' as 'valley of the moon': Erwin G. Gudde, *California Place Names: Origin and Etymology of Current Geographical Names* 4th ed, rev. by William Bright (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 370.
[5] [Cornelia Comer], 'Recent Reflections of a Novel-Reader', *Atlantic Monthly* 113 (April 1914), 494, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951d00192218t. Ellery Sedgwick III, grandson of the editor and owner of the *Atlantic* from 1908-38, attributes Comer as author in his literary biography of her and four other women contributors to the periodical in 'The American Genteel Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century', *American Studies* 25, no. 1 (1984), 66, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40641830.
[6] G. A. Cummings and E. S. Pladwell. *Oakland ....A History* (Oakland: Grant D. Miller, 1942), [preface].
[7] Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 289.

protagonists. This begins as fleeting encroachments of the utopian spatial other on Oakland. When Billy and Saxon finally leave the city, the narrative blossoms into a romance of rural California. Here the text more closely engages not only the region's physical specificities but also its intellectual culture, which idealised the agrarian interior in preference to the urban coast. The San Francisco-based economist Henry George identified land monopolisation, in particular the displacement of the settler-colonist 'pioneers' from the countryside into wage-labour in the city, as the cause of lamentable Gilded Age wealth inequality.[8] In correspondence, London can be found 'agreeing with [George's] destructive criticism while disagreeing with his constructive theorizing'.[9] At the turn of the century, Josiah Royce, the Californian-born philosopher, advocated 'provincialism', the return to small-scale, land-based communities.[10] In pursuing land ownership and subsistence farming, Saxon and Billy follow the ideas of these two central figures in Californian philosophy.[11]

The trajectory of the protagonists from *seen* urban objects to *seeing* pastoral subjects depends on the narrative's dogmatic belief in the supremacism of their Anglo-American heritage, which exemplifies the 'racial refinement from "white" to "Anglo-Saxon"' from the 1840s to the 1920s' in the United States.[12] Hence London christens the hero of the novel 'Saxon', for which he even congratulates himself through a secondary character quipping '"ain't it a scream of a name"'.[13] Stoddard Martin argues that this narrow formation of whiteness places the text more in a European tradition of racial theory in the vein of Richard

[8] Henry George, *Our Land and Land Policy, National and State* (San Francisco: White and Bauer, 1871), 44, https://archive.org/detail.s/ourlandandlandp00georgoog.
[9] Jack London to George P. Brett, 2 Dec. 1905, in *The Letters of Jack London. Vol. 1: 1896-1905*, edited by Earle Labor, Robert C. Leitz, III, and I. Milo Shepard (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 538. London's library attests to careful reading of George: David Mike Hamilton, *'The Tools of My Trade': The Annotated Books in Jack London's Library* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 7, 25, and 134.
[10] Royce, *Race Questions*, 55-67.
[11] George and Royce each figure prominently in Kevin Starr's history of the state, *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 134-41 and 140-71.
[12] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 41.
[13] Jack London, *The Valley of the Moon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 12. Subsequent references to this text in this chapter appear in parentheses.

Wagner than 'the multi-racial superego America went on to develop in the twentieth century'.[14] In the political lens of the novel, the visual subjugation of the protagonists in Oakland appears unjust because it violates not human rights but racial dignity, while the empowering gaze that they find in Sonoma Valley is a teleological, 'natural' inevitability. Racism in the novel shrouds Oakland in an ideological space, a counterpart to the place-making of industrial production and domestic containment.[15] Anglo-Saxon supremacism and class oppression clash and coalesce to form the visual power relations that define the city.

The visual formation of space, place, and race in *The Valley* are appropriately prefaced in its original serialised publication in *Cosmopolitan* by the preceding piece, a prose poem, 'Seeing the Unseen', about a new journalist with poor sight who, redolent of the blind prophets of ancient Greek mythology, glimpses what others fail to notice: 'his almost sightless eyes saw with crystalline vision the future, a future where health, happiness, justice, and love will prevail'.[16] As much is realised at the novel's end for those judged worthy, except the ultimate utopia is not simply perceived but *made* through looking.

The Valley of the Moon begins in the depths of industrial exploitation. In a steam laundry where women iron 'fancy starch' (3), an elderly worker collapses from exhaustion. Such an occurrence is unsurprising: a 1911 report on women workers found that experienced ironers 'universally show the effects of hard labor. The continued motion of the arms and the weight of the irons combined with the heat and steam make this work particularly exhausting'.[17]

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[14] Stoddard Martin, *California Writers: Jack London, John Steinbeck, the Tough Guys* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1983), 44.
[15] In reality, of course, Oakland was then and is now materially shaped by structural racism.
[16] Elbert Hubbard, 'Seeing the Unseen', *Cosmopolitan* 54, 1912-13, 579, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.c005276300?urlappend=%3Bseq=580.
[17] U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States* vol. 12, 61st Cong., 2d sess., S. Rep. 645 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 25-26, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31158003862298.

London depicts it as a purely economic incident, where the most urgent injury is the 'labor efficiency suffered' (3). Those closest to the commotion rush to 'the hot iron to save the cloth' before turning to their stricken co-worker (4). Once she is removed, 'drumming and shrieking', the sole remnant of her breakdown is the damaged means of production, 'the scorch of cloth drifting ominously through the air' (4). The unrelenting rhythm of work then resumes: 'the many irons rose and fell, the pace of the room in no wise diminished' (4).

The devotion of the ironers to their work is perfectly plausible given that they are paid by their output, not the hour, which entices more intense labour and greater profits.[18] A 1981 U.S. Institute of Medicine report speculates that 'employees with individual piece rates might be less disposed to help each other'.[19] So it is in the fictional laundry, where workers' 'quick glances at the sufferer … betray fears about losing money'.[20] Yet London states the method of renumeration only once in a passing reference to 'the piecework ironers', then later hints at it through workers vainly comparing their day's wages (5). The far more prominent disciplinary force is the forewoman, whose task is 'to keep work moving without delay'.[21] She 'hurried belligerently' to the collapse then 'strode the aisle with a threatening eye for incipient breakdown and hysteria' (4). The workers immediately obey her visual command: 'occasionally an ironer lost the stride for an instant, gasped or sighed, then caught it up again with weary determination' (4). In his handwritten manuscript, London wrote 'sad' before

[18] Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 692-700. A frequently cited study found piece wages boosted productivity by over 20% compared with time wages: Bruce Shearer, 'Piece Rates, Fixed Wages and Incentives: Evidence from a Field Experiment', *The Review of Economic Studies* 71, no. 2 (2004), 513-15, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3700636.
[19] National Research Council, *Research on Stress and Human Health: Report of a Study* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 1981), 101, doi:10.17226/19689.
[20] Jeanne Campbell Reesman, 'Jack London's New Woman in a New World: Saxon Brown Roberts' Journey into the Valley of the Moon', *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 24, no. 2 (1992), 46, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27746487.
[21] U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Vocational Education Survey of Minneapolis, Minn*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 330, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015067080989.

crossing it out and opting for ‘weary’, which better conveys the dehumanisation of the ironers.[22] Where people experience sadness, the tools of industry merely become worn.

By manging the tempo of ironing, the gaze of the forewoman commands the physical impacts of the workers on their surroundings. Given that ‘the only available starting point and obligatory point of passage for studying the emergence and germination of agency is that of material engagement’, surveillance oversees the appropriation by capital of not only the labour of the workers but also their spatial agency, the ability to make place.[23] This explains the disjuncture between action and *feeling*, body and *mind* of Saxon Brown when London introduces the ironer-protagonist: ‘Her movements were delicate, safe, and swift, *and though her face was wan with fatigue and exhausting heat*, there was no slackening in her pace’ (3, my emphasis). To quote from the title of a 1918 report on laundry conditions, London appraises the true ‘cost of clean clothes’ as the objectification of the workers into place: bodies commanded not by their own will but by the ‘eye’ of the forewoman, which turns the initial economic exchange of labour-power for wages into the space of production.[24]

The forewoman, absent in the author’s previous depiction of laundry work in his novel *Martin Eden* (1909), establishes how the gaze of an authority figure generates space and reduces subordinate bodies within it to places. London develops this theme later in the first of the novel’s three books. In a long dialogue, Saxon’s love interest, Billy Roberts, confesses to her his love of boxing but disdain for prizefighting, a distinction due squarely to the spectators. ‘“It ain’t the fightin’, it’s the fight crowds”’ (61). He recalls a bout with his old

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[22] Jack London, *The Valley of the Moon* original manuscript part I, p. 8, 17 July 1912 [date of completion], JL1368, vol. 31, Jack London Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, United States.
[23] Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris, ‘Material and Nonhuman Agency’, introduction to *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach*, eds. Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris (New York: Springer, 2008), xiv.
[24] Louis Israel Harris and Nelle Schwartz, *The Cost of Clean Clothes in Terms of Health: a study of laundries and laundry workers in New York City* (New York: Department of Health, 1918), https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo1.ark:/13960/t6qz2sm1f.

friend, Billy Murphy. After a ferocious yet amicable start, Roberts ducks too slowly from a hook aimed at his jaw and is hit on his head '"where the bone's thick"' (63). The impact smashes Murphy's thumb, which Roberts knew had always been prone to injury. Roberts pleads, '"I couldn't a-done that to Bill Murphy for a million dollars. It was a [*sic*] accident, just because I was slow, because I was born slow"' (63). Money alone may not win over Roberts' sporting principles, but the onlookers can. His opponent reduced to one hand, Roberts tries to spare Murphy further pain, but the crowd and referee scorn mercy. The former cry '"'Why don't you fight? … Go in an' finish 'm'"' and the latter warns '"'Fight, or I'll disqualify you'"' (64 and 65). With even Murphy urging '"'For God's sake finish me'"', Roberts throws the decisive, indefensible blow that knocks out his friend and commodifies himself. '"We've sold ourselves for a hundred bucks, an' we gotta deliver the goods"' (64).

As the forewoman does to the ironers, both crowd and referee scrutinise the boxers for deviations from their labour. So potent are the spectators that their every taunt proves a self-fulfilling prophecy, even if it undercuts the values they look to enforce. Responding to the slowdown after Murphy's injury, the crowd yells '"'Fake! Fake!'"' (64, 65), an accusation of veritable sacrilege given the faith among its followers and critics that the sport reveals a raw reality. 'Boxing fans remark that the prize ring reveals life the way it really is' notes Elliot J. Gorn, while Joyce Carol Oates polemicizes that 'professional boxing is the only major American sport whose primary, and often murderous, energies are not coyly defected by such artifacts as balls and pucks'.[25] The heckling crowd sways the boxers further from an authentic bout, a descent of sport into spectacle, fight into farce as Roberts explains:

> "Now suppose he an' me was boxin' for fun, out in the back yard, an' he hurts his thumb that way, why we'd have the gloves off in a jiffy an' I'd be putting cold compresses on that poor thumb of his an' bandagin' it that tight to keep the

[25] Elliott J. Gorn, 'The Manassa Mauler and the Fighting Marine: An Interpretation of the Dempsey-Tunney Fights', *Journal of American Studies* 19, no. 1 (1985), 27, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27554545; Joyce Carol Oates, 'The Cruelest Sport', *The New York Review of Books*, 13 February 1992, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1992/02/13/the-cruelest-sport.

> inflammation down. But no. This is a fight for fight-fans that's paid their admission for blood, an' blood they're goin' to get." (64)

The crowd's fallacious, self-negating identification of real boxing with pitiless violence reflects, as Marianne Doezema contends, the allure of virile prizefighting in an age where dominant ideas of masculinity seemed imperilled by the rise of nonmanual office work and the consolidation of the U.S.'s westernmost expanses.[26] The novel plunges those anxieties into their epicentre, a west coast city, where industrial reality shatters frontier mythology.

The implicit emasculation in the shouts of 'fake' is made plain when the crowd jeer: '"'Why don't you kiss 'm?' 'Lovin' cup for yours, Billy Roberts!'"' (64). Yet Roberts' testimony is indeed imbued with great fondness for Murphy from the moment he introduces '"the fifth fight of two lovin' men that just loved each other"' (62).[27] He continues, '"to look the eyes of a brave man that's sick with pain, an' love 'm, an' see love in them eyes of his, an' then have to go on givin' pain—call that sport?"' (64). To elicit our sympathies for the character, London inserts in his manuscript a tender image of Roberts' response after the match: '"I pick Bill up in my arms an' carry 'm to his corner, an' help bring 'm around"' (65).[28] The boxer's recollection concludes: the crowd '"pay their money an' they get their blood, an' a knockout. An' a better man than them, that I love, layin' there dead to the world with a skinned face on the mat"' (65). Roberts' frantic, retrospective insistence on his 'love' for Murphy atones for a betrayal partly incited by homophobic heckles directed at the pair in the first place. The crowd *perceives* a sham between two deeply affectionate boxers and in doing so *produces* that vision as a reality. Far exceeding the motive for a definitive result – 'the fight lacking a classic knockout seems unresolved, unfulfilled' – spectatorship reifies its

[26] Marianne Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 69-72.
[27] See for the homoerotic elements of the sport and its accompanying literature: Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*, updated ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 74-75 and 142.
[28] Jack London, *The Valley of the Moon* MS pt. II, p. 365, vol. 32, Jack London Papers, The Huntington Library.

subjective impressions of the match in the ring itself.[29] 'The purpose and circumstances of observation materially alter what is seen' writes David Lowenthal *of the viewing subject*, which the crowd omnipotently transmutes into the *object viewed*.[30]

The constitution of space through spectatorship is illustrated in perhaps the most iconic representation of boxing in U.S. culture (at least until the *Rocky* films), painter George Bellow's prizefighting series: *Club Night* (1907), *Both Members of This Club* (1909), and, most famous of all, *Stag at Sharkey's* (1909, fig. 1.1). The compositions of these pieces draw the viewer firmly to the boxing figures, who are thus made the primary figures, the spectacle,



Figure 1.1. George Bellows, *Stag at Sharkey's*, 1909, oil on canvas, 92 x 122.6 cm., Cleveland Museum of Art, http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1133.1922.

[29] Oates, 'The Cruelest Sport'.
[30] David Lowenthal, 'Geography, Experience, and Imagination: Towards a Geographical Epistemology', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 51, no. 3 (1961), 256, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2561658.

the *place* in the scene.[31] But, as Doezema observes, it is the crowd in the background that creates the claustrophobic, menacing environment for which Bellows' boxing works are so renowned.[32] Instead of 'a clear definition of the physical space' such as a discernible interior wall, the artist, increasingly in later works, shrouds the rear rows of spectators in a deepening gloom, blurring the distinction between crowd and space so that each envelops the other.[33] Bellows achieves in oil what London does through words. Both show that 'the atmosphere around the fighters is a lot more immoral than the fighters themselves'.[34] More significantly, London and Bellows each elevate the crowd from a place within to the *space of* the boxing scene. Anticipating the industrialisation of prizefighting into a mass spectator sport for 1920's consumer culture, their works are 'less about the fight than … about watching it'.[35]

The forewoman and the crowd each assimilate the laundry and the boxing ring into a space of surveilled locations. London extends this from an attribute of the workplace to the marker of the urban through Saxon's home, where the noise of her cohabiting brother and his wife Sarah arguing over their impoverishment spills into the exterior world. 'The light frame house leaked the noise hideously, and Saxon knew that the houses on either side of the street were hearing, and the street itself and the houses across the street' (57). The dissolution of the *private* into the *public* forms a distinct third space of exposure. The audible presence of Saxon's home infringes on the privacy of neighbouring houses and undermines public

[31] Michael Quick, 'Technique and Theory: The Evolution of George Bellow's Painting Style', in *The Paintings of George Bellows*, eds. Michael Quick, Jane Myers, Marianne Doezema, and Franklin Kelly (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 21-24.
[32] Doezema, *George Bellows*, 82-89. The significance of the crowd is likewise noted by John Fagg in his *On the Cusp: Stephen Crane, George Bellows and Modernism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 36.
[33] Doezema, *George Bellows*, 86.
[34] George Bellows to Katherine Hiller, 1910, quoted in *George Bellows and Urban America* by Marianne Doezema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 87.
[35] Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 241. See for relevant discussions of the development of boxing: Gorn, 'The Manassa Mauler', 28-32; Kathleen Drowne and Partick Huber, *The 1920s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 154-55.

character of the street. Conveying this feeling of urban density, London refutes the cultural and economic foundations of U.S. myths of California: spaciousness and land ownership.

The synthesis of public and private in working-class residential space regulates Saxon in her home just as the forewoman does in the laundry. It compels her to sacrifice the needs of her weary mind and body for the maintenance of the proletarian household. As her sister-in-law Sarah declines from quarrelling to breakdown, Saxon seems galvanised into providing aid by a cause *external from herself,* an impression that London took care to convey given his replacement of 'she wished to' by the imperative 'she must' in his manuscript draft:[36]

> Left to herself, Saxon worked with frantic haste, assuming the calm *she did not possess,* but which *she must* impart to the screaming bedlamite upon the floor. … *Every fibre rebelled*, almost in nausea; *yet she maintained cool control* and stroked Sarah's forehead and hair with slow, soothing movements. (57, my emphases)

Neither does Saxon's compulsion to attend to the ailing Sarah derive from another person. 'Left to herself' punctuates the departure of Sarah's husband, the only man in the scene, once the breakdown began and the consequent gendering of domestic labour as a woman's burden. Nothing then remains to instil the 'calm she did not possess' or pacify her 'every fibre [that] rebelled' except the *space* itself, which threatens Saxon with the possibility that a neighbour or passer-by will hear, know, and judge the crisis of her household. The exposure of the domestic extorts from Saxon a 'second shift', the unpaid labour ('Saxon *worked*') of home care as a ransom for her imperilled social respectability: hence the sound of the breakdown 'leaked … hideously' (57), the adverb invoking public appearance and reputation.[37] To the discomfort of its inhabitants, 'the light frame house' (57) is doubly accommodating to capital, once as an economised exchange value and again in the ongoing dividends of its use value;

[36] Jack London, *The Valley of the Moon* MS pt. II, p. 229, vol. 32, Jack London Papers, The Huntington Library.
[37] Arlie Hochschild coined the term 'second shift' in her and Anne Machung's, *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Penguin, 2003).

the inferior structure is a cheap construction as well as a porous boundary for exterior to encroach on interior and with it public upon private, work on home, toil upon rest.

The regulatory power of domestic space depends on Saxon knowing that events inside are audible to surrounding places; it lacks the presence of a forewoman or spectators. Despite this disembodied influence of the environment on the protagonist, London avoids the mechanistic view of the subject as a product of external forces, unlike much literary naturalism as Ronald Martin despairs.[38] The novelist instead reveals Saxon's *internalisation* of urban scrutiny. He takes us to her most intimate location, where she gets ready to meet Billy after helping Sarah:

> In her bedroom Saxon completed her dressing, for an instant stepping upon a chair so as to glimpse critically in the small wall mirror the hang of her readymade linen skirt. This, and the jacket, she had altered to fit, and she had double-stitched the seams to achieve the coveted tailored effect. Still on the chair, all in the moment of quick clear-seeing, she drew the skirt tightly back and raised it. The sight was good to her, nor did she under-appraise the lines of slender ankle above the low tan tie; nor did she under-appraise the delicate yet mature swell of calf outlined in the fresh brown of a new cotton stocking. … [She] delayed a moment longer to put on her tan lisle-thread gloves. Once, in the fashion page of a Sunday supplement, she had read that no lady ever put on her gloves after she left the door. (58)

London stresses the socially-constituted aspects of Saxon's reflection by laying bare the manufacture of her garments – 'readymade', 'altered to fit', 'double-stitched', 'new cotton', 'lisle-thread'. He likewise describes the discerning gaze of the protagonist in terms evocative of social relations. To 'glimpse *critically*' connotes judgement as a specialised occupation administering culturally-specific tastes, while the twice-repeated 'under-appraise' implies economic valuation.[39] The author most explicitly identifies the social origin of the beauty standards to which Saxon aspires when he refers to fashion trends, 'the coveted tailored

[38] Ronald E. Martin, *American Literature and the Universe of Force* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981), xiv. He levels this criticism against London, branding him an environmental determinist, on 196-97.
[39] Raymond Williams intimates that 'criticism' and its lexical relatives ('critic' and 'critical') articulate the implicitly bourgeois aesthetic and artistic identities of society in his *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Society and Culture*, new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 48.

effect' and the heeded advice of 'the fashion page of a Sunday supplement'. All this follows the established paradigm of visual power in the novel. Looking and seeing, with which the populous city is so replete, impose hegemonic social interests on the environment and its inhabitants, thereby assuming the position of place-making space. The internalisation of that process signifies the extent of 'the urbanization of the consciousness'.[40] So far, the domestic settings in the novel have firmly established the first element in London's typical narrative structure, which Christopher Gair identifies is 'the fear of containment and the struggle to locate a space in which individual identity can be asserted'.[41]

More complexly, the mirror scene also anticipates the second part of the storytelling pattern that Gair notes, if not an 'assert[ion]' then at least the suggestion of 'individual identity'.[42] Both object viewed (Saxon in the mirror) and viewing subject (Saxon looking at the mirror) possess elements that feel untouched by urban space and social regulation. Underneath the clothes that he so accentuates the fabrication of, London depicts a body that, while conforming to cultural ideals, appears effortlessly and inherently formed.[43] Absent from Saxon's preparation to meet Billy is any beauty regimen that a contemporary woman might undertake before such a romantic encounter, the late-1900s and early 1910s having witnessed the development of a mass market for cosmetics in the U.S.[44] Contrasting her meticulously adjusted garments, the work that we see Saxon apply to her body is cursory: 'she rubbed her cheeks quickly and fiercely to bring back the color Sarah had driven out of them' (58). Also omitted are physical symptoms of her strenuous occupation, her brief pallor aside. A physician in 1911 reported the litany of dire ailments that afflicted experienced

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[40] David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), ch. 5, 250-76.
[41] Christopher Gair, 'The disappearing Other: Exoticism and destruction in Jack London's South Sea writings', in *Writing and Race*, ed. Tim Youngs (London: Longman, 1997), 257.
[42] Ibid.
[43] London more explicitly articulates this dichotomy of manufactured clothes versus natural body when he writes that Billy 'radiate[s] muscular grace through the ungraceful man-garments of civilization' (13).
[44] Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 97-99..

ironers: synovitis in the dominant arm, paraesthesia in the fingers, gastric ulcer from poor posture, flatfoot, and a displaced kidney from use of a foot lever.[45] Not in Saxon's 'slender ankle' or 'delicate yet mature swell of calf' can one find the onset of any such condition.

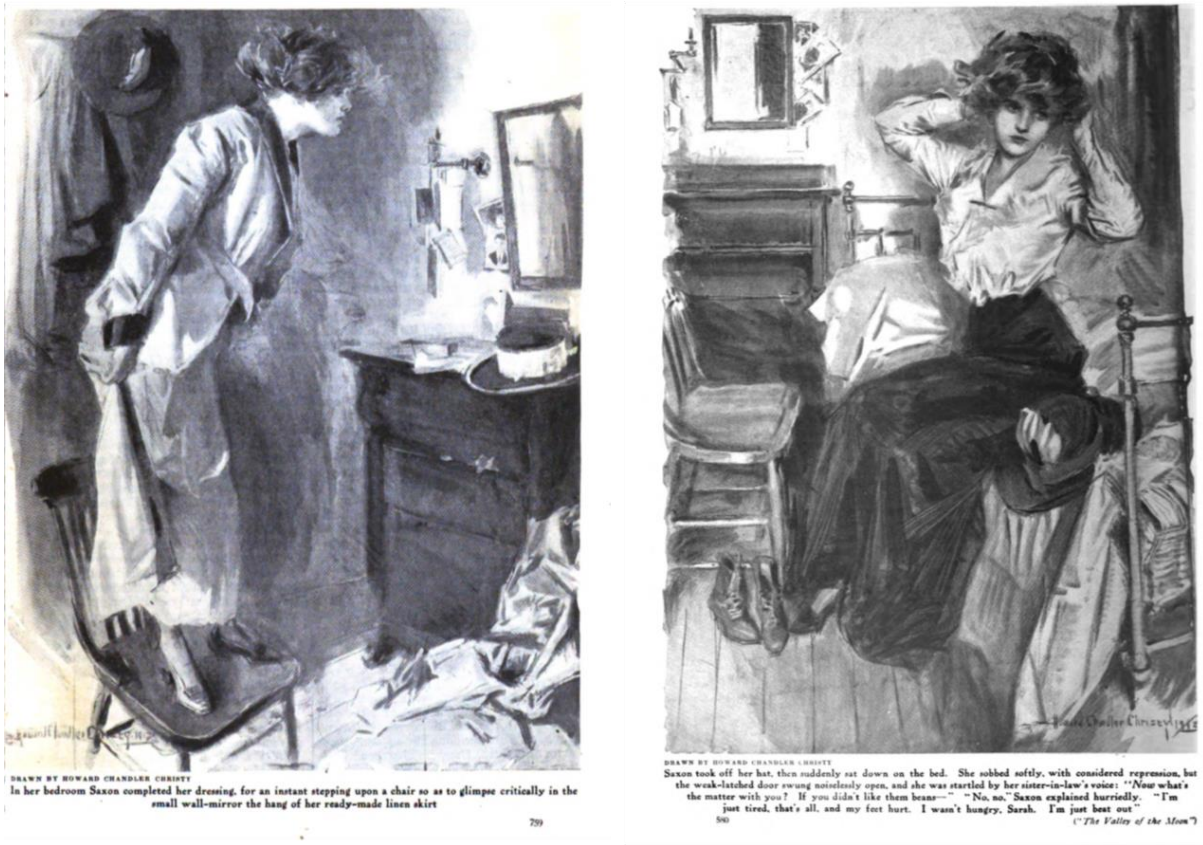
The fanciful description of Saxon's immaculate body hardly seems attributable to an aversion to frank portrayals of female physicality. The mirror scene exemplifies what Reesman praises as the novel's 'straightforward detailing of the woman's consciousness of sexuality'.[46] In tension with the formalistic adverb, 'to *glimpse* critically' sets a bashful mood and fleeting temporality, enticing more risqué play: 'all in the moment of quick clear-seeing, she drew the skirt tightly back and raised it'. In Henri Lefebvre's sense of the term, it really is a 'moment', an 'experience in everyday life that provides an immanent critique of the everyday' through 'vivid sensations of disgust, of shock, of delight'.[47] Just as the revealed body is untouched by rituals of female beauty culture and realities of working-class life, so too its admirer is uninhibited in exploring her sexual sense of self, the epitome of a Lacanian interaction between subject and their mirror-image.[48] Going further than the 'conceptual conflation between women's bodies and domestic interiors that was prevalent in the industrial age', the frolic of Saxon and her reflection (two distinct places) establishes a momentary space (the relation between those two places) which substitutes for what the dysfunctional dwelling and the city outside both fail to provide: privacy, intimacy, affection, and pleasure.[49]

The liberational sublime in Saxon is based in a fervent ideology. It is not gender, for if anything London slightly masculinises the protagonist's features, the swell of calf being

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[45] U.S. Dpt. of Commerce and Labor, *Report on Condition of Woman* vol. 12, 25-26.
[46] Reesman, 'Jack London's New Woman', 43.
[47] Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 115.
[48] Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 1-7.
[49] Beverly Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age', *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 4, 'Gendered Spaces and Aesthetics' (1996), 281, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1215239.

'mature' as well as 'delicate'. Clarice Stasz argues and Reesman concurs that Saxon embodies London's preference for androgynous heroes, especially with women.[50] This is rather obscured in the serialisation of the novel in *Cosmopolitan,* where Howard Chandler Christy's full-page illustrations, brimming with the 'delicate' but void of the 'mature', feminise the protagonist, not only in this mirror scene (fig. 1.2) but at the start of the novel (fig. 1.3).[51] London claimed to take 'delight' in the 'splendid' images, though he was writing to Christy and his judgement might have been clouded regardless by the recent removal of his appendix.[52] In full health and to other recipients, London was less flattering about the



Figures 1.2 and 1.3. Howard Chandler Christy, (left) 'In her bedroom Saxon completed her dressing…' and (right) 'Saxon took off her hat, then suddenly sat down on the bed. …', *Cosmopolitan* 54, 1912-13, 759 and 580, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.c005276300.

[50] Clarice Stasz, 'Androgyny in the Novels of Jack London', *Western American Literature* 11, no. 2 (1976), 127, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43017925, 121-33; Reesman, 'Jack London's New Woman', 43-44.
[51] See for the publication history of the novel up to 1966, which includes translations into eighteen different languages: Hensley C. Woodbridge, John London, and George H. Tweney *Jack London: A Bibliography* (Georgetown, CA: Talisman Press, 1966), 114-18.
[52] Jack London to Howard Chandler Christy, 16 July 1913, in *The Letters of Jack London* vol. 3, *1913-1916*, eds. Earle Labor, Robert C. Leitz, III, and I. Milo Shepard (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 1206.

illustrator.[53] But what these images do share with the text is Saxon's untainted, ideal, and 'natural' appearance. The defiance of industrial realities by the body of the protagonist derives from racial supremacy, which London brazenly articulates at the beginning of the novel's next book. 'She was a flower of Anglo-Saxon stock, a rarity in the exceptional smallness and fineness of hand and foot and bone and grace of flesh and carriage—some throwback across the face of time to the foraying Norman-French that had intermingled with the sturdy Saxon breed' (104-5). Connecting the protagonist to some mythic past, Anglo-American supremacism functions as an ideological space which, in the rationale of the narrative, resists the ultimate ambition of urban surveillance: the total urbanisation of consciousness and creation of self-regulating industrial subjects.

London first indicates the racial identity of Saxon, aside from her name, when he introduces her bedroom. In it is a 'very ancient chest of drawers' which 'Saxon had known … all her life': 'it had crossed the plains with her people in a prairie schooner. … One end was cracked and dented from the capsize of the wagon in Rock Canyon. A bullet hole, plugged, in the face of the top drawer, told of the fight with the Indians at Little Meadow' (6). The narrator idolises the furniture as the objectification, the place, of a different time and space where the immediacy of the colonial project supposedly gave settlers a sense of purpose and belonging. Identification with an imagined racial heritage sets the protagonist apart from her economic kin. Of 61 hand ironers interviewed for the previously cited 1911 study of women laundry workers, just three identified as 'English' and two 'American'.[54]

On only their second meeting, Saxon's acquaintance with Billy Roberts brings the racialized nostalgia out of the bedroom. She explains to him that '"the Saxons were a race of

[53] Jack London to Alexander G. Cotter, 18 June 1915 and Jack London to Ethelda Hesser, 21 September 1915, in *The Letters of Jack London* vol. 3, 1471 and 1503.
[54] U.S. Dpt. of Commerce and Labor, *Report on Condition of Woman* vol. 12, 45-50. It is unclear whether 'American' refers to Indigenous or U.S.-born.

people … They were wild, like Indians, only they were white. And they had blue eyes, and yellow hair, and they were awful [awe-inspiring] fighters"' (17). Their affection for one another quickly develops through this shared racial identification. She says to him '"We're both old American stock. And if you aren't a Saxon there never was one—your hair, your eyes, your skin, everything. And you're a fighter, too"' (19).[55] When their friend remarks on their instinctive rapport, Saxon replies that she and Billy '"knew each other longer than [a week] … Before ever we were born our folks were walkin' across the plains together"' (19). Though entirely imagined, the past invented by her supremacist politics greatly modifies the experience of her present place, rendering her and Billy's first meeting a spiritual reunion. Signalling the racial destiny of the protagonists' forthcoming marriage, this early passage in the novel justifies Stoddard Martin's view that 'London is Wagnerian in his romanticism … like Sieglinde to Siegmund, London's women provide the spark to his heroes' heroism'.[56]

The sense of injustice and indignation at the surveillance of the protagonists is developed as much from the relative inferiority of those doing the looking as any moral objection to social oppression or economic exploitation in principle. It is London's effort to reconcile the characters' proclaimed racial supremacy on the one hand and their class subordination on the other. Antithetically to the Anglo-American masculine ideal that he embodies and which he identifies in his opponent, Billy Roberts lengthily denigrates the spectators of his ill-fated boxing match as not merely cowardly and unmanly, a gendered inadequacy, but also as subhuman, with a fixation on 'blood' suggestive of biological racism.

> "them, that couldn't take just one stiff jolt or hook to the stomach … without the blood of a shrimp in their bodies." (61)
>
> "them sickenin', sap-headed stiffs, with the grit of rabbits and the silk of mangy ki-yi's, a-cheerin' me—*me!*" (61, original emphasis)

[55] Reminiscent of the boxer in Gorn's study
[56] Martin, *California Writers*, 34.

> "I'd sooner fight before broke-down old plugs of work horses that's candidates for chicken meat, than before them rotten bunches of stiffs with nothin' thicker'n water in their veins … booze-guzzlin' stiffs that'd be afraid to mix it with a sick cat, not fit to hold the coat of any decent man, think of them a-standin' up on their hind legs an' yellin' an' cheerin' me—*me!*—" (61, original emphasis)
>
> "They ain't men. They're wolves." (64)
>
> "…all the wolves in the house snarlin'." (65)
>
> "…a bunch of stiffs I'd be ashamed to wipe my feet on." (65)

The humorous hyperbole belies an insidious grading of humanity which crowns Billy '"the master of other men"' as Saxon at one point admiringly remarks of him (52). Coercive spectatorship of the boxer traces its iniquity not to the merciless and selfish character of the crowd but the deeper contravention of a supposedly primal racial order.

Obvious then who would be a worthy witness to the boxer's fighting prowess. He confides to Saxon: '"Why, honest, now, I'd sooner fight before an audience of one—you, for instance, or anybody I liked. It'd do me proud"' (61). When he later repeats that '"I'd just like you to see me fight some time … I'd be proud to death to do it for you"' (70), Billy also proves Stasz's point about London's 'androgynous' women heroes.[57] Saxon's companionship fulfils what male company offers: '"I never wanted to fight before a woman in my life. They'd squeal and screech an' don't understand. But you'd understand"' (70). The text thus finds Anglo-Saxon supremacism liberatory on two counts. First, racial kinship promises to overcome the cultural aspects of the gender divide between men and women. Later, Billy even exhibits his boxing skill on an enthusiastic Saxon, tapping her with 'the slightest flick of a tap' that elicits in her momentary paralysis and blindness (362-63), exemplifying how 'London's heroines are roughed up and love every minute of it'.[58] Second, Billy imagines that racial homogeneity would gratify both audience and himself as boxer, viewer and

[57] Stasz, 'Androgyny', 121-33.
[58] Like many scholars of London, Starr finds biographical corroboration for his reading, noting 'one of Charmian's wifely duties was to put on the gloves' and box with the author. Starr, *Americans*, 236.

viewed, categories that correspond to consumer and producer, employer and worker. Anglo-Saxonism never claims to eliminate those relations but simply to make them irrelevant.[59]

Saxon's sister-in-law Sarah (who suffers the previously discussed breakdown) is introduced like the crowd as a 'lesser' character; 'the rickety house shook to a heavy, prideless tread, and through the inner door came Sarah, middle-aged, lop-breasted, hair-tousled, her face lined with care and fat petulance' (6). Sarah's inferiority – her unideal body, her 'prideless' demeanour in contrast to the 'proud' and 'pride' that describe Billy and Saxon – is at this stage only implicitly innate.[60] It gradually becomes racialized. Her insistence that Saxon ought to settle for the cruel Charley Long instead of Billy betrays an indifference to the racial kinship between the protagonists which, in the logic of the novel, sanctifies their union. Antithetically to the novel's construction of Anglo Saxons as a migratory (more accurately, imperialist) people, 'so habitual was [Sarah] that any change in the customary round assumed the proportions of a revolution' (88).[61] Thus when Saxon in the first chapter, 'took a mouthful of the cold tea that had been steeped so long that it was like acid in her mouth, and … *under the eye* of her sister-in-law, she swallowed it' (6, my emphasis), the author positions surveillance along a racial axis. By compelling Saxon to cohabit with her, urban industrial life enables Sarah, like the crowd does with Billy, to defy a supposed racial order through unremitting watching, judging, and controlling of her superior sister-in-law.

Despite the contented point on which the first book of the novel ends, the newlywed Billy and now pregnant Saxon cannot for long exist at once as proletariat and Anglo-Saxon, wage-

[59] Martin expounds the political utility of Anglo-Saxon supremacism in the novel in *California Writers*, 43-45.
[60] Billy and Saxon are described as 'proud' or 'pride' on: 32, 52, 61, 70, 79, 88, 195. In the second book of the novel where economic pressures cause Billy to decline the narrator states that 'he lost his own pride' (180).
[61] The author later writes of Anglo-Saxons, '"we've wandered all over the world, licking the world. On the sea, on the land, it's all the same. Look at Lord Nelson, look at Davy Crockett, look at Paul Jones, look at Clive, an' Kitchener, an' Fremont, an' Kit Carson, an' all of 'em"' (213).

slave and 'master race', even though each draws on the other for self-definition in the narrative.[62] The text's racial supremacism uses economic exploitation to claim that whiteness is wrongly and *unnaturally* disenfranchised, while its conception of the proletariat excludes non-Anglo-American labourers, whom London represents as either class traitors in the case of 'non-union Italians' (171) or, as with Portuguese (246-50), 'brown-skinned' (253), and East Asian (294-5) immigrant labourers, so abnormally productive that they seem more akin to machines supplanting the humanised, white native-born worker.[63]

The second book plays out the antagonism between class oppression and racial supremacism, which concludes with the triumph of the former. A long, riotous industrial strike drives Billy to alcohol, a month-long jail term, and a return to prizefighting. From deprived to depraved, Billy now revels in the corrosive limelight of the ring. '"Terror [his opponent] had come across to my corner an' was standin' with his hands down, lookin' at me. The referee was lookin' too, an' the house was that quiet, lookin', you could hear a pin drop. … 'Watch me', says I. … th[e] crowd goes crazy."' (186). No longer does London treat Billy's race as inalienably superior, the visual power of urban space having enveloped the boxer and reduced him to the level of the spectators yearning for violence. The racial kinship that backed his relationship with Saxon is fractured, the narrator informing us that '*This Billy was not the Billy she had loved*. This Billy was another man, a sick man' (181). He even reprises Sarah's incursion on and surveillance of the home, 'so radical was the change in him that he that he seemed an intruder in the house … Another man looked out of his eyes' (180). But, with the determinism of literary naturalism that Martin criticises, the narrative absolves

[62] The master and slave being the archetypal dialectic: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, 'Self-Sufficiency and Non-Self-Sufficiency of Self-Consciousness; Mastery and Servitude', in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 108-17. The use of enslavement to illustrate dialectics ought to be attributed as much to history as to Hegel, the Haitian revolution having concluded just three years before publication of *The Phenomenology* and influenced its author, as Susan Buck-Morss argues in her 'Hegel and Haiti', *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000), 821-65, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1344332.
[63] See for the novel's Anglo-Saxon supremacism and anti-immigrant politics: Martin, *California Writers*, 43-44.

Billy and in turn his Anglo-Saxon heritage of culpability for his decline.[64] He is 'no more to be held responsible than a fever patient in the ravings of delirium … If fault there was, it lay elsewhere, in the tangled scheme of things that made men snarl over jobs like bones' (181).

Saxon is not immune from their worsening circumstances. After strikers violently demonstrate, she endures 'the hell of pain that is given to women alone to know' and loses her baby (154). Given ethnic 'futurity' is a foundation of racial supremacism, the miscarriage proves the city is unliveable for the protagonists insofar as they are 'Anglo-Saxons'. From the start of its statehood, California enshrined these anxieties in a series of 'anti-miscegenation' statutes that prohibited white people (including Mexicans) from marrying those of Black (1850), Asian (1905), or eventually Indonesian and Malaysian (1933) heritages.[65] Overseeing the stillbirth, urban space appears in its preferred regulatory guise, looking:

> [Saxon] was surprised to see [her neighbour] Mercedes regarding her with questioning, searching eyes. … Many faces were about her—Mercedes, Mrs. Olsen, Maggie Donahue. … Then appeared the fat, comfortable face of Martha Skelton, and, later, Doctor Henley came. Once, in a clear interval, through the thin wall Saxon heard the high opening notes of Mary's hysteria. (154)

The 'push' factors of their migration now firmly established, all that the protagonists need now is to be made conscious of an alternative to industrial Oakland and realise Lefebvre's dictum that 'to change life … we must first change space'.[66] London does this through the subversion and the inversion of urban visual power: the former challenges the authorities who do the regulatory looking, while the latter expands and empowers the gaze of the protagonists, placing them where the San Francisco Bay Area offers the widest vantage points. Both cases permit the symbolic intrusion of the spatial other in the city. Such apparitions become transcendent 'moments', to draw once more on Lefebvre's use of the

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[64] Martin, *American Literature*, xiv. Stasz notes Billy here 'behaves more mechanically' in: 'Androgyny', 127.
[65] The Perez v. Sharp California supreme court case finally overturned these laws in 1948. Peggy Pascoe devotes a chapter to placing such legislation in the regional context of the American West in her *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 77-108. Citation for the laws themselves.
[66] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 190.

term, interspersed in the narrative. Those instances are initially fleeting and mundane: the old west in the chest of drawers, the natural beauty embodied by Saxon's mirror-image, the escapism in her and Billy's bonding over shared racial identification. Gradually, such sublime 'moments' become greater in duration and scale and are increasingly derived from the landscape itself. Here the novel begins to engage the specificities of its California setting.[67]

On the protagonists' first venture out of the city in chapter nine of the first book, London immediately makes use of the topography of the Bay Area, highlighting the 'divide of the Contra Costa hills' that separates the urban East Bay and San Francisco to the west from the 'green and sunny stillness of Redwood Canyon' to the east (69). With Billy and Saxon now on the latter side of that natural partition, the author introduces a new visual relationship between subject and environment, a 'trickle of *unseen* water' (69, my emphasis). In a narrative where looking has been in support of economic exploitation, 'unseen' is almost synonymous with nonindustrial, hence Saxon's declaration that '"it makes me want to live in the country"' (69). The land, virginial and secluded, offers itself to the protagonists, who have become accustomed to the city where home, work, and leisure are all shared and surveilled. London swiftly racializes this primal topophilia, to use Yi-Fu Tuan's term for 'the affective bound between people and place or setting'.[68] When Billy generalises, '"Folks wasn't made to live in cities"', Saxon, exhibiting her stronger sense of racial self, qualifies '"Not our kind, at least"' (71). Indeed, Saxon is the one who apprehends and comprehends these sublime views, justifying Reesman's claim that 'the focus throughout the novel is on Saxon Brown Roberts; we see through her eyes and hear through her ears'.[69] London envisioned the story as such, writing in two separate pitches of the novel to his publisher at

[67] 'The fiction [London] did set in the Bay Area made only routine explorations of locale. What he does make of California is usually in the order of dream or vision.' Starr, *Americans*, 217.
[68] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 4.
[69] Reesman, 'Jack London's New Woman', 43.

MacMillan and editor at *Cosmopolitan* that 'the woman gets the vision. She is the guiding force'.[70] Indeed, the back to the land themed clippings that London kept in preparation for drafting *The Valley* included one article written by and another centred on a woman.[71]

The *natural* topography restores to the protagonists what urban space has denied and turned against them: the empowered act of looking. Looking eastward towards the countryside, in the direction that her settler-colonial parents came from, Saxon melancholically glimpses the extremities of her idyllic existence: 'she gazed sadly away across the fields until her eyes came to rest on a fence bright-splashed with poppies at its base' (75). With 'away' suggesting a spatial and temporal departure and 'to rest' indicating arrival at home, the site of recuperation, Saxon's eye embarks on a journey across the landscape from its raised position on the hill that anticipates her later travel. In the opposite direction, elevated topography reveals the true nature of the Californian city, 'burgeoning against the backdrop of Eden'.[72] For the first time, the urban conglomeration is apprehended at once. 'The smoke of Oakland filled the western sky with haze and murk, while beyond, across the bay, they could see the first blinking lights of San Francisco' (77). The view reduces the substance of the protagonists' industrial toil to mere air and light pollution, diminishing the urban from a potent space into a single expanse to be gazed upon by Billy and Saxon.

As if to laud the nature of the Bay Area while rebuking its urbanity – commending what California inherently is as opposed to what it has become – London later places Saxon at sea level. Dazed and exhausted, her husband incarcerated, Saxon collects driftwood by the

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[70] Jack London to George P. Brett, 30 May 1911 and Jack London to Roland Phillips, 30 May 1911, in *The Letters of Jack London* vol. 2, *1906-1912*, eds. Earle Labor, Robert C. Leitz, III, and I. Milo Shepard, 1008 and 1009. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. Reesman quotes the former in her 'Jack London's', 43.
[71] Mary Rankin Cranston, 'My Beginning as a Farmer', *Collier's* 47, no. 25, 9 September 1911, 21 and Le Roy Armstrong, 'The Man Who Came Back', *The Saturday Evening Post*, 12 November 1910, 12-15 and 38-42, in Manuscripts: *The Valley of the Moon*, JL1369, box 103, Jack London Papers, The Huntington Library.
[72] Martin, *California Writers*, 16.

shore, a familiar ritual of peasantry in the capitalist world. She is jealous of a passing fishing vessel for it 'was not tied always to one place' (208).[73] Her Melvillian impulse for seafaring ('nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little') is satisfied when a young boy in a boat, Jack, who stands in for the author himself, offers to take her aboard as rats scurry about her feet (209-10).[74] Saxon replies '"Anywhere"' to Jack's prompt '"Where d'ye want me to land you?"' (210) and then the reader is told that the small boat appealed to her' because 'like the ships she had envied, it was outbound' (211). Despite this ostensible desire to meander, be lost and placeless, the narrative depends on the particularities of the San Francisco Bay. When Saxon asks Jack '"What do you want"', the boy responds:

> Turning his head slowly, he followed the skyline, pausing especially when his eyes rested landward on the brown Contra Costa hills, and seaward, past Alcatraz, on the Golden Gate. The wistfulness in his eyes was overwhelming and went to her heart.
> "That," he said, sweeping the circle of the world with a wave of his arm. (212)

Instead of the constraints of being watched, the panorama instils Jack with a boundless freedom. Whereas urbanity confines the subject to their immediate vicinity, the bay is a lookout, a place characterised by the ability to see other locales. When a ferryboat passes and 'the passengers … crowded to one side to watch' Jack and Saxon (214), the gaze proves impotent; in the open water, beyond the city and its capitalist economy, a natural order prevails: 'nothing seemed artificial. There were no men there, no laws nor conflicts of men. The tide flowed and ebbed; the sun rose and set … Everything ran with frictionless order. Everything was free' (202). In such a natural setting, the supposed 'master race', embodied by Jack and Saxon, assumes its seat at the head of the human hierarchy.[75]

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[73] Karl Marx's first forays into political economy were articles on the imprisonment of peasants who took unclaimed wood from the Provincial Assembly of the Rhine in the 1840s: 'Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly. Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood', *Rheinische Zeitung*, nos. 298, 300, 303, 305, and 307, 25 October – 3 November, 1842, quoted in *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, vol. 1, *Karl Marx 1835-43*, trans. Clemens Dutt (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 224-63.
[74] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 3.
[75] Martin, *California Writers*, 63.

It is easy to dismiss this 'moment' of Saxon with Jack in the boat as another chauvinistic passage of Anglo-American supremacism over which the two characters bond, especially given the imperialistic undertones in Jack's enthusiasm for exploration:

> "Don't you sometimes feel you'd die if you didn't know what's beyond them hills an' what's beyond the other hills behind them hills? An' the Golden Gate! There's the Pacific Ocean beyond, and China, an' Japan, an' India, an' … an' all the coral islands. You can go anywhere out through the Golden Gate—to Australia, to Africa, to the seal islands, to the North Pole, to Cape Horn. Why, all them places are just waitin' for me to come an' see 'em." (212)

Jack certainly makes the case for the strategic importance of the San Francisco Bay Area to U.S. ambitions for expanding its sphere of influence 'into the void Pacific', as Andrew Shanken, borrowing D.H. Lawrence's Eurocentric phrase, titled his study of the region's westward projection of cultural power in the 1939 World's Fair.[76] The boy's ostensibly hyperbolic warning that not exploring would make one 'feel you'd die' is quite rational insofar as Saxon shares his racial identification, which is built on travel and conquest.

But for all this imperial excitement for westward exploration, the narrative ultimately declines to 'go anywhere out through the Golden Gate' as so many of London's most famous novels do. Instead, Billy and Saxon go eastward, reliving the settler-colonial quest of their ancestors, when 'tailors left their irons cold, launderers left their tubs dry … all became prospectors'.[77] Frank Norris, another Anglo-Saxon supremacist of Californian literature, had earlier predicted that the closure of the frontier would merely preceded its backwash: 'we have not lost the Frontier … We must look for the lost battle-line not toward the sunset, but

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[76] Andrew M. Shanken, *Into the Void Pacific: Building the 1939 San Francisco World's Fair* (Berkeley: University of California, 2014), 10-12. D.H. Lawrence originally remarked that 'California is a queer place – in a way, it has turned its back on the world, and looks into the void Pacific: D.H. Lawrence to John Middleton Murray, 24 September 1923, in *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. 4, *June 1921 – March 1924*, eds. Warren Roberts, James T. Boulton and Elizabeth Mansfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 502.
[77] Joseph Gaer, ed., *Bibliography of California Literature. Fiction of the Gold-Rush Period. Drama of the Gold-Rush Period. Poetry of the Gold-Rush Period* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 4.

toward the East'.[78] But whereas Norris, a more textbook naturalist, sees that retrograde motion as an inevitable course of 'natural forces … alternate—action first, then reaction', the journey of London's protagonists toward the interior seems the product of their own will.[79] The Bay offers to Saxon a microcosm of possible directions for Anglo-American futurity but does not prescribe a course for her to take. Unlike in the city, the landscape respects Saxon's spatial agency, approaching her almost as a map would its user; the landscape as it appears to her from the boat is formed not only by 'nature' but by a deeply political act of authorship.

The protagonists' pursuit of the rural interior stems from not only nature's inversion but also its *subversion* of urban visual power. At the end of the first book, London imitates the opening of the novel, taking the reader to the laundry where, as before, 'elderly women gasped and sighed' (92). Once more 'the tireless, vigilant forewoman kept a sharp lookout for incipient hysteria' (92). London sets up a repeat of the first chapter, even describing how the forewoman removed a young labourer on the brink of 'collapse' (92). The start of the next sentence shocks but does not surprise: 'Saxon was startled by the wildest scream of terror she had ever heard' (92). But therein the slightest deviation from our expectations. Though the first chapter also has 'wild' (3) and 'shrieking', here those images are superlatives, 'wild*est*' and '*ever heard*'. This faintest spark of departure from the repetitive order of industrial work detonates in the next sentence. 'The tense thread of human resolution snapped; wills and nerves broke down, and a hundred women suspended their irons, or dropped them' (94). The cause of the chaos then appears, 'a strange black animal flapping great claw-like wings' (92), which flies from one ironer to another, prompting each to either scream or collapse, utterly demolishing the once irresistible visual regime. '"It's only a bat!" the forewoman shouted.

[78] Frank Norris, 'The Frontier Gone at Last: How our race pushed it westward around the world and now moves eastward again – the broader conception of patriotism as the age of conquest ends', *World's Work* 3, no. 4, February 1902, 1730, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435059861898?urlappend=%3Bseq=392.
[79] Ibid.

She was furious… All of them [the workers] were screaming the stupid, soul-sickening high note of terror, drowning the forewoman's voice' (93). Though she eventually catches the bat, 'no bullying nor entreating of the forewoman could persuade the women to return to work' (94). London does not miss the opportunity to prove the heroic distinction of Saxon, who 'was angry with herself' for being swept up in the needless panic and then is 'one of the handful' who returns to work (93, 94). More importantly, her voice guides us to an allegorical reading of the bewildering passage as she reassures her co-worker '"It was only a bat. I've heard about them. *They live in the country*"' (93, my emphasis). The 'country' both restores the racially-endowed visual power of Saxon when she is within it and intrudes on the city, here the workplace, momentarily extinguishing the unjust regulatory gaze of the forewoman.

Once Saxon and Billy at last leave Oakland for good, the natural environment restores orderly, ideal visual relations. As she and Billy revel in Carmel-by-the-sea in Monterey Bay, Saxon 'scarcely needed the little hand mirror to know that never, since she was a young girl, had there been such color in her cheeks, such spontaneity of vivacity' (313). Her freedom from urban self-scrutiny feels prelapsarian, self-consciousness and ashamedness being the immediate reaction of Adam and Eve to their forbidden consumption: 'And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons'.[80] Billy likewise finds in Carmel a harmonious relation between the looker and the looked, audience and performer. The couple quickly bond with the solely Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of the area, whom London loosely bases on the members of a real-life artists' colony at Carmel, which included himself and Mary Austin among other celebrities of Californian culture.[81] Billy races and wrestles the men of the fictionalised colony, all exemplars of the 'blond Superman' with which London was so enamoured, but

[80] Gen. 3.7 (KJV).
[81] Starr, *Americans and the California Dream*, 266-70.

emerges second-best in each friendly competition.[82] He is then challenged to a boxing contest by a particularly Herculean character, Iron Man (we later learn his real name is Pete Bideaux). 'Saxon felt very nervous, visions of Billy's bloody fights and all the scabs he had slugged rising in her brain' (317). Her husband wins easily without the slightest hint of violence: 'Billy went on, tap, tap, tap, calmly, gently, imperturbably' (317).

The onlookers appreciate the boxer's craft for what it is, not what it can yield through lucky wagers. 'His mastery of the sport, coupled with his self-control, had most favourably impressed the crowd, and Saxon, very proud of her man-boy, could not but see the admiration all had for him' (317). Indeed, diametrically opposed to the crowds of before in the city, the audience at Carmel actually implore Iron Man to 'go easy' when he becomes briefly enraged at Billy's domination of proceedings.[83] Saxon later confirms the account of the narrative voice when she says to Billy: '"Everybody could look on and enjoy—and they did, too"' (320). Whereas in the urban prizefighting ring, the vulgar crowd constitute the space and reduce the fighters within to cruel yet submissive places, the esteemed community in Carmel are passive witnesses, moved by the skill of Billy who now assumes the position of mood-setting, place-making *space*. That such fulfilment is found by leaving the city, the centre of social conflict and class struggle, abandoning collective action in favour of self-gratification, indicates how successfully the novel met its author's expectations. 'For once in my life, I have a story that will not be offensive to bourgeois morality and bourgeois business ethics.'[84]

[82] Martin, *California Writers*, 41.
[83] It is grammatically ambiguous in the text whether the crowd's pleas are directed at Billy or Iron Man, particularly given the former is described as 'completely the master' despite his 'gentl[e] manner of boxing (317). But the next sentence after those calls for amicability describes Iron Man, strongly suggesting he is the one being referred to: 'His face purpled with anger, and his blows became savage'.
[84] London to Brett, 30 May 1911, 1007; London to Phillips, 30 May 1911, 1009.

The transformation of the visual dynamic that marked the first half of the novel restores ever more spatial agency to Billy and Saxon as they inch to the titular paradise. In Oakland, the protagonists by being *looked upon* were reduced to place. Their capacity to influence their surroundings both physically (objective material place-making) and cognitively (the personal meanings and significance that shape place) – their potential to be space – were seized by and for somebody else: the supervisor in the workplace, the crowd at the boxing match, neighbours and cohabitants. Inversely, the countryside presents itself to Billy and Saxon as an expanse to be settled, nurtured, and sown. This anti-urban spatial dynamic of the pastoral manifests through Billy and Saxon being able to *look*.

The visual patterns of spatial power that Jack London develops were perceptible in the San Francisco Bay Area throughout the twentieth century. In his history of Oakland after the second world war, Robert O. Self observes that 'by the 1920s real estate interests had carved the city into long, narrow strips that marked neighborhoods by income and elevation – flatlands, foothills, and hills – and embedded a class regime literally into the physical terrain'.[85] Docks, railroads, factories, and predominantly Black working-class residents filled the low terrain from the shore to the edge of the foothills; overlooking them all from the hills to the east were the affluent, overwhelmingly white political leaders and business owners of the region.[86] The social landscape of Oakland echoes the empowerment and place-making positionality that Billy and Saxon find from panoramic vantage points. So too the recourse of the city to historic preservation during economic downturns reflects the novel's belief that a prosperous futurity depends on reliving a romanticised, often exclusionary idea of the past.[87]

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[85] Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Nathaniel Sikand-Youngs, 'Preservation Park and Themescape Economics in Oakland, California', *European Journal of American Culture* 37, no. 3 (2018), 265-83.

Despite its parallels with the real landscape of the Bay Area, the novel's ultimate destination could only be conceived in fiction: liberation from economic exploitation by departing from rather than challenging the class formation of capital; the *peaceful* realisation of an Anglo-Saxon 'ethnostate' enclaved in an increasingly multiracial region.[88] But thus the novel concludes, the protagonists looking at Edenic California, which, mirror-like, gazes back at them. By a stroke of his pen in his manuscript, crossing out 'stood in' and replacing it with 'looked down', London frames the narrative with sight:[89]

> His open arms received her, and the pool in the heart of the canyon knew a tender silence.
>
> Saxon felt Billy's finger laid warningly on her lips. Guided by his hand, she turned her head back, and together they gazed far up the side of the knoll where a doe and a spotted fawn looked down upon them from a tiny open space between the trees. (425)

A fawn for the forewoman and a doe for the crowd from where the story began, Billy and Saxon find here in Sonoma, the valley of the moon, the summit of the world.

[88] 'Saxon's desire to blend racial coherence and glory with the sense of place … [and] London's sentimental attachment to Anglo-Saxon *virtù* … were ultimately insupportable, impractical, and romantic. When held *in extremis*, they could only lead to holocaust and self-immolation.' Martin, *California Writers*, 44.
[89] Jack London, *The Valley of the Moon* MS part IX, p. 1487, vol. 39, The Huntington Library.

Chapter Two

‘These limitless reaches of space’: Landscaping Force in the San Joaquin Valley of Frank Norris’s *The Octopus* (1901)

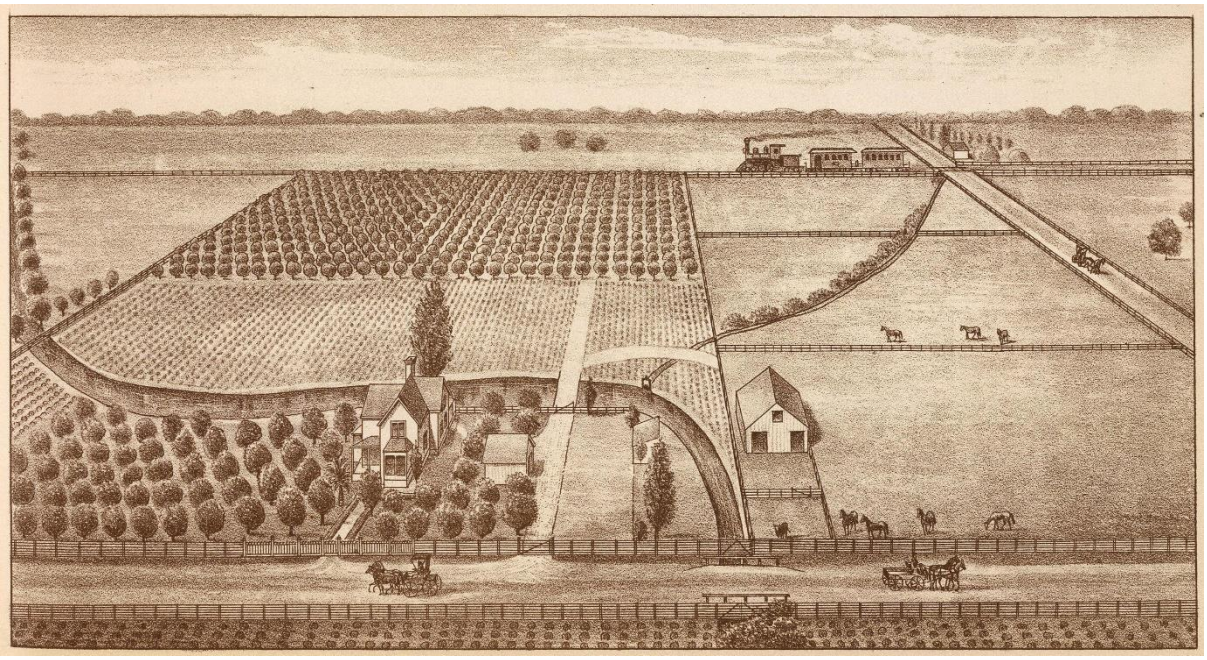


Figure 2.1. A train in the distance passes a ranch in this lithograph of the same county where Frank Norris sets *The Octopus*. Thomas H. Thompson, ‘Ranch and Residence of H. Hackett, Grangeville, Tulare Co., Cal’, in *Official Historical Atlas Map of Tulare County* (Tulare, CA: Thomas H. Thompson, 1892), 41, https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~24882~970034.[1]

In the final chapter of *The Octopus*, Frank Norris’s epic 1901 retelling of the land disputes between farmers and corporations in late nineteenth-century California, the capitalist S. Behrman savours the inexorable victory of the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad over its tenant ranchers. Now presiding over the production and distribution of wheat in the state, Behrman wants to celebrate – to observe and to grasp – his new acquisition in agriculture.

[1] Alison Preston and William Preston discuss this and many other lithographs from Thompson’s *Official Historical Atlas* in their co-authored ‘Pictured Landscapes of the South San Joaquin Valley, California: Lithographs of the 1880s and 1890s’, *California History* 83, no. 1 (2005), 41-58, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25161786.

> So long had he planned for this day of triumph, so eagerly had he looked forward to it, that now, when it had come, he wished to enjoy it to its fullest extent, wished to miss no feature of the disposal of the crop. He had watched it harvested, he had watched it hauled to the railway, and now would watch it as it poured into the hold of the ship, would even watch the ship as she cleared and got under way.[2]

He enters an elevator shaft to look upon the reaped grains of California surging into a vessel bound for the new famine-stricken market of India. But the currents of wheat consume him. Drowning and suffocating in the crop, Behrman pays his life to learn that he was wrong when he 'saw himself … the Master of the Wheat' (1069), for 'no human agency seemed to be back of the movement of the wheat' (1089-90). To mark his property and boast that it was his own cost-saving innovation, Behrman even has the elevator shaft painted with his name 'upon its red roof, in enormous white letters' (1089); ultimately, the adornment commemorates only the site of his entombment.

Behrman dies because he tries to assert his presumed authority over the wheat by watching it at the apex of its continent-spanning energy. His fate contradicts the basis of Jack London's *The Valley of the Moon*, where, as my previous chapter shows, the act of looking establishes power over the environment, both for those who subjugate Saxon and Billy through surveillance in the city and the protagonists themselves as they journey towards their rural paradise. Human agency is far more restricted in *The Octopus*, but only in part because the trajectory of the narrative was predetermined by the historical event that it retold: the Mussel Slough tragedy of 1880 in which five settlers and two U.S. marshals were killed as ranchers – some squatters, some unable to afford rent – in the San Joaquin valley of central California resisted eviction by the Southern Pacific Railroad. The other reason for the stark discrepancy in the scope of human agency between the two novels is their antithetical spatial foundations. *The Valley* is centred on place – the characteristics of the physical surroundings

[2] Frank Norris, 'The Octopus: A Story of California' in *Frank Norris: Novels and Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1986), 1088. Subsequent references to this text in this chapter appear in parentheses.

– first with the protagonists' personal sufferings of urban industrial exploitation, then their pursuit and realisation of an agrarian utopia. Beyond merely noting a 'tangled scheme of things that made men snarl over jobs like dogs over bones' or pointing out the enormity of the world that lies beyond the Golden Gate, London does not delve into the larger relations that shape his fictional places and people; this realm of space belongs to *The Octopus*.[3] Indeed, the only annotation that London made in his copy of Norris's deterministic novel was to underline the call for collective freewill by the poet and bereaved friend of the ranchers, Presley, in which he orates to an assembly of farmers, 'will you never listen to that command "*Let My people go*"?'.[4] In his review of the novel, recovered and transcribed by Mukhtar Ali Isani, London is especially full of praise for Annixter, the one character in *The Octopus* who seems to possess agency as he transforms his initially hostile and noncommunicative attitude to women, writing that he is the 'greatest of all' figures in the text and that 'Norris [has] blown the breath of life into him'.[5]

Inverting London's approach, Norris uses places – objects in and inhabitants of the environment – as a gateway to their governing social and environmental spaces, reflecting his ambition of producing naturalist writing, 'a fictional mode which illustrated some fundamental truth of life' as Donald Pizer puts it.[6] Kathryn Cornell Dolan observes that in Behrman's demise, for example, 'Norris uses only active verbs to describe the wheat, making it the subject of the action. The wheat leaps, fills, covers, runs, and creeps as it kills the novel's villain. Meanwhile, Behrman is described as the object being acted upon'.[7] 'Imperilled with a force of its own' (1090), the active wheat clearly exceeds its material

[3] Jack London, *The Valley of the Moon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 181 and 212.
[4] Hamilton, *'The Tools of My Trade'*, 217-18. The quoted passage is on p. 1015 in the cited edition of the novel.
[5] Mukhtar Ali Isani, 'Jack London on Norris's "The Octopus"', *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 6, no. 1 (1973), 69, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27747851.
[6] Donald Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), 35.
[7] Kathryn Cornell Dolan, 'A "Mighty World-Force": Wheat as Natural Corrective in Norris', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 19, no. 2 (2012), 303-04, https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/iss061.

properties as an inert, harvested crop. Instead the grain exerts its power as a *commodity*, which Karl Marx theorises not as an object in itself but rather a transitory form that capital assumes in its trinitarian circuit through money, production, and product.[8] Commodity may describe a physical entity at a particular moment in time – a place – but the category itself arises from space, the relation between separate events, the prior production process and the pending exchange on the market.[9] 'Capital … can only be grasped as a movement, and not as a static thing', Marx writes.[10] That movement, the spatiality of capital, is precisely what the wheat embodies as it is compelled by the next stage in the circuit, the hungry market across the Pacific, becoming 'a resistless, huge force, eager, vivid, impatient for the sea' (1090).

The wheat, so often transcending the limits of its physical form, is one of two entities that persistently appear as spaces in the text. The other is the railway, which Norris similarly describes as a sphere of influence rather than a self-contained object. On the surface, the organic, nourishing wheat seems antithetical to the manmade railway, hungry for land and coal. The scholarship that deals with the wheat and railway in *The Octopus* generally takes their opposition for granted, debating the niceties without interrogating the premise of the presumed conflict between the two commodities. In the classic mid-century studies of the novel, critics divided over whether the antagonist of the wheat is either the locomotive itself, 'the machine' as Leo Marx contended, or rather the corporate monopoly and its exploitation of an otherwise benign technology, which W. F. Taylor and later Donald Pizer asserted.[11] The essential assumption of divergence between wheat and railway has remained unchallenged in modern scholarship. In her ecocritical reading of the text, for example, Dolan posits that the

[8] Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume II*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1992), 167-79.
[9] The two defining aspects of the commodity being the labour-time (value) endowed by production and its exchangeability on the market, as Marx sets out in: *Capital: Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 953-55.
[10] Ibid., 185.
[11] Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism*, 138-39.

wheat is ‘a force of nature acting against human forces like capitalism as represented by entities like the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad’.[12] She interprets the death of Behrman, whom she deems a personification of the railroad, as the crop having ‘punishe[d] him for his hubris’ while it pursues what Norris saw as the United States’ benevolent agricultural expansion into Asia.[13]

While the wheat and railroad may well be *morally* antagonistic, they are on a more fundamental level *materially* commensurable. Norris did conceive of the wheat and railway as equivalents, but not with space in mind. He was informed instead by the English philosopher and social Darwinist Herbert Spencer’s idea of force, which the novelist encountered through Joseph LeConte, his tutor at the University of California, Berkeley.[14] In his *First Principles*, originally published in 1862 and revised variously thereafter, Spencer introduces ‘Force … as the ultimate of ultimates’, a pantheistic mechanism of causality to which ‘Space, Time, Matter and Motion’ can all be reduced and attributed.[15] Echoing Pizer’s earlier work, Ronald Martin argues that Norris imagined the wheat in Spencerian terms ‘as behaving like a force, moving autonomously, impersonally, and irresistibly, regardless of the desires and efforts of men and regardless even of powerful institutions’.[16] Going one step further than Pizer, Martin notes that the railway is also ‘clearly a force to the narrator’ and an ‘uncontrollable’ one at that.[17] As Shelgrim, the president of the P. and S.W., edifies Presley,

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[12] Dolan, ‘A “Mighty World-Force”’, 297.
[13] Ibid., 303. Donald Pizer even contends that the wheat here asserts a Christian moral order by punishing Behrman’s greed: ‘Evolution and American Fiction: Three Paradigmatic Novels’, *American Literary Realism* 43, no. 3 (2011), 209-10, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/amerlitereal.43.3.0204.
[14] Donald Pizer, ‘The Concept of Nature in Frank Norris’ “The Octopus”’, *American Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1962), 75-76, doi:10.2307/2710228. LeConte was influential in the introduction of Spencer’s philosophy to U.S. intellectual discourse according to Ronald E. Martin in his *American Literature and the Universe of Force* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981), 80-81.
[15] Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* 4th ed. (New York: D. Appleton, 1882), 169, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015056925921.
[16] Martin, *American Literature*, 162; Pizer, ‘The Concept of Nature’, 77.
[17] Martin, *American Literature*, 165.

‘“you are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of Wheat and the Railroads, not with men … The Wheat is one force, the Railroad, another”’ (1037).

With the blessings of the presumed authorial intentions of Norris, scholars continue, unquestioningly and reflexively, to read *The Octopus* through Spencer’s language and theory of ‘force’.[18] Ironically, this now dominant approach to the text arose, so Pizer explained at the time, in part as a reaction against the tendency of contemporary critics to classify Norris as a mere imitator of the French naturalist Émile Zola.[19] The ubiquity of this earlier assessment is evident in the myriad articles and reviews archived in the Frank Norris Collection at the Bancroft Library.[20] Labelled in Spencerian terms, the common constitution of the wheat and railway has evaded sustained critical attention. Pizer and Dolan each describe the wheat and railway as ‘forces’ before swiftly moving on to discuss their dissimilarities.[21] Dolan initially acknowledges that wheat is a ‘hybrid entity … an agricultural crop that is neither nature nor culture’, suggesting a far more entangled relationship with the Pacific and Southwestern, also a ‘hybrid’ albeit a ‘grotesque’ one, than the diametric opposition that she goes on to construct.[22] Discussing U.S. literature in general, Leo Marx identifies the ‘wild’ or ‘rural’ on

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[18] For example: Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 344-45; Pizer, ‘The Concept of Nature’, 77; Martin, *American Literature*, 162; Ellis, ‘“A Little Turn Through the Country”,17; Steven Frye, ‘Presley’s Pretense: Irony and Epic Convention in Frank Norris’ *The Octopus*’, *American Literary Realism* 39, no. 3 (2007), 218, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27747259; Leigh Ann Litwiller Berte, ‘Mapping “The Octopus”: Frank Norris’ Naturalist Geography’, *American Literary Realism* 37, no. 3 (2005), 204, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27747171; Dolan, ‘A “Mighty World-Force”’, 295-316.

[19] Pizer, ‘The Concept of Nature’, 73. Pizer elaborates on the balance between acknowledging Norris’s literary influences without reducing him to a ‘“boy Zola”’ in his *The Novels of Frank Norris* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), viii and 116-17. The latter page reference concerns *The Octopus* specifically.

[20] Take these passages, all from clippings in the Frank Norris Collection of Papers and Related Materials, BANC FILM 2381, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, United States: ‘in “The Octopus,” as in most of Zola’s novels, there are a crowd of characters’ in ‘Mr. Frank Norris’ Posthumous Novel, “The Pit,” Is full of Dramatic Intensity’, *New York Herald*, 10 January 1903, [n.p.], p. 117 of vol. 8; ‘there was [in *The Octopus*] … an offensive mannerism borrowed from Zola’ in ‘Good Reading’, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11 January 1903, 18, p. 95 of vol. 8; ‘Sequel to “The Octopus” Confirms Deceased Novelist’s Title of the American Zola’ in ‘The Heart of the Nation, Norris calls Chicago’, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 22 January 1903, 12, p. 33 of vol. 8; ‘Norris was the American Zola’ in ‘A Very Thorough Sinner Who Was Earnestly Dull’, *Evening Mail*, 26 June 1914, 25, p. 1 of vol. 6.

[21] Critics who also do so include: Reuben J. Ellis, ‘“A Little Turn Through the Country”: Presley’s Bicycle Ride in Frank Norris’s *The Octopus*’, *Journal of American Culture* 17, no. 3 (1994), 17, doi: 10.1111/j.1542-734X.1994.00017.x.

[22] Ibid., 295 and 296.

the one hand and 'industrial technology' on the other as 'two cardinal images of value', but then departs from that central similarity to look instead at 'the sharp conflict' between them.[23]

This chapter foregrounds the neglected equivalency of the two foundational objects in *The Octopus* by approaching the wheat and railway as spaces. Such a divergence from Norris's own terminology and intellectual influences is appropriate and productive. 'Force' and my definition of space do overlap as labels for the processes that form the material world, though Spencer goes further in conceiving force not as a category but an actual entity. For this, Martin calls Spencer 'the very epitome of naive realism, believing that his words infallibly stood for real things and that the relationships between words represented relationships between things'.[24] Crucially for *The Octopus,* force is a limiting paradigm because Spencer does not account for its formation; he writes that 'the creation of force is just as inconceivable as the creation of matter'.[25] Force simply *is,* an almost divine prime mover with no antecedent. We can see the totalising effect of this worldview in the novel when the narrator explains the amorality of the world following the dispossession of the ranchers:

> Men were naught, death was naught, life was naught; FORCE only existed—FORCE that brought men into the world, FORCE that crowded them out of it to make way for the succeeding generation, FORCE that made the wheat grow, FORCE that garnered it from the soil to give place to the succeeding crop. (1084)

This passage, probably the most frequently quoted example of Spencer's influence on *The Octopus,* vastly oversimplifies the novel as a whole.[26] Far from the case that 'FORCE only existed', Norris's 'forces' almost always arise from a material point of origin, typically the

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[23] Leo Marx, 'Two Kingdoms of Force', *The Massachusetts Review* 1, no. 1 (1959), 72, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25086459.
[24] Martin, *American Literature,* 54.
[25] Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology. Volume 1* (New York: D. Appleton, 1868), 337, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hw1vrm.
[26] See this passage cited in: Malcolm Cowley, '"Not Men": A Natural History of American Naturalism', *The Kenyon Review* 9, no. 3 (1947), 414-15, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4332868; Pizer, 'The Concept of Nature', 77; Martin, *American Literature,* 170; Frye, 'Presley's Pretense', 218. Albeit in the context of determinism rather than Spencerian force, which she too accepts and adopts in her analysis, Leigh Ann Litwiller Berte suggests like I do here that this absolutist passage should not govern our reading of the entire novel in her essay, 'Mapping "The Octopus"', 215.

cultivation and harvest of the wheat or the form and appearance of the locomotive. This contradicts Spencerian force which occurs *ex nihilo* and instead invites a spatial approach; space is not just a cause but also a result, the outcome of a location influencing somewhere else and thus ceasing to be a place. By reading the railway and the wheat (in that order) as spatial counterparts, I argue that the two objects do not correspond to a dichotomy between nature and industrial capital, nor are they simple extensions of the class conflict between tenant ranchers and corporate landowner. Rather, the spaces that they produce and embody each allegorise a different outcome of capitalising on the natural resources of California.

Though scholars typically read the first chapter as a 'jarring contrast' between the pastoral landscape and industrial railway, a spatial approach to the beginning of the novel reveals an underlying and distinctly counter-Spencerian trajectory of material form to immaterial 'force' – or rather to space.[27] In conveying the former, Norris utilises mapping and surveying, literally through a prefatory diagram and figuratively in his prose, both of which firmly root the narrative in its Californian locality. Charles L. Crow, who does not shy from noting the numerous shortcomings of the novel, applauds Norris as 'the first to see this landscape [the San Joaquin Valley] as a *center*, not a place marginal to the larger world'.[28] From these meticulous depictions of *place*, physical geography, the narrator employs increasingly metaphorical language to evoke a railway *space*. This twofold place to space construction reflects Norris's conception of literary naturalism, articulated in his critical writing: as Pizer summarises, 'Norris placed realism, romanticism, and naturalism in a dialectic, in which

[27] Michael Velez, 'Railroad and Region in Frank Norris's *The Octopus* and Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don*', in *Trains, Literature, and Culture: Reading/Writing the Rails*, eds. Steven D. Spalding and Benjamin Fraser (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 177 https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nottingham/reader.action?docID=850679.
[28] Charles L. Crow, 'Regions of California: The Great Central Valley', in *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 385. Original emphasis.

realism and romanticism were opposing forces, and naturalism was transcending synthesis'.[29] Through the materiality of *place*, Norris achieves what he calls the 'Accuracy' of realism: 'attention to the characteristics' of a specific literary object 'in every detail, in every particular'.[30] Then, through *space*, he pursues the romanticist 'Truth', a larger principle, meaning, or process underlying surface reality.[31] Lacking such spatial vocabulary, Pizer can only note an 'interweaving of the "large" and "small"' in the novel, reducing a qualitative difference to a merely quantitative one.[32]

Before the narrative even starts, Norris provides a map of the novel's fictionalised San Joaquin setting.[33] It marks locations and objects as seemingly insignificant as 'high ground' and 'low ground', a grocery store and watering tank, *individual* trees, and six telephone lines, each separately labelled (578). In his original hand drawn map (fig. 2.2), the novelist even scribbles the fastidious correction that a particular saloon 'should be nearer to Bonneville than indicated – about half a mile outside the town', duly implemented for the published version by the engraving company, L. L. Poates.[34] Norris's evident realist preoccupation with orientating the reader initially continues in the prose itself as we follow Presley on his bicycle, which Reuben J. Ellis argues 'grounds a narrative otherwise concerned with ultimate ontologies in the local, the human and the experiential'.[35] The first sentence of the novel

[29] Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism*, 33.
[30] Frank Norris, 'Frank Norris's Weekly Letter', *Chicago American* (3 August 1901), 75, Norris Collection.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris*, 161.
[33] Norris states that he will in the published novel include 'maybe' a character list but 'this *surely*—a map of the locality', in his letter to Isaac Frederick Marcosson, 13 September 1900, in *Frank Norris Collected Letters*, ed. Jesse S. Crisler (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1986), 124.
[34] Frank Norris, 'Map for The Octopus', BANC FILM 2381, Frank Norris Collection of Papers and Related Materials, Bancroft Library.
[35] Ellis, '"A Little Turn Through the Country"', 19.

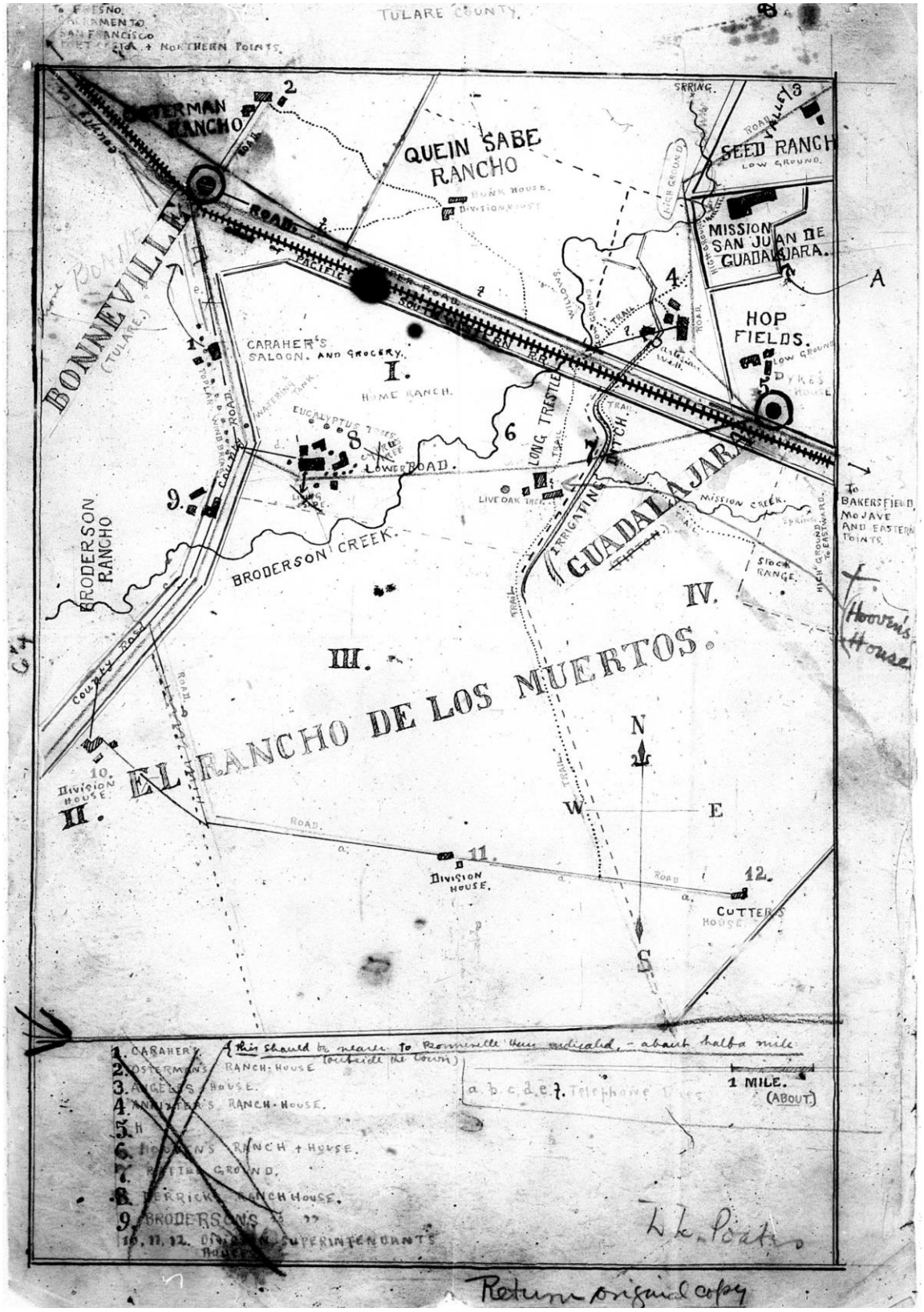


Figure 2.2. Frank Norris, 'Map for The Octopus', BANC FILM 2381, Frank Norris Collection of Papers and Related Materials, Bancroft Library.

begins accordingly, with almost geometric language that not only plots our precise position in the fictionalised setting but also evokes the real San Joaquin landscape, whose rectangular

layout (fig 2.1) reflected the template prescribed by the U.S. Public Lands Survey System.[36]

> Just after passing Caraher's saloon, on the County Road that ran south from Bonneville, and that divided the Broderson ranch from that of Los Muertos, Presley was suddenly aware of the faint and prolonged blowing of a steam whistle that he knew must come from the railroad shops near the depot at Bonneville. (579)

Through the 'suddenly aware' Presley, the narrative abruptly shifts from the initial passive orientations between *places* to their active influences on one another as *spaces*, which is how we first encounter the railway. The steam whistle is the partial, disembodied presence of another location, the train, which exists for Presley and thus too for the reader as a space because its physical form is somewhere else, 'the depot at Bonneville'.[37] As a space, the railway assumes a place-making function. Its 'faint and prolonged blowing' constitutes the character, experience, and even temporality of a landscape that previously appeared through the bland physical metrics of distance and direction – 'after passing', 'ran south', 'divided' (579).[38] Indeed, Ellis notes that, throughout the chapter, 'while within this grid of converging lines, Presley remains emotionally unengaged, preoccupied, cursory'.[39] Conversely, the steam whistle stimulates Presley to emote ('suddenly') and to intuit ('aware', 'he knew'), and it is through his knowledge, mediated by the narrator, that the railway is introduced.[40] While enabling this deduction, a pillar of Norris's idea of romanticism, the manifestation of the railway is not amicable; the whistling locomotive, Leo Marx shows, is one of the primary

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[36] Preston and Preston, 'Pictured Landscapes', 50-51.
[37] The Bonneville in *The Octopus* is not to be confused with a real small town in California that had the same name but is now called 'Boonville', located in Mendocino County, quite someway northwest of the San Joaquin Valley. While fortunately rare, the two have been confused, for example in the introductory note to: Frank Norris, '*The Octopus: A Story of California* (Excerpt)', in *Reforming America: A Thematic Encyclopedia and Document Collection of the Progressive Era*, ed. Jeffrey A Johnson (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 366.
[38] Indeed, the next sentence describes how the whistle of the train instils a consciousness of temporality: Presley 'had forgotten his watch, and was now perplexed to know whether the whistle was blowing for twelve or for one o'clock' (579).
[39] Ellis, '"A Little Turn Through the Country"', 20.
[40] The melding of the character's thought into the narrative voice anticipates the extensive use of free indirect discourse in the novel, which Charles Duncan discusses in his '"If Your View Be Large Enough": Narrative Growth in "The Octopus"', *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 25, no. 2 (1993): 56-66, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27746529.

tropes of industrial incursion on the pastoral landscape in U.S. literature.[41] 'Suddenly aware' implies an unpeaceable intrusion, typifying the standard literary treatment in which 'the machine is made to appear with startling suddenness'.[42] We see by following Presley's journey along the prefatory map that he is moving south, away from Bonneville, meaning that the sound of the locomotive is pursuing him, an unwelcome disturbance.

As the chapter unfolds, Norris continues to construct both Presley's surroundings as place through cartographic language and the railway as a space by rendering it a remote and increasingly antagonistic influence rather than an embodied presence. In the sixth paragraph, Norris introduces S. Behrman, the agent of the railway, in the same manner as the locomotive in the first sentence.

> As Presley drew near to the point where what was known as the Lower Road struck off through the Rancho de Los Muertos, leading on to Guadalajara, he came upon one of the county watering-tanks. … Since the day of its completion, the storekeepers and retailers of Bonneville had painted their advertisements upon it. It was a landmark. In that reach of level fields, the white letters upon it could be read for miles. … "S. Behrman, Real Estate, Mortgages, Main Street, Bonneville, Opposite the Post Office." On the horse-trough that stood in the shadow of the tank was another freshly painted inscription: "S. Behrman Has Something To Say To *You*." (580)

Once more, a realist, almost geometrical identification of Presley's locale, 'the point where … the Lower Road struck off through the Rancho, leading on to Guadalajara', precedes an incorporeal appearance of the railway, now in the guise of Behrman's written name.[43] David Henkin shows how public displays of the written word render the environment a legible 'text', meaning in this case that the branded water tank elevates Behrman to an authorial position in the landscape.[44] As with the steam whistle in the first sentence, the advertisement

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[41] Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 15-16 and 343-45. The latter page range discusses a passage from *The Octopus* similar to the one here.
[42] Ibid., 15.
[43] Like Bonneville, Norris's Guadalajara should not be confused with a real life namesake, a far larger city to the south in Mexico, though Velez rightly observes the shared name nevertheless evokes the sense of 'a larger mass stretching from California to Mexico': Velez, 'Railroad and Region', 178-79.
[44] David M. Henkin, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 2-3.

asserts itself across the region. Behrman's name and business services are legible 'for miles', even transgressing the separation of the reader from the world of the narrative by confronting us with 'Something To Say To *You*'.[45] As 'a landmark', the advertisement is a prominent object that alters the characteristics of and guides our navigation through the surroundings.[46]

The importance and power that Behrman exudes arises not despite the fact but because his person and the centre of his business are both elsewhere, on 'Main Street, Bonneville, Opposite the Post Office' (though even there, the town is merely 'a satellite for the hegemonic power of the railroad' itself).[47] Manifesting here without his body, the Behrman invoked by the water tank instead embodies the geographical area in which the advertisement is legible. Henkin observes of antebellum New York that 'the radical publicity of signs … invested them with an authority so distinct from individual identity that they could in some cases speak for, and thereby impersonate, the public', but as the novel's rural setting is too sparsely populated with not enough anonymous characters (let alone crowds) to constitute a 'public', Behrman instead simply 'speak[s] for' and exists through the landscape itself.[48] Hence an aggrieved rancher later complains in geographical terms of the ubiquity of the capitalist, that 'it's Behrman here and Behrman there"' (663). As soon as he is physically present, he ceases to be a detached incorporeal space, the personification of a share of the railway's capital, and becomes instead a place, manifest through the fragile mortality of his own flawed and unfit body (by hegemonic standards). Norris describes him in the character

[45] As far as public advertisements in Norris's fiction go, Behrman's water tank is outdone by the eponymous protagonist of the earlier novel *McTeague*, who markets his dental practice by hanging a giant gilt-gold tooth outside his office. For such absurdity, we should indict not the novelist but contemporary San Francisco, where a similar display actually existed: Thomas C. Ware, '"Gold to Airy Thinness Beat": The Midas Touch in Frank Norris's "McTeague"', *Interpretations* 13, no. 1 (1981), 39-40, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23241350.
[46] A landmark is 'any conspicuous object which characterizes a neighbourhood or district': 'landmark, *n.*', *OED Online*, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/105499; landmarks also provide 'a means both of establishing our location and of knowing how we "beare by the compasse"' according to Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2015), 12.
[47] Velez, 'Railroad and Region', 186.
[48] Henkin, *City Reading*, 65.

sketches for the novel as 'middle aged', 'fat with a *great stomach*', with a 'great tremendous *jowl*', '*roll of fat over his collar*', and notes 'his difficult breathing'.[49] Indeed, Behrman's fatal decision to enter the elevator shaft – which, recalling the water tank, is also painted with his name in 'white letters' (1089) – was caused by his complacent desire to be present in the inner mechanisms of commodity distribution. In much the same way, when we turn from the novel to consider those historical railroad operatives on whom Behrman was based, Norris's portrayal of the formidable capitalist proves mythic.[50] 'Looking for Behrman's equivalent in archives is like looking for Superman and finding only Clark Kent', Richard White quips.[51] 'The corporation actually amounted to a group of divided, quarrelsome, petulant, arrogant, and often astonishingly inept men.'[52] Through the history of California as across the geography of the novel, distance inflates the perceived authority of Behrman and his ilk.

Norris's derivation of the railway's power from *elsewhere* rather than *nowhere* negates Spencer's understanding of force and corresponds instead to space – the relations between discrete locations. Through long, ornate sentences that encircle rather than pinpoint the literary object, Norris reinforces this spatial construction of the railway even when we encounter it in the flesh at the end of the chapter, a feat yet more impressive than making Behrman a remote phenomenon despite him being 'the railroad's *local* representative'.[53]

> The engine … whistled for road crossings, for sharp curves, for trestles; ominous, notes, hoarse, bellowing ringing with the accents of menace and defiance; and abruptly Presley saw again, in his imagination, the galloping monster, the terror of steel and steam, with its single eye, cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon; but saw it now as the symbol of a vast power, huge, terrible, flinging the echo of its

[49] Frank Norris, 'S. Behrman' in 'Character Sketches for *The Octopus*', p. 3, vol. 3, box 3, BANC FILM 2381, Frank Norris Collection of Papers and Related Materials, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, United States. In the original, Norris denotes these emphases with underscores. As with much in his other character sketches, those unflattering descriptions find their way almost verbatim into the final novel on p. 629.
[50] Richard White identifies those historical antecedents for Behrman as W. H. Mills, Creed Haymond, W.W. Stow, and Boss Billy Carr, among others, in his acclaimed monograph, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), 234.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid. Of course, the complacency of Behrman in the runup to his death complicates White's one-dimensional assessment of the character as the 'competen[t] and efficien[t]' foil to his flawed historical counterparts.
[53] Michael Velez, 'Railroad and Region', 177. My emphasis.

> thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path; the leviathan, with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power, the monster, the Colossus, the Octopus. (617)

While the style of prose is divisive – 'Norris's … literary handling of the train as a metaphor has long been praised' claims Michael Velez, but Crow dismisses it as 'overwritten to the point of self-parody' – a spatial approach allows us to engage it productively.[54] Here, physical features in the landscape – 'road crossing', 'sharp curves', and 'trestles' – are no longer mapped as wayfinding objects and are instead defined solely by the oncoming train whistle. Likewise, the antagonism between the railway and its surroundings that earlier was subtle has now erupted into violence: 'the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path'. On this level, Leo Marx finds ample evidence to read this passage as an example of the 'interrupted idyll' – the incursion by the industrial into the pastoral.[55] Yet even with such a dominating presence across the landscape, the railway still feels elusive. After identifying 'the engine' and the 'bellowing ringing' of its whistle, Norris says nothing directly about the physical form of the locomotive, turning instead to what 'Presley saw again, in his imagination'. Metaphor after metaphor moves ever further from the realist materiality of the referent, 'the engine' as a *place,* in a romanticist pursuit of the characteristics, effects, and significance – the *space* – of the railway: 'galloping monster', 'cyclopean', 'leviathan', 'tentacles of steel', 'Colossus', 'Octopus'. These meandering '"Homeric" epithets', as Barbara Hochman aptly calls them, do not merely hyperbolise the vehicle; they transform its abstract sphere of influence into an organic, animate, and tentacular creature, whose 'soulless', 'iron-hearted' constitution and 'steel' appendages are the only remaining traits of the original locomotive.[56] Referring to the

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[54] Velez, 'Railroad and Region, 176; Crow, 'Regions of California', 385.
[55] Marx, 'Two Kingdoms', 72-73.
[56] Barbara Hochman, 'Reading Homer in the 1890s: Interpretive Conventions and Norris' "The Octopus"', *American Literary Realism* 35, no. 2 (2003), 121, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27747091. Pizer notes the same tendency but refers to it as a 'Homeric kenning', a device more associated with Norse and Old English epics. I concur with Floris Overduin, that 'there is no need to introduce the term kenning for Homer's poetry, …

beginning of this chapter and an image (fig. 2.1) of a train moving past a San Joaquin ranch only goes to show the extent to which the material place of the train in the novel is substituted and dwarfed by the railway space, reified at the end of the passage as 'the Colossus, the Octopus'.[57]

The eponymous metaphor reinforces the geographical construction of the railroad's power, contrary to Spencer's dismissal of space as a passive plane through which force acts. This spatiality is illustrated in the first octopoid representation of the railway, George Frederick Keller's 1882 cartoon 'The Curse of California' (fig. 2.3). The aquatic organism, branded 'RAILROAD MONOPOLY', spreads expansively over a caricature of California, stretching from the interior farmland at the bottom of the image to the ocean at the top right. Unnaturally adapted for this enormous range, the creature departs from the anatomy of any real octopus with its mantle substituted for a *tenth* tentacle, corroborating Robert MacDougall's claim that 'the octopus and the spider [an alternative visualisation of Gilded Age capital] were not caricatures of corporate size alone. They were nightmares of *reach*'.[58] Size was still a vital, palpable aspect of the cartoon's conveyance of railway power in its original publication, the pioneering *San Francisco Wasp*.[59] In it, Keller's cartoon was printed with its long vertical edge on the bottom of a double page spread, such that the reader must rotate the entire magazine ninety degrees anticlockwise to view the image in the correct

considering that the term *epitheton ornas* [epithet] is both apt and widespread'. Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris*, 161; Floris Overduin, *Nicander of Colophon's* Theriaca*: A Literary Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 77 n.306.

[57] For a representation of the railway in the western landscape that acknowledges both the impressive industrial scale and the natural grandeur of the setting, we might refer to Andrew J. Russell's late nineteenth-century photographs of the construction of the transcontinental line. A recent exhibition showcases how in these works the formidable topographies of the west – canyons, mountains, great plains – augment without being undermined by the railway infrastructure that traverses them: *Pushing West: The Photography of Andrew J. Russell*, 4 May - 2 September 2019, Oakland Museum of California. United States.

[58] Robert MacDougall, 'The Wire Devils: Pulp Thrillers, the Telephone, and Action at a Distance in the Wiring of a Nation', *American Quarterly* 58, no, 3 (2006), 716, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40068390. His emphasis.

[59] *The Wasp* was 'one of the first magazines to make sustained use of colored cartoons' notes Amy K. Lippert in her *Consuming Identities: Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 156.

portrait orientation, rendering it not merely large but oversized.[60] Though not with this degree of tactility, the magnitude of the corporation and its vehicles likewise modifies our



Figure 2.3. George Frederick Keller'The Curse of California', The San Francisco Wasp 9, no. 316, 19 August 1882, 520-21, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Curse_of_California.jpg.

[60] George Frederick Keller, 'The Curse of California', *The San Francisco Wasp* 9, no. 316, 19 August 1882, 520-21, https://archive.org/details/waspjulydec188209unse/page/n115.

consumption of *The Octopus*: in those long, meandering passages on the locomotive, our reading is measured and paced by the short, digestible clauses, not the sentence, whose proportions are as formidable as the railway itself. Clearly for both Keller and Norris, scale and omnipresence, not the sheer strength of 'force', generates the power of the zoomorphised railway. More fundamentally, Keller's cartoon shows how geography underpins the logic of the metaphor. The surreal, almost absurd creature is given symbolic credibility by its association with realistically portrayed places, either actually located in or at least emblematic of California: the ship flagged 'wheat export', the ensnared farmers (one of whom is lifted out of Mussel Slough, where the violent shootout that inspired Norris occurred), and Nob Hill, the exclusive San Francisco neighbourhood where various railway magnates resided.[61] In both the image and Norris's novel, the metaphorical octopus does not occur *ex nihilo* as a prime mover like Spencer's force but instead arises from the material locations that the railway influences.[62] Reading Norris's novel in view of Keller's cartoon therefore shows that it is not merely the case that 'geography, cartography, and space offer material constructs through which to represent the abstraction of force' as Leigh Ann Litwiller Berte writes of the text.[63] Rather, space outright replaces Spencerian force as the mode of the railway's authority and power.

In many respects then, Keller's 'The Curse' is the obvious and fitting choice of cover for the 1994 reissue of the Penguin Classics edition of *The Octopus*.[64] But as the novel unfolds, Norris shows that the spatial construction of the railway offers a far greater range of mood and character than in the monolithic subject of the satirical cartoon. In the final

[61] See for the opulence of Nob Hill: Charles Caldwell Dobie, *San Francisco: A Pageant* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1939), 276.
[62] 'Space, Time, Matter, and Motion, … are either built up of, or abstracted from, experiences of Force': Spencer, *First Principles*, 169.
[63] Berte, 'Mapping *The Octopus*', 204.
[64] Frank Norris, *The Octopus: A Story of California* (London: Penguin, 1994), front cover.

sentence of the second chapter, Norris once more uses a long series of Homeric epithets that seem more to orbit rather than apprehend the locomotive as it

> passed slowly on its way with a mournful roll of wheels, like the passing of a cortege, like a file of artillery-caissons charioting dead bodies; the engine's smoke enveloping it in a mournful veil, leaving a sense of melancholy in its wake, moving past there, lugubrious, lamentable, infinitely sad, under the grey sky and under the grey mist of rain which continued to fall with a subdued, rustling sound, steady, persistent, a vast monotonous murmur that seemed to come from all quarters at once. (651)

The sorrowful and sombre impression is quite the departure from the power and violence of the previous chapter, yet both passages render the railway a space all the same. Where before Norris abstracts the railway's sphere of influence from its physical form as a place by describing what Presley 'saw … in his imagination' (617), here he does so through the engine itself with its 'smoke enveloping it in a mournful veil'. Obscuring the materiality of the locomotive, this leaves us only with its effects on the environment, the 'sense of melancholy in its wake'. The 'grey mist of rain' further extracts the mood engendered by the railway from its origin place, creating the impression that the space, now 'a vast monotonous murmur', has 'come from all quarters at once'. Such poignancy seems antithetical to inanimate and mechanistic force, which Spencer states is barely knowable let alone affecting, but can absolutely be a product of space insofar as it is an area demarcated by a defining quality, condition, or experience.[65]

By the end of only the second chapter, Norris establishes that sheer power and artificiality are far from constant attributes of the railway, contrary to its longstanding association by critics with 'fire, speed, iron, and noise'.[66] As we have just seen, it can also be sadly processional. So too it slumbers, as if asleep in its depot, 'motionless, solid, drawing

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[65] Spencer writes that 'it is absurd to think of Force as in itself like our sensation of it, and yet necessary so to think of it if we realize it in consciousness at all' and later provides the pseudo-algebraic formulation that when 'we represent Matter, Motion, and Force by the symbols *x*, *y*, and *z;* then, we may ascertain the values of *x* and *y* in terms of *z;* but the value of *z* can never be found: *z* [i.e., force] is the unknown quantity which must for ever remain unknown': *First Principles*, 58 and 170.
[66] Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 27.

long breaths' (589). In one of the more sensational moments in the text, the train is even rendered utterly powerless. Dyke, a disgruntled former engineer for the P. and S. W., stages a hold up, hijacks the locomotive as a getaway vehicle, and leaves the rolling stock 'helpless, bereft of its engine, a huge decapitated monster it lay, half-way around a curve, rained upon, abandoned' (910). Beyond the text and in a different mode of expression altogether, Norris shows a humorous side to the railway, sketching a doodle of the vehicle to accompany an inscription of his 1900 novel *Blix* (fig. 2.4).[67] What seems almost immutable, however, in those multifaceted depictions of the railway in *The Octopus* is its representation as an animate entity and, more fundamentally, its construction as a space. Through these methods, Norris's depiction of the railway is a powerful challenge to Henry George's claim that a map of railroad holdings in California is a 'commentary on the railroad land grant policy of Congress to *the force of which no words can add*'.[68]

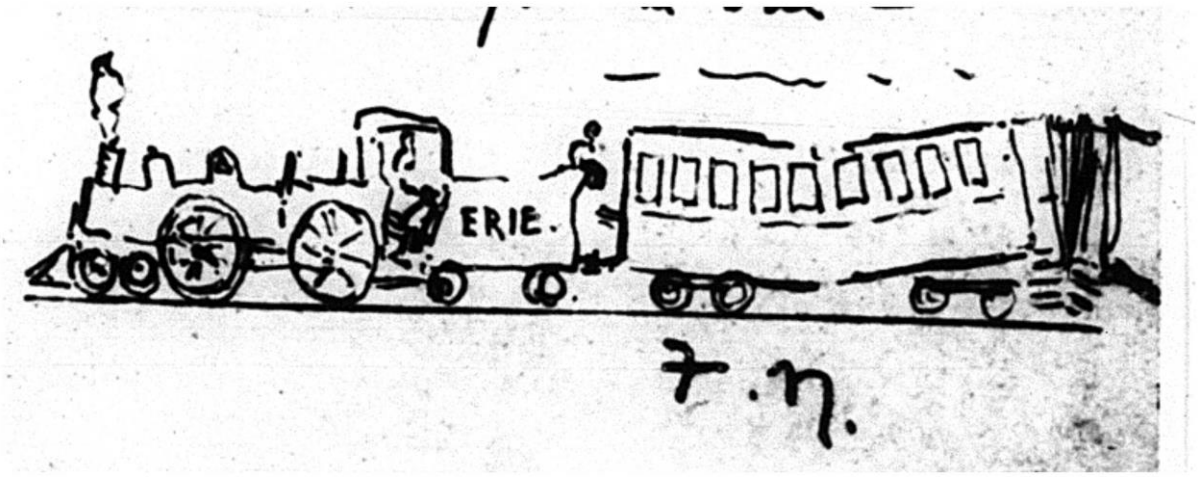


Figure 2.4. *Detail from*: Frank Norris, 'Inscription in *Blix* "To The Erie"', BANC FILM 2381, Frank Norris Collection of Papers and Related Materials, Bancroft Library.

[67] Norris trained as an artist while studying in Paris and did produce fine visual work when he tried – which he evidently did not in this nonchalant scribble. See for an outline of this aspect of Norris's life: Denison Hailey Clift, 'The Artist in Frank Norris', *The Pacific Monthly* 17, no. 3 (March 1907), 313-22, https://archive.org/stream/pacificmonthly17woodrich#page/n569/mode/2up. Many of his drawings and sketches, the most accomplished of which are of medieval artefacts from the Musée d'Artillerie in Paris, may be found in the Frank Norris Collection, box 7, vol. 7, Bancroft Library.

[68] George, *Our Land*, 18.

The wheat is represented through those same two foundations as the railway – animacy and spatiality – but ultimately yields an antithetical moral outcome. Where the railway produces discord with its surroundings, the grain symbolises a harmonious relationship between people and nature, functioning according to Dolan as 'a natural corrective to the human forces when they become exploitative'.[69] The moral antagonism yet material commensurability of wheat and railway can be inferred from just a short passage, where Norris describes the crop as 'the germ of life, the sustenance of the whole world, the food of an entire People' (717). On the surface, the nourishment offered by the seemingly benevolent wheat is not only contrasted but actively disrupted by the ravenous railway: 'between the fecund San Joaquin, reeking with fruitfulness, and the millions of Asia crowding toward the verge of starvation, lay the iron-hearted monster of steel and steam … its ever hungry maw glutted with the harvests that should have fed the famished bellies of the whole world of the Orient' (832).[70] Materially, however, the language of predation endows the railway with animacy, moving it away from its own lifeless 'steel and steam' construction and closer to the living nature of the wheat. Likewise, Norris's exaltation of the grain as 'the germ of life' shows that it engenders something larger than itself – a place to space transformation – both in terms of its own growth from seed to crop and its consumption by people for food, just as the railway moving through the valley generates a sphere of influence greater than itself as a place. In the same way that Norris marks the space of the railway through capitalised proper nouns, 'the Colossus, the Octopus', so too 'an entire People' individuates the consumers of wheat from the rest of humanity, demarcating a discrete space in the world market.

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[69] Dolan, 'A "Mighty World-Force"', 300.

[70] Resentment and criticism of the railway monopolies was fuelled by the same objections expressed by the narrator here, that 'legendary new markets, especially for California's farm products, proved elusive for several decades' after the completion of the first transcontinental route, despite expectations that it 'would end California's isolation': Richard J Orsi, '"The Octopus" Reconsidered: The Southern Pacific and Agricultural Modernization in California, 1865-1915', *California Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (1975), 197, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25157574.

As Pizer notes, the timeframe of the narrative corresponds to one complete cycle of wheat cultivation; accordingly, we first encounter the representation of the wheat as a space during its ploughing.[71] From the perspective of Vanamee, the enigmatic shepherd who is here employed to help till the land, the narrative describes the view across the landscape:

> At intervals, from the tops of one of the rare, low swells of the land, Vanamee overlooked a wider horizon. On the other divisions of Quien Sabe the same work was in progress. … Farther off to the west on the Osterman ranch other columns [of horse-drawn ploughs] came and went, and, once, from the crest of the highest swell on his division, Vanamee caught a distant glimpse of the Broderson ranch. There, too, moving specks indicated that the ploughing was under way. (680)[72]

Ploughing encompasses the entire valley, as dominant and ubiquitous as the railway from before. So far, this is only the seed of space. Whereas the locomotive exceeds its physical form to generate a sphere of influence larger than itself, a space, the expanse that Vanamee sees is simply the same material process, ploughing, repeated across the landscape as an array of places. The 'moving specks' show that, even in the most distant ranch, each plough can be distinguished as a separate entity. This changes when the narrative shifts from Vanamee's vision to his intuition, using his elevated vantage point to realise a larger truth, much in the same way that London uses summits in *The Valley of the Moon*:

> farther away still, far off there beyond the fine line of the horizons, over the curve of the globe, the shoulder of the earth, he knew were other ranches, and beyond these others, and beyond these still others, the immensities multiplying to infinity. (680)

While the 'other ranches' refer to real albeit unidentified places beyond the San Joaquin, both they and the farmland in Vanamee's line of sight are subsumed into a collective space, demarcated by the sensation of limitlessness – 'the immensities multiplying to infinity'. In

[71] Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris*, 155 and 'The Concept of Nature', 76.
[72] Preston and Preston identify and discuss a contemporary lithograph that illustrates the 'impressive spectacle' of horse-drawn agricultural machinery, as Norris describes here, in their, 'Pictured Landscapes', 55. See the original lithograph: Thomas H. Thompson, 'Scene on Hamilton-Dale Ranch, T. J. Dale, Proprietor', in *Official Historical Atlas Map of Tulare County*, 69.

this nascent stage in its growth, space already enacts the power and magnitude of the wheat, like the railway but on a far greater global scale.[73]

After a brief one sentence paragraph that reinforces the extent of ploughing 'everywhere throughout the great San Joaquin' (680), Norris then turns to the moral and symbolic implications of wheat cultivation:

> It was the long stroking caress, vigorous, male, powerful, for which the Earth seemed panting. The heroic embrace of a multitude of iron hands, gripping deep into the brown, warm flesh of land that quivered responsive and passionate under this rude advance, so robust as to be almost an assault, so violent as to be veritably brutal. There, … the elemental Male and Female, locked in a colossal embrace, at grapples in the throes of an infinite desire, at once terrible and divine, knowing no law, untamed, savage, natural, sublime. (680)

Just as the railway is earlier zoomorphised with its 'tentacles of steel clutching into the soil' (617), so too the agricultural machinery is depicted as a violent organism, its 'multitude of iron hands, gripping deep into the … land'. But gendered as 'male', the forceful physicality of the ploughing is redeemed and validated, according to heteronormative standards, by the feminisation of the receiving earth – 'panting', 'brown, warm flesh', 'quivered response', 'Female'. Transformed from a destructive into a reproductive act, the sexualisation of the farm work prompts Norris's narrator to exalt both the violent industrialism and the natural basis of wheat cultivation: 'at once terrible and divine, knowing no law, untamed, savage, natural, sublime'. While not eradicating the violence of the railway, the 'sublime' agriculture symbolises a greater and more righteous use of the environment than that realised by the locomotive, hence why Terry Beers might have included this passage of the novel in a literary anthology that 'attempt[s] to recover and preserve for readers some of the paradise that California has lost'.[74] At the same time, though, this invocation of the sublime arises from space, just as the iniquities of the railway. A virtuous counterpart to 'the Colossus, the

[73] Dolan pays particular attention to the global scale of the wheat in her 'A "Mighty World Force', 295-316.
[74] Terry Beers, introduction to *Unfolding Beauty: Celebrating California's Landscapes*, ed. Terry Beers (Santa Clara: Santa Clara University; Berkeley: Heyday, 2000), xii; Frank Norris, 'The Octopus', in ibid, 350.

Octopus' of the railway space, the 'elemental Male and Female' each amalgamate myriad different places – individual ploughs and ranches respectively – into unified bodies, representing not a physical but an economic and environmental geography, bound by a common agricultural practice.

At the ends of the second and third chapters, Norris uses the same distinctive structure – ornate, perhaps 'over-written' – to describe the wheat as he does the railway, reinforcing their common constitution as spaces.[75] The chapters cover the same critical moment in the cycle of the wheat, the night before the crop sprouts from the soil, from two perspectives, each of a man wandering the fields before daybreak as they confront their different romantic situations. The first is Annixter, the rancher whose humourless demeanour and hostility to women are both swept away by his realisation of his affection towards Hilma Tree, the daughter of one of his workers. As soon as he exclaims his character-transforming epiphany, '"Why—I—I, I *love* her"' (869), the sun rises and he sees that:

> The wheat had come up. It was there before him, around him, everywhere, illimitable, immeasurable. … Once more the strength of nations was renewed. Once more the force of the world was revivified. Once more the Titan, benignant, calm, stirred and woke, and the morning abruptly blazed into glory upon the spectacle of a man whose heart leaped exuberant with the love of a woman, and an exulting earth gleaming transcendent with the radiant magnificence of an inviolable pledge. (870)

As with the railway, Norris encircles the wheat with epithetic adjectives and metaphors, a structure that evokes spaciousness before we even consider the words themselves. Recalling the omnipresence of the train, which was earlier seen 'shooting from horizon to horizon' (617), the wheat encompasses the surrounding environment, being 'everywhere, illimitable, immeasurable'. While certainly geographical, the wheat does not constitute an inanimate landscape, for Norris endows it with the qualities of a sentient organism, 'the Titan, benignant, calm, stirred and woke'; with such agency, a departure from the properties of its

[75] Crow, 'Regions of California', 385.

material form, the wheat instead amounts to space like the railway, one 'the Titan' and the other 'the Octopus'. There the similarities end. Where the appearance of the engine so often heralds destruction, the 'benignant' wheat 'renew[s]' and 'revivifie[s]', personified by Annixter's realisation of his amorous feelings toward Hilma. The emergence of the crop and Annixter's love sanctify each other, so that the 'inviolable pledge' refers as much to the promise of the earth to subsist its inhabitants as the commitment of an ensuing romantic relationship. Thus, as Dolan states, the wheat not only punishes transgression as with Behrman in the elevator shaft at the end of the novel but 'also rewards characters in the novel'.[76]

The second iteration of the same daybreak in the following chapter expounds the reason why the wheat is so virtuous in comparison to the railway. The narrative follows Vanamee as he grieves for his lover of sixteen years ago, Angéle Varian, who was assaulted by an unknown 'Other' and died in subsequent childbirth.[77] As Vanamee recovers from seeing an apparition of Angéle, which transpires to be her daughter, he looks at the same fields as Annixter while the dawn breaks:

> The Wheat! The Wheat! … Once more the pendulum of the seasons swung in its mighty arc, from death back to life. Life out of death, eternity rising from out dissolution. There was the lesson. Angéle was not the symbol, but the *proof* of immortality. The seed dying, rotting and corrupting in the earth; rising again in life unconquerable, and in immaculate purity,—Angéle dying as she gave birth to her little daughter, life springing from her death,—the pure, unconquerable, coming forth from the defiled. (889. Original emphasis.)

[76] Dolan, 'A "Mighty World-Force"', 313 n. 15.
[77] Stuart Burns contends that the 'Other' is Vanamee's confidant, the Spanish priest at the local San Juan Mission, which would correspond to Norris's racism where 'villains or degenerates are invariably Jews … or Latins', while John Jolly posits the assailant of Angéle is Vanamee himself, recalling the violent and misogynistic flaws of the eponymous protagonist of Norris's first written (but posthumously published) novel *Vandover and the Brute*: Stuart L Burns, 'The Rapist in Frank Norris's *The Octopus*', *American Literature* 42, no. 4 (1971): 568, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2924732; John Jolly, 'The Genesis of the Rapist in "The Octopus": Frank Norris's Revision of "Vandover and the Brute"', *Western American Literature* 17, no. 3 (1982), 201-11, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43018698.

The ‘lesson’, the consolation for the bereaved Vanamee, is the cyclical nature of the wheat, its ‘dying, rotting and corrupting in the earth; rising again in life’. This renewal and rebirth are personified by the appearance of the daughter in place of the deceased Angéle, whom Norris plainly states in his notes for the novel is ‘a symbol of the wheat’.[78] The propagation of the wheat – hinted at during its ploughing through the ‘elemental Male and Female’, suggested in the previous chapter by Annixter’s realisation of his love for Hilma, but now almost explicit – is what ultimately distinguishes the crop from the railway, which, incapable of reproduction, knows only wanton consumption: ‘that huge, sprawling organism … swollen with life-blood, reaching out to infinity, gorged to bursting; an excrescence, a gigantic parasite fattening upon the life-blood of an entire commonwealth’ (806). The trace of the enlarged pregnant body in the ‘swollen’, ‘gorged to bursting’, and ‘excrescen[t]’ form of the railway only renders more conspicuous the sterility of its ‘life-blood’ hoarding. Conversely, the wheat consumes natural and industrial resources both to grow this year and to respawn in the next. Even though it is the seed for moral divergence from the railway, the *cycle* of the wheat is itself a space, albeit one where the constituent places – ploughing, sowing, sprouting, harvest – are separated by time rather than geography.

Even without a formal critical approach, a reader is likely to notice the shared techniques through which Norris depicts the wheat and the railway: the emphasis on vastness and expanse, the long series of epithets that create distance between the description and the described, the animacy of inanimate objects. These recurrences are all the more significant for the continuity and grounding that they provide to a text whose ‘structure is not universally considered to be unified’ as Christine Elizabeth King puts it, more charitably so than Kenneth

[78] Norris, ‘Character Sketches for *The Octopus*’, p. 11, BANC FILM 2381, Frank Norris Collection of Papers and Related Materials, Bancroft Library.

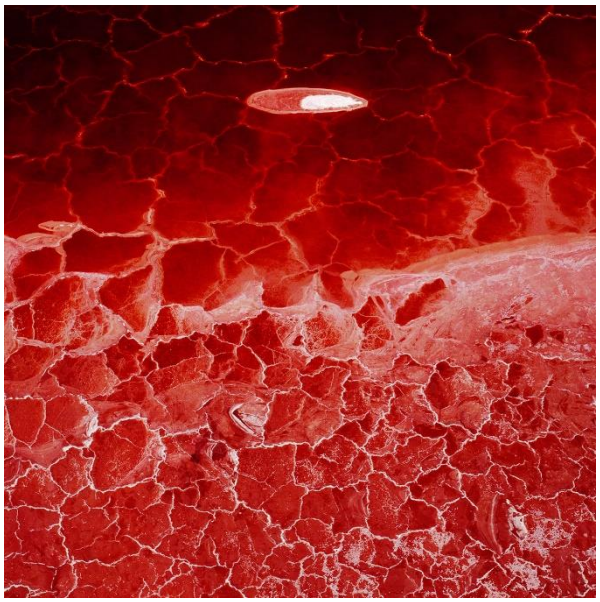
Lynn's assessment that 'measured by any architectonic standard, *The Octopus* is a literary chaos'.[79] With a spatial framework, we can develop that initial inkling of equivalency between wheat and railway into a much more thorough understanding of their common constitution – a transformation of place into space – and their subsequent divergence into reproductive and destructive entities respectively, each offering a different response to what Kevin Starr sees as the perennial Californian question: how best to reap the abundant resources of the state.[80]

[79] Christine Elizabeth King, 'Frank Norris's Argument for Naturalism' (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 1994), 139, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.x57016. Edward W. Younkins voices a rare dissenting opinion on this, writing that '*The Octopus* is a masterpiece of structure with interweaving plots and an integrated series of dramas', which are precisely what so many other scholars find disjointed about the narrative: Edward W. Younkins, *Exploring Capitalist Fiction: Business through Literature and Film* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 36. Kenneth S. Lynn, introduction to *The Octopus* by Frank Norris (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), v.

[80] Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 388.

Chapter Three

'The Feel of the Purposeful Earth': Synthesising Place and Space in the Sierra Nevada of Mary Austin's *The Ford* (1917)




Figures 3.1 and 3.2. David Maisel, (left) *The Lake Project 3*, 2001, and (right) *Oblivion 15n*, 2004, both pigment print and in Oakland Museum of California, Oakland.[1]

A first viewing indicates only stark differences between *The Lake Project 3* and *Oblivion 15n*, two works by San Francisco-based photographer David Maisel. The aerial images each belong to separate series and capture locations some 200 miles apart – the incarnadined Owens Lake of the rural Sierra Nevada in the first, the monochrome urbanity of Los Angeles in the other.[2] Visible on the horizon of the latter, the San Gabriel Mountains form an imposing barrier between the two locations. But in its permanent Gallery of California Art,

[1] The accompanying label at the Oakland Museum of California (see note three) dates both photographs 2013, the year of their acquisition, not completion as I provide in this caption. The latter information, along with remarks by the artist and the high-resolution images used here, are available on Maisel's website: https://davidmaisel.com/works/the-lake-project/#17 and http://davidmaisel.com/works/oblivion/#14.

[2] The two photographic series were published as: David Maisel, *The Lake Project* ([Paso Robles, CA]: Nazraeli Press, 2004) and *Oblivion* ([Paso Robles, CA]: Nazraeli Press, 2006). The distance between the two locations is given in Kenneth J. Hollett, Welsey R. Danskin, William F. McCaffrey, and Caryl L. Walti, *Geology and Water Resources of Owens Valley, California*, United States Geological Survey Water-Supply Paper 2370-B (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991), B1, https://doi.org/10.3133/wsp2370B.

the Oakland Museum of California displays the two works side by side with a shared label explaining how 'together these photographs … tell the story of water use in California', for the environments that they picture are deeply interconnected.[3] In 1913, following a determined political campaign, the Los Angeles Board of Water diverted the flow of the Owens River towards the city, facilitating its growth into a major metropolis.[4] The aqueduct system remains to this day the 'main source of water for the city'.[5] From this social perspective, the materiality of the setting of *The Lake Project 3* is abstracted into space, a mere water supply that generates the place of the second image: the vast landscape of Los Angeles. These roles are reversed, however, on the reciprocal side of the interaction between the two locations. In this environmental view, the entire city in *Oblivion 15n* – its infrastructural complexity, countless industries, and myriad inhabitants – is distilled into a simple quantity of water consumed, a space that transforms Owens Lake in the first photograph. A 1991 study by the United States Geological Survey summarises these dramatic, anthropogenic changes:

> Prior to 20th-century development in Owens Valley, Owens Lake was a large body of water that covered more than 100 mi^2 and exceeded a depth of 20ft. Diversion of streamflow for irrigation uses in the early 1900's and to the river-aqueduct system after 1913, however, altered the water budget of the lake. Evaporation now exceeds inflow except in very wet years, and the lake is presently (1988) a playa.[6]

The only water remaining on the drained lakebed are hypersaline (saltier than the oceans) pools, where pigmented bacteria thrive and turn the landscape red.[7] Maisel's vivid rendition

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[3] Oakland Museum of California, museum label for David Maisel, *The Lake Project 3* and *Oblivion 15n*, viewed 10 May 2019.
[4] Norris Hundley Jr., *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water, 1770s-1990s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 141-65. See for a briefer account: David Carle, *Introduction to Water in California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 115-18.
[5] Hollett et al., *Geology and Water Resources*, B2.
[6] Ibid, B3. New methods have since allowed for more accurate estimations of historic water levels for the lake, confirming that the present desiccation of the area has no precedent in recent geological history: Steven N. Bacon, Nicholas Lancaster, Scott Stine, Edward J. Rhodes, and Grace A. Macarley Holder, 'A Continuous 4000-year lake-level record of Owens Lake, south-central Sierra Nevada, California, USA', *Quaternary Research* 90, no. 2 (2018), 290 table 3, https://doi.org/10.1017/qua.2018.50.
[7] David B. Herbst and Michael Prather, 'Owens Lake – From Dustbowl to Mosaic of Salt Water Habitats', *Lakeline* 34, no. 3 (2014), 35-36, http://herbstlab.msi.ucsb.edu/pdfs/Herbst&Prather.2014_LakeLine.Owens.pdf.

of this colouring exemplifies what Jennifer Peeples terms the 'toxic sublime', where 'instead of contrasting the beautiful and the unsightly, the pristine and the desecrated, … photographers create beauty in destruction—stunning images of devastated environments'.[8] The striking hue of *The Lake Project 3* marks the disembodied polluting presence – the space – of the distant city shown in *Oblivion 15n*, visualising Karen Piper's lament that 'the dry bed of what was once Owens Lake contains the detritus of Los Angeles's fantasies'.[9]

Just as Los Angeles colours *The Lake Project 3* its arresting red while the same waterbody sustains the bleak black and white cityscape of *Oblivion 15n,* so too the dual nature of a location as both a *product and producer* – a place and a space – of remote regions underlies Mary Hunter Austin's 1917 novel *The Ford*. Dealing with the same subject as Maisel's photographs, the acclaimed writer of the American Southwest fictionalises the bitter dispute between local farmers and Los Angeles (recast in the text to San Francisco) over rights to the water of the Owens Valley prior to its diversion.[10] Set in the imagined Sierra Nevada county of Tierra Longa, *The Ford* follows the growth into adulthood of the ranchers' children, the siblings Kenneth and Anne Brent, and of their friends Frank Rickart and Virginia Burke, the son of a powerful capitalist and his local agent's daughter, while around them landowning farmers and speculators clash over plans for oil development and then water irrigation. But the novel is no typical coming of age narrative; as Anne Raine notes, it 'subverts the bildungsroman's anthropocentric and andocentric conventions … by redefining

[8] Jennifer Peeples, 'Toxic Sublime: Imagining Contaminated Landscapes', *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture* 5, no. 4 (2011), 376, doi:10.1080/17524032.2011.616516. Though the article focuses on the works of Canadian landscape photographer Edward Burtynsky, Peeples identifies Maisel as a practitioner of the 'toxic sublime'.
[9] Karen Piper, 'Dreams, Dust and Birds: The Trashing of Owens Lake', *Places Journal* (2011), para. 1, doi:10.22269/110124.
[10] Heike Schäfer, *Mary Austin's Regionalism: Reflections on Gender, Genre, and Geography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 167. The monograph was published under the anglicised form of the critic's name, Schaefer, which I cite here and in my bibliography with the umlaut so as to be consistent with her native language and the spelling used for her more recent publications.

the environment as simultaneously social, economic, and ecological'.[11] This radical integration of the human with the nonhuman arises from Austin's emphasis on the mutually-constructive relationship between a place and its underlying structures – in a word, space.

Throughout the novel, landmarks and key locations of the Tierra Longa manifest as both the outcome of combined social and nonhuman activities (space forms place) as well as the generator of further economic development and environmental change (place engenders space). *The Ford* thus represents a synthesis of the two novels previously considered. *The Valley of the Moon* centres on only the formation of place, first by those who oppress the protagonists in the city and then by the working-class couple themselves as they journey towards their rural utopia. Antithetically but no less one-directionally, *The Octopus* pursues the productive power of space, which, materialised through the wheat and railway, determines the events of the narrative. Combining both those approaches allows *The Ford* to progress towards a mutually beneficial settlement between the farmers and capitalists. The two antagonistic spaces of local agricultural economy and speculative urban capital each converge on and, over the course of novel, find common ground in the places – physical locations – of the Tierra Longa; hence Betsy Klimasmith asserts that in the novel 'the land determines what is best for it'.[12] This interplay of immediate setting with larger structures strikes a balance between place and space, avoiding the romantic escapism of the individualist *Valley* at one extreme and at the other the inevitable triumph of capital in the determinist *Octopus*. Indeed, Austin envisioned her work in general as a meld of individual and local agency with the determinism of environmental and economic forces, writing in her

[11] Anne Raine, '"The Man at the Sources": Gender, Capital, and the Conservationist Landscape in Mary Austin's *The Ford*', in *Exploring Lost Borders: Critical Essays on Mary Austin*, eds. Melody Graulich and Elizabeth Klimasmith (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999), 247. Schäfer makes a similar point about the genre of the novel in her *Mary Austin's Regionalism*, 168 and 173-76.
[12] Betsy Klimasmith, '"I have seen America emerging": Mary Austin's Regionalism', in *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 547.

1932 autobiography *Earth Horizon* that 'I would write imaginatively, not only of people, but of the scene, the totality which is called Nature'.[13] I show that Austin understands and represents that 'totality' not only 'in terms of place' as Klimasmith argues but crucially through the larger structures of space too.[14]

By reading *The Ford* through my spatial framework, this chapter encourages scholars to consider not just the implications but the economic and ecological *construction* of Austin's written landscapes. Questions of regional identity and later environmental politics have long been central to critical discourse about the novelist, but her actual methods of depicting geography have yet to be the subject of sustained, focused analysis and are a logical next area of inquiry for Austin scholarship. The labelling of Austin as a regionalist writer began with her contemporary critics, backed by her own assertion that 'art … is the response [people] make in various mediums to the impact that the totality of their experience makes upon them, and there is no sort of experience that works so constantly and subtly upon man as his regional environment'.[15] In 1932, two years before the novelist's death, Lowry Charles Wimberly associated Austin with 'the New Regionalism', a 'revolt by the West against the so-called literary domination of the East'.[16] Again, Austin's critical writing invited this categorisation, despite her frequent wish 'to escape her reputation as a Western writer'.[17] In a 1920 essay, she denounces the intellectual dominance of the northeast, claiming that of the 'books about American writing and American thinking … the greater number of them are

[13] Mary Austin, *Earth Horizon: Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1932), vii.
[14] Klimasmith, '"I have seen America emerging"', 532.
[15] Mary Austin, 'Regionalism in American Fiction', *The English Journal* 21, no. 2 (1932), 97, https://www.jstor.org/stable/803470. Stineman outlines Austin's relationship with her contemporary critics and frequent disagreement with them in her *Mary Austin*, 126-29 and 167-68.
[16] Lowry Charles Wimberly, 'The New Regionalism', *Prairie Schooner* 6, no. 3 (1932), 214, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40622336.
[17] Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson, *Mary Austin and the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), ix, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nottingham/detail.action?docID=1991743.

about what a small New York group thinks ought to be written and thought'.[18] It is therefore not surprising that by 1936 Austin was seen as not merely a practitioner but the exemplar of the 'new regionalism', with Robert Penn Warren declaring that 'the theoretically perfect regionalist must be someone like Mary Austin'.[19] At the same time, his equivocal and disinclined tone – '*theoretically* perfect' suggesting defects in practice, '*must*' begrudging the ostensibly positive assessment – reflects the exclusion of Austin and other women writers from the canon during the 'professionalization and concomitant masculinization' of American literary criticism in the 1930s and 1940s.[20]

The rediscovery of Austin by feminist literary critics in the mid-1980s prompted not only the republication of her long out of print works, including *The Ford* by the University of California Press in 1997, but also more socially and environmentally engaged readings of her regionalism than those offered by her contemporaries.[21] In one of only five contributions devoted to a single writer in the 31 chapter strong *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America* (2003), Klimasmith uses *The Ford* to show that 'Austin's regionalism is not limited to the aesthetics or visuality of place; region is never divorced from economics or culture'.[22] Her assertion refutes the disinterest of earlier critics in the social implications of Austin's regionalism, typified by Van Wyck Brooks in his mid-century survey of U.S. literature, where he spends over a page prettifying the Sierra Nevada landscape where the novelist lived before deeming three of her most famous works 'deeply felt and picturesque,

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[18] Mary Austin, 'New York: Dictator of American Criticism', in *Beyond Borders: The Selected Essays of Mary Austin*, ed. Reuben J. Ellis (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 56. The Illinois-born Austin did not even choose to live in California; she writes bluntly in her autobiography that 'Mary had not been consulted' on the matter: Austin, *Earth Horizon*, 177.
[19] Robert Penn Warren, 'Regionalism or the Coterie Manifesto', *Saturday Review of Literature*, 28 November 1936, 8.
[20] Heike Schaefer, *Mary Austin's Regionalism*, 13.
[21] Schäfer writes that those early critics were 'less interested in the general epistemological questions that Austin's assertions of geographical determination raised than in the ramification of Austin's regionalism for conceptualizations of the American nation': ibid., 12.
[22] Klimasmith, '"I have seen America emerging"', 546. The other four 'regionalist masters' who each receive their own chapters in the collection are Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Willa Cather, and Wallace Stegner.

though perhaps a little too cunningly, or too consciously, wrought'.[23] While offering a far more politically engaged reading, Klimasmith in her brief discussion of *The Ford* does not examine any of its landscapes, only generalising that in the text 'modernity reshapes the space of region'.[24] Schäfer likewise identifies *The Ford* as a 'regionalist work of literature' without examining its representations of geography, instead investigating how, 'by tracing the inner and outer development of its main characters, the novel emphasizes the intersecting gender, class, and environmental aspects of Tierra Longa's past and present situation'.[25]

The most thorough analysis of the setting of *The Ford* remains Anne Raine's chapter in the landmark 1999 collection, *Exploring Lost Borders: Critical Essays on Mary Austin*. Unlike Klimasmith and Schäfer, Raine centres Austin's descriptions of landscape with her contention that '*The Ford* constructs a conservationist fictional space in which … relations between human beings and the physical landscape are inextricable from social and economic structures'.[26] By showing that its 'urban and rural spaces are structured not only by ecological relationships, but by systems of governmental, technological, and corporate power', Raine distinguishes *The Ford* from the ecocentrism of Austin's more famous and frequently studied writings, particularly the 'desert's sublime indifference to human agency' in her most renowned work, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903).[27] While her essay affirms the scholarly value of the previously neglected novel (though she still insists that it is 'less convincing' than others in Austin's oeuvre) and exemplifies the usefulness of a close study of its geography, Raine largely overlooks the agency of place in *The Ford*.[28] She is rightly attentive to how the 'material landscape' in the text is 'incorporated into modern capitalist sociospatial relations',

[23] Van Wyck Brooks, *The Confident Years: 1885-1915* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1952), 354-55. Those writings are *The Land of Little Rain* (1903), *Lost Borders* (1909), and *The Flock* (1906).
[24] Klimasmith, '"I have seen America emerging"', 547.
[25] Schaefer, *Mary Austin's Regionalism*, 174 and 168.
[26] Raine, '"The Man at the Sources"', 246.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid, 247.

but then overlooks the ways that those relations are in turn reshaped by that physical environment, just as Maisel's two photographs earlier illustrated.[29]

My discussion of the novel asserts the importance of this mutually-formative relationship between local setting and larger structure, in other words place and space: it provides the foundation for Austin's radical 'construction of a viable *working* relation between human and natural economies' and distinguishes *The Ford* from the determinism of naturalist texts like *The Octopus*, where social and natural forces dominate immediate lives and locations.[30] Austin's attention to how local place actively shapes larger spaces means that *The Ford* is more than 'a natural compliment to Norris's novel as a story of how the forces of development and industrialization reshape a region in serve to the unchecked destructive forces of laissez-faire capitalism', as Terry Beers claims.[31] Building on Raine's most significant contribution to the field, I thus seek to push the general trajectory of Austin scholarship further towards *how* she constructs her signature western and Californian landscapes, away from those contemporary commentators and more modern critics who each considered only the appearances and the implications of her written geographies. Austin herself might have welcomed such an approach, having explained in a 1915 letter to her friend Jack London that 'you don't know how tired I get of being called "the greatest American stylist"'.[32]

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[29] Ibid, 248.
[30] Ibid, 262. Her emphasis. Raine finds only a moral, not a structural, difference between the two novels, observing that the 'water companies made production possible, and so seemed more intrinsically benevolent than the monopoly-controlled railroad system described in *The Octopus*': ibid, 250.
[31] Terry Beers, *The End of Eden: Agrarian Spaces and the Rise of the California Social Novel* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2018), 169-70.
[32] Mary Austin to Jack London, 26 October 1915, box 94, Mary Hunter Austin Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California, United States. In response, London implored Austin to take the comment as a compliment: Jack London to Mary Austin, 5 November 1915, in *Literary America 1903-1934. The Mary Austin Letters*, ed. T. M. Pearce (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 73-75.

On the surface, the first chapter of *The Ford* might seem to demonstrate in dramatic fashion the hardships of farming in the Tierra Longa. Kenneth Brent, the ten-year-old child of a rancher family, tries to guide his reluctant flock of sheep across a fast-flowing stream.[33] The flock makes it, save for one lamb whom Kenneth sees stranded on a sandbank, surrounded by the rushing water. Pressured by the knowledge that 'his father … expected him to bring *all* the flock in' (16) – an oblique reference to the fine margins of economic survival for the farmers – Kenneth wades the stream to rescue the shivering animal. The ominous atmosphere when he picks it up suggests the worst for the creature: 'as he looked up with the drowned lamb in his arms, he saw it dark; pale darkness like obsidian above, and thick blackness around the foot of the Torr'' (17). In this moment, the Tierra Longa appears treacherous, with the spreading gloom of dusk demarcating a space hostile to the farming community, just as the train whistle from *The Octopus* does when it blows and is heard throughout the valley.[34] But Austin rarely treats the environment in such a one-dimensional light; in *The Land of Little Rain,* for example, she writes even of the forbidding Death Valley that 'void of life it never is, however dry the air and villainous the soil'.[35] So it is here in *The Ford*, where the suffering of the lamb, which symbolises the innocence and promise of Kenneth and his generation of future ranchers, is not born of any inherently dangerous or uninhabitable qualities of the landscape. Rather, we learn that the creek was inadvertently diverted through the sheep field by nearby workers who 'had been busy cleaning the ditch and had turned the water back in its ancient channel' (14).

[33] Mary Austin, *The Ford* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 16 and 14. Subsequent references to this text in this chapter appear in parentheses.
[34] Frank Norris, 'The Octopus: A Story of California' in *Frank Norris: Novels and Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1986), 579, 617, 626, 651, 896, 1026.
[35] Mary Austin, 'The Land of Little Rain', in *Essential Mary Austin: A Selection of Mary Austin's best writings* ed. Kevin Hearle (Berkeley: Heyday, 2006), 5.

Alongside that cautionary tale of incompetent human activity in the environment, specifically intervention in its waterways, the first chapter also hints at the possibility of a mutually beneficial relationship between society and nonhuman nature. When Austin introduces the area where Kenneth's herd grazes, she commodifies and anthropomorphises the land, endowing it with an almost preordained agricultural usefulness:

> The meadow of Mariposa Creek lay close up under the Torr'. It was more than a mile from the ranch house and was kept clear for the lambing ewes on account of the lush grass and the strip of windy dunes that fenced it from the valley. At the upper end of the meadow, where the creek came out in soddy runnels under the fern, the Torr' began. It rose from the mesa that closed the southern end of Tierra Longa, with the smooth, lovely swell of a woman's breast. (7)

The boundary of the Brent farm arises almost organically from this 'naturally fenced meadow' (12), enclosed by the 'strip of windy dunes'. This stands in sharp contrast to the San Joaquin valley of *The Octopus*, where Norris constantly highlights the painstaking labour of constructing and maintaining property divisions: in its beginning we see the German immigrant Hooven working on a 'vast trench not yet completed' that separates 'two divisions of the Los Muertos ranch', and throughout the narrative thereafter the reader frequently encounters a character 'mending breaks in the wire fences'.[36] In reality, much of this work would not have been as arduous as Norris suggests given that barbed wire was 'cheap, easy to install' – indeed it 'ushered in a new era of modern ranching' – but the geography of the Tierra Longa saves the Brent family even that relatively undemanding, historically accurate labour.[37] Austin only compounds the favourable characteristics of the novel's geography when she goes on to describe it through the female form. The 'lovely swell of a woman's

[36] Norris, 'The Octopus', 588, 606, 641, 893. We even encounter a dispute between the landowner and tenant over who is responsible for such onerous tasks, with the railroad representative S. Behrman warning a rancher who had just lost his flock of sheep after they strayed onto the train tracks that '"I will have to lodge a protest against you, Mr. Annixter, in the matter of keeping your line fence in repair"': ibid, 638.

[37] Elaine M. Nelson, 'Barbed Wire', in *The Settlement of America: Encyclopedia of Western Expansion from Jamestown to the Closing of the Frontier*, eds. James A. Crutchfield, Candy Moulton, and Terry A. Del Bene (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 73. The most thorough study of this innovation remains husband and wife Henry D. McCallum and Frances T. McCallum's labour of love, *The Wire that Fenced the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965).

breast' evokes fertility and nurturing, two essential qualities for agriculture and prosperity in general (though the women in the novel possess far more agency and complexity than this imagery might suggest).[38] In purely topographical terms, *The Ford* begins where Jack London's *The Valley of the Moon* ends: in an enclosed landscape that seems made for farming.[39] Billy's remark to his wife Saxon upon reaching their rural utopia in the latter novel, that '"this place was specially manufactured for us"', could just have well have been uttered about the geography of the Tierra Longa.[40]

In just the first chapter, then, Austin gives the reader two competing visions of the relations between Tierra Longa and its inhabitants. While the landscape itself appears perfectly suited to habitation and cultivation, human work, such as the mere cleaning of a ditch, can reconfigure the environment and imperil both livestock and farmer. With respect to narrative development, Austin thus establishes the themes of the central conflict in the novel: as Schäfer summarises, '*The Ford* presents the arid region as suited for agricultural development. The problems stem less from the climatic conditions than from the incapacity of the farmers to coordinate their efforts'.[41] Raine concurs, noting that 'in *The Ford*, [Austin] is highly sceptical of the farmers' ability to read the modern landscape in a viable way'.[42] This thematic tension between the inherent qualities of the environment and its modification by often unwitting people is grounded in Austin's use of opposing constructions of geography. As a place, a physical feature in the landscape, the creek and with it the threat to Kenneth's flock is the *product* of an anthropogenic space generated by the men working in the trench. Conversely, in Austin's idealised descriptions of the Tierra Longa geography,

[38] Raine provides an incisive commentary on the place of women in the text: '"The Man at the Sources"', 245-60.
[39] Jack London, *The Valley of the Moon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 385-86.
[40] Ibid, 389.
[41] Schaefer, *Mary Austin's Regionalism*, 171.
[42] Raine, '"The Man at the Sources"', 252.

material place – the 'naturally fenced meadow' (12) with hills akin to a 'woman's breast' (7) – *produces* the ideal conditions for the space of agricultural production. In this framework, the fundamental problem that the novel poses is not so much the pursuit of an agreement between the farmers and capitalist speculators as it is whether society as a whole can realise that inherent and specific usefulness of the land and its promise of prosperity. Suggesting an answer to this question and foreshadowing the ultimately positive conclusion of the novel, the first chapter ends with Kenneth, drenched but safe in his home, making the surprising discovery about the rescued lamb still cradled in his arms – '"it beats… it beats!"' (18, original ellipsis).

As the novel unfolds, Austin continues to endow locations in Tierra Longa with a predetermined socio-economic purpose. In the third chapter, this unrealised potential space even supplants the place itself (the immediate form and appearance of the location) as the primary determiner of the experience of the landscape. The chapter begins with the narrative voice adopting a panoramic position to survey the surroundings and introduce the reader to the river that runs through the valley:

> On clear days, the outlook from Palomitas [the Brent family's ranch] took in the flat glimmer of the marshes in which the river lost itself at the far end of Tierra Longa. Always one had the town in view and the green-lined squares of quarter-sections which fringed the creeks between the Agua Caliente fence and the green, meandering smudge the river made on its way down from the west flank of the Torr'. (34)

Initially, Austin's evocation of light through the 'clear days' and 'glimmer of the marshes' and her suggestion of boundlessness – 'the river lost itself' – both paint a typical if not appealing pastoral scene. As with the introductory description of Tierra Longa in the first chapter, the prose is so far redolent of the idyllic vistas that punctuate *The Valley of the Moon* with increasing frequency as the protagonists journey toward the titular paradise.[43] But the rather unflattering characterisation of the river's path as a 'green, meandering *smudge*' hints

[43] London, *The Valley*, 75-77, 210-14, 385-86.

at a disdain for the landscape. This intensifies in the following sentence where the narrator describes the waterbody in detail:

> It was a little river, but swift and full, beginning with the best intentions of turning mills or whirring dynamos, with the happiest possibilities of watering fields and nursing orchards, but, discouraged by the long neglect of man, becoming like all wasted things, a mere pest of mud and malaria. (34)

What is most striking here is that Austin does not focus on any detriments to society from its failure to realise 'the river's productive potential within the human regional economy'.[44] Rather, the 'wasted' landscape itself seems the primary casualty of underdevelopment. As *ideas* conjured by the physical characteristics of the 'little river' (a place) as opposed to real material objects in themselves, the 'turning mills', 'whirring dynamos', 'water[ed] fields' and 'nurs[ed] orchards' are all spaces. They transform the pastoral character of the landscape from the start of the chapter into a veritable dystopia of 'wasted things, a mere pest of mud and malaria', leaving the reader with the feeling, neatly articulated by George Henderson, that 'nature is incomplete'.[45] Like the 'naturally fenced meadow' (12) from the first chapter, the unexploited river invites specific forms of economic production (a generation of space by place), but it also goes further, demonstrating through its spoiled appearance the negative consequences of failing to develop along those prescribed lines (a re-formation of place by space). Indeed, the mere thought of such development restores the beauty of the river, when 'Brent returned to a subject that was always in his mind,—"there's water … there's thousands of cubic inches of water…" His gaze wandering down the *glittering hieroglyphic* of the river completed the suggestion' (69, my emphasis).[46]

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[44] Raine, '"Man at the Sources"', 246.
[45] George L. Henderson, *California and the Fictions of Capital* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 205.
[46] Raine states that this imagery 'signif[ies] the river's unfulfilled desire' for development in her '"Man at the Sources"', 246.

We have seen that the beginning of *The Ford* strongly advocates the idea of a 'purposeful earth' (92), where places have an inherent and ideal economic usage, a social space waiting to be realised. The rest of Austin's novel is broadly concerned with the fulfilment of that promise of prosperity, as in *The Valley* though without the need to travel to a different location. But like London and perhaps even more so, Austin does not downplay the problems posed by social class, which proves the primary obstacle to realising the potential of Tierra Longa. Pushed by unfavourable soil conditions, a consequence of the failure of the ranchers to organise and develop irrigation, the Brent family sells their Palomitas ranch to Jevens, an 'unscrupulous prospector' gambling on the chance of striking oil.[47] This prompts a despondent Kenneth to tell his friend Virginia Burke that 'wherever the land flings us a handful of coin we run and scramble for it like beggars in the street' (62).

Unlike the farmers, the incoming capitalists have the means and organisation to develop the land. But beyond the question of whether and where it harbours oil, they are detached from and uninterested in the material qualities of the environment itself. Instead, Austin, through the collective thought process of the farming community, describes how the speculators impose themselves and their wealth upon the land, just as with the domination of places by the wheat and the railway in *The Octopus*. She writes that the ranchers thought that they

> must have Capital; and if they did, such was their deep conviction, Capital in the end would have them. … Such was their strange illusion about it that they believed that if once they could lay hand on it, Capital could be made to run in their harness, breed in their pastures. (95)

The conflation of capital, an amorphous and socially constructed economic power, with corporeal horses that 'run' and 'breed in their pastures' underscores the non-natural source of the farmers' shared vision. Whereas the idea for the development of the river emerges from

[47] Raine, '"The Man at the Sources"', 254.

the material reality of the waterbody itself, here the ‘strange illusion’ about capital has no roots in place and instead originates from the difficult social position of the ranchers. Likewise, the effects of this capital are not to modify or reshape a location but rather dissolve place and its unique and identifying particularities into a generic social category; the patriarch of the Brent family hopes that, through its sale, the ‘Palomitas … would become Capital; and the salt, barren acres an Investment’ (95). In both its origin and consequences, capital, as the farmers hopefully envision it, is utterly disconnected from the material qualities of place and operates only as a space. It is therefore unsurprising that, when the capitalist developers strike oil, the Brent family realise ‘how completely they had been deflected from the main line of prosperity’ (112); to avoid the same sorry fate as the ranchers in *The Octopus*, the farmers of *The Ford* must achieve the antithetical spatial relation, where economic space arises from rather than being imposed on material place. This geographical order, emblematic of a society that is sensitive to the natural environment, is what distinguishes justified uses of land from the exploitation of its resources.

After the Brent family sells their ranch, the narrative spends little time in the Sierra Nevada. It instead follows the growth into young adulthood of Kenneth and his peers, which is largely based in the bureaucratic world of San Francisco. Compared with the rest of the novel, these middle passages of *The Ford* have been the subject of much fruitful critical inquiry, especially concerning the relation between *bildungsroman* conventions and Austin’s radical gender politics. With the return of the narrative to Tierra Longa at the end of *The Ford*, Austin reaffirms the centrality of an equitable spatial formation to her vision of an ideal relation between people and the environment.

After an increasingly unsatisfying tenure working for T. Rickart, the San Franciscan capitalist and father of his childhood friend Frank, Kenneth resolves to return to Tierra Longa to organise the ranching community in an effort to irrigate their farmland with the local water supply and resist the campaign of San Francisco to appropriate the resource for itself. At the height of the dispute, just before the city capitalists benevolently and fancifully acquiesce to the rural inhabitants, the narrator voices Kenneth's thoughts:

> The system by which land and water became subject to the greed or caprice of men like Rickart was a bad one. … No, it wasn't any feeling about the System that had got him, it was a feeling for the land. Land was to be cherished, to be made productive. … It didn't make so much difference under *what* system it was bandied about, if you lost sight of that consideration. (403, emphasis and second ellipsis both original)

Here, Austin explicitly weighs up land relations with the social 'System' of capitalism. For Kenneth, the iniquities of the latter stem from maltreatment of the environment. But this is not an eco-centric formulation as we might find in Austin's other works.[48] Rather, 'land was to be cherished, to be made productive', which entails a marriage of economy and environment. 'Cherish[ing]' involves attentiveness to what the land yearns for, the socially useful spaces that it seems ideally shaped for: harnessing the power of the river, defining property boundaries according to the natural topography. Making the land 'productive' only fulfils the social side of the bargain if it realises the specific usefulness offered by the land.

By synthesising natural places with socially productive ones through the development by people of a preordained spatial purpose, Austin avoids the romantic escapism of *The Valley* at one extreme and the mechanistic triumph of capital in *The Octopus* at the other, which are each results of their respective concentration on place and on space. She also departs from historical events. While *The Ford* concludes with the local farmers and capitalist speculators reaching a mutually beneficial settlement, the real-life residents of the Owens Valley

[48] Raine, '"The Man at the Sources"', 247.

continued to protest the appropriation of its resources by Los Angeles at the time of the novel's publication.[49] Austin was almost certainly deliberate in this idealisation. From 1899 until 1910, she lived in Independence, a small town in the valley, with her husband and local land registrar Stafford Wallace Austin, who publicly objected to the initial attempts of the U.S. Reclamation Service to divert the region's water to Los Angeles.[50] The novelist soon became and advocate in her own right for the interests of the valley's residents.[51] In a 1905 letter, Charles Amadon Moody, an editor at *Out West* magazine, pleads with Austin to write an article on the water dispute, explaining that 'the reason we turned to you in this matter is just that no one else alive combines the affectionate knowledge of that section [the Owens river] with the master hand'.[52] Her keen interest in the region survived her move in 1907 from Independence to the coastal Carmel artists' colony (also frequented by Jack London and fictionalised in his *The Valley*) as well as her divorce from Stafford in 1914.[53] Until her death in 1934, she amassed numerous newspaper clippings, now archived in the extensive collection of her papers at the Huntington Library, that document the protraction of the conflict and its deterioration on several occasions into outright violence, including in 1924 when armed ranchers dynamited part of the aqueduct.[54] In deeming the novel 'essentially useless as a historical source', then, Hoffman hardly discovers anything that Austin would

[49] John Walton summarises the forms of local resistance against Los Angeles and their effectiveness in his *Western Times and Water Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 282-85.
[50] Esther Lanigan Stineman lists the novelist's various residences in her biography of the author, *Mary Austin: Song of a Maverick* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), xiv. The activism of Stafford Wallace Austin is outlined in: Abraham Hoffman, 'Origins of a Controversy: The U.S. Reclamation Service and the Owens Valley-Los Angeles Water Dispute', *Arizona and the West* 19, no. 4 (1977), 341-43. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40168826.
[51] Scholars diverge over which spouse was the most effective campaigner. Abraham Hoffman implies that historians tend to assess Stafford more favourably than Mary while literary critics generally conclude the opposite in his: 'Mary Austin, Stafford Austin, and the Owens Valley', *Journal of the Southwest* 53, no. 3/4 (2011), 307-08, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41710078.
[52] Charles Amadon Moody to Mary Austin, 15 August 1905, in *Literary America 1903-1934: The Mary Austin Letters*, ed. T. M. Pearce (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 12.
[53] Stineman, *Mary Austin*, 94 and xiv.
[54] 'Owens Valley, California', folder 3, box 126, Mary Hunter Austin Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, United States.

not already have known herself.[55] The fanciful outcome of *The Ford* is instructive not about social fact but rather about the imaginative and even practical possibilities of radical spatial reconfigurations of the relationship between people and the environment.

[55] Hoffman, 'Mary Austin', 316.

Conclusion

Where next

This dissertation has proposed a new understanding of space and place and used it to analyse the distinct approaches of three novels to their respective Californian settings. From forewomen to railways, rivers to wheat, and farmlands to panoramic vistas, I have attempted to show that objects and inhabitants of landscapes in literature can be categorised in terms of place, a material entity tied to one location at a time, or space, a formative power or structure that shapes physical geography. Such an approach reveals *how* a writer projects the conflicts of the narrative, their social concerns, and their conceptions of a certain region through the settings that they describe.

The next stage of development of my approach and its application to Californian studies is twofold. First, the greatest value of a spatial reading of literature resides in a larger survey of the writing of a region: by finding the underlying and general structures of the geographies in a text, my framework has the potential to identify the larger, overall trends of development in a given literary tradition over a historical period. Secondly, I developed my understanding of space and place with the intention of exploring geographical locations as the points of intersection for traditionally separate disciplinary spheres. Environment, economy, and cultural representations of a place all converge on physical landscapes; with some development and refinement, I want to use my spatial framework to analyse the interrelations and co-development of those spheres. I intend to pursue these areas with the greater scope and depth of my upcoming doctoral project, but for now this dissertation has provided the opportunity for a first exposition of my ideas and their potential usefulness to the study of the literature of California.

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