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Movement and Adjustment in Twentieth-Century Western Writing

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Western American literature in the twentieth century has effectively mirrored life in the region. The West has for centuries seen more geographic movement, and accompanying cultural adjustment, than other American regions. These themes of movement and adjustment have dominated western writing. Literary historians' frameworks for categorizing and analyzing this writing have emphasized a tidy process of organic development in western writing, from "frontier fiction" to more mature "regional writing," or from frontier to regional to post-regional literature. Such models underestimate the degree to which movement and adjustment continued to shape western writing in the twentieth century and tend to separate literature produced by white Europeans from that of other cultural groups. This essay suggests that the more fluid movement and adjustment model can better illuminate the connections between ostensibly separate cultural literary streams.

Writing *about* twentieth-century western literature (namely, literary history and criticism) has often constructed overly comfortable categorizations of periods and sub-genres and has dichotomized works that are fundamentally interrelated. Nonetheless, several organizational frameworks have functioned as important road maps for traversing twentieth-century western literary landscapes. Acts of framework construction are generally more intellectually demanding and time-consuming than acts of literary deconstruction, and critiques of existing frameworks should be offered with that understanding in mind.

Historian Richard Etulain has constructed a tripartite division of modern western history, art, and literature into works linked thematically by the categories of frontier (1890–1920), region (1920 to roughly World War II), and post-region (from the transformations of World War II to the 1960s and the present). Etulain's categories of "to-the-West" (frontier), "in-the-West" (regional), and "beyond-the-West" (post-regional) bring some order to a tremendous range of sub-genres, individuals, and works. Included in the frontier category are writers Owen Wister and Zane Grey. Among the regionalist

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writers covered are Mary Austin, Charles Fletcher Lummis, H. L. Davis, Willa Cather, and John Steinbeck. Etulain's post-regionalists are a diverse group, including Wallace Stegner, Marilynne Robinson, Leslie Marmon Silko, N. Scott Momaday, Amy Tan, Rudolfo Anaya, and Larry McMurtry.[1]

Etulain's framework is characterized more by contrast than continuity among these three bodies of western writing.[2] In his model, western literature moves through distinct stages of development—frontier, region, and post-region—that might be equated with stages of human life—youth or adolescence, middle age or maturity, and old age or wisdom. The comparison with stages of human development is instructive since Etulain emphasizes that modern western literature has grown out of one stage and into the next. He draws on the theme of post-region to capture the growing diversity of western American literature in the second half of the twentieth century, including the emergence of writers of color exploring ethnic themes and utilizing urban and suburban settings for their stories. For Etulain, regionalism is not a viable category for analysis of recent works, since they are increasingly marked less by an emphasis on place than by issues of ethnicity and complexities of character.

Literary scholar Thomas J. Lyon offers a model that partially parallels Etulain's by dividing western literature into "frontier and postfrontier mentalities," and into "the mythic West" and "the real West." Lyon notes that "a complex self-consciousness stands behind [the] more mature regional literature," to which he also gives the designation "postfrontier."[3] This is similar to Etulain's prefer-

1. Richard Etulain, *Re-Imagining the Modern American West: A Century of History, Fiction, and Art* (Tucson, 1996).

2. It is important to note that in his more recent work, Richard Etulain, *Telling Western Stories: From Buffalo Bill to Larry McMurtry* (Albuquerque, 1999), explores the theme of continuity between different kinds of western stories—"Creation Stories," "Untold Stories," "Traditional Stories," and "New Stories"—and Etulain places heavier emphasis on the crossovers between the various categories than he did in *Re-Imagining the Modern American West*. Still, the basic contours of the "to-the-West," "in-the-West," "beyond-the-West" framework are still very much evident in his later, more synchronic model.

3. Thomas J. Lyon, "The Literary West," in Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O'Connor, and Martha Sandweiss, eds., *The Oxford History of the American West* (New York, 1994), 707–741, quotation on 708; and Lyon, "Introduction: The Conquistador, the Lone Ranger, and Beyond," in Lyon, ed., *The Literary West: An Anthology of Western American Literature* (New York, 1999), 1–18. See also Lyon, "Beyond the Frontier Mind," in Judy Nolte Lensink, ed., *Old Southwest, New Southwest: Essays on a Region and Its Literature* (Tucson, 1987), 119–130, in which he notes that "the qualitative watershed in Western American literature is between the frontier mind and the postfrontier mind" (quotation on p. 119). Lyon views postfrontier literature as an effort to move beyond the dualistic frontier-mind;

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ence for "in-the-West" and "beyond-the-West" writing over "to-the-West" works.[4] Both Etulain and Lyon construct progressive models marked by movement from one stage of western writing to the next higher stage. They essentially chart a shift from lamentably simplistic and Eurocentric beginnings to contemporary works that are culturally rich and diverse and structurally complex.[5]

These frameworks provide order and shape to a massive and varied body of writings. However, they are too dualistic in structure, and their juxtapositions a little too rigid. They seem, infelicitously, to separate the "Old West" from the "New West," memories of the past from the present (which is, after all, shaped in part by those very same memories), rural spaces from the urban places they surround, and white majority literature from multiple minority literatures. The frameworks also seem (and it comes as a revelation of sorts for a

yet, the frontier-postfrontier framework itself is rather dualistic. In "The Literary West," Lyon treats Native American literature as an add-on to his model, rather than fully incorporating it into the framework. He also adds a category titled "Other Contemporary Trends," which is reminiscent of Etulain's post-region category, in that it is comprised of those works that do not really fit his (Lyon's) two main categories of frontier and postfrontier (frontier and region for Etulain).

4. Harold P. Simonson, *Beyond the Frontier: Writers, Western Regionalism, and a Sense of Place* (Fort Worth, Tex., 1997), also emphasizes a shift from immaturity to maturity in western literature as it enters its regionalist phase. It is worth noting that Lyon's second effort at model building, "The Conquistador, the Lone Ranger, and Beyond," is more complete than "The Literary West" (with coverage of Chicana/o writing and environmental writing), more integrated, and more convincing; nonetheless, the dichotomy remains. Lyon writes somewhat dismissively about the "mythic West" writings and uses the terms "serious" western literature and "real" western literature in a way that is reminiscent of Elliott West's use of the terms "mature" and "immature" in his chapter "Stories" in West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque, 1995), 127–166. It is worth pointing out that West presents his essay as a speculative overview that is light in tone. West also offers good advice concerning the dangers of "separat[ing] and categoriz[ing] too cleanly . . . people and nature, whites and Indians, and the West of prehistory, the frontier, and the modern day" (quotation on p. 12). A notable aside is that writer Edward Abbey, who falls into the category of real, serious, postfrontier western writers in the estimation of Lyon and Etulain, is for West a classic example of the less mature, placeless, frontier-approach to western writing.

5. Another example of this common approach in western literary history and criticism is Michael Johnson's distinction between "Old Western Literature," or "boomer writing," and "New Western Literature," or "sticker writing," that began to develop at the beginning of the 1970s; see Michael Johnson, "Rewriters of the Purple Sage, Part 1," in Johnson, *New Westers: The West in Contemporary American Culture* (Lawrence, Kans., 1996), 102–134, quotation on 112. This easy distinction between "Old" and "New" dichotomizes western literature in ways that simply fail to reflect the variety and complexity of much of the western writing produced prior to the 1970s. Such categorical juxtapositions of old and new are reminiscent of the limitations of the all-too-easy distinction between "Old" and "New" Western History.

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historian to admit this) somewhat hidebound by chronology. Writers who are deemed to be ahead of the prevailing cultural currents of their time come to be seen as precursors of later literary movements or cultural attitudes. Other writers in more recent times who favored "frontier themes," such as Louis L'Amour, are described as throwbacks to earlier ages or genres, men (and, more rarely, women) out of time.

The existing organizational models tend to emphasize a movement from the immature literary output fueled by frontier mythology to a mature, regionally grounded western literature, a literature of place, that flowered during the interwar years. From there, the common approach is to highlight the range of "minority" literary streams that have complicated the "mainstream" by taking it in a myriad of new directions. It is a kind of "worst" (frontier), "better" (regional), "best" (contemporary, post-regional, post-western) model. This model is itself complicated by the fact that the contours of the final (post-regional) category appear largely indefinable, deemed meritorious perhaps in part because of their very indefinability—that is, because they are not obviously "western." In other words, the existing frameworks present western writing as being first white and placeless, then white but becoming place-centered, and finally becoming multicolored and multicentered, or multi-streamed/"unwestern"/"post-western."[6] Thus, western writers are seen as trapped within the realm of myth in the frontier stage, partially freed from the bonds of mythology in the regional stage, and fully liberated in the post-regional phase. Problematically enough, when treated within these kinds of organizational paradigms, the various literary works do not seem to speak to each other across racial and chronological borders. These sorts of models play down the possibility that regional identity can remain important even as western places become more diverse. They suggest that a multicultural West will necessarily be a non-regional, post-western, or "non-western" place. Furthermore, such frameworks imply that the mythic western heritage is largely unmalleable and unlikely to become more inclusive over time better to reflect regional demographic realities.

What is more, these models for categorizing western writing

6. Virginia Scharff asks, "Is it perhaps time for a *postwestern history*?" in Scharff, "Mobility, Women, and the West," in Valerie J. Matsumoto and Blake Allmendinger, eds., *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West* (Berkeley, 1999), 160–171, quotation on 167.

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seem to delineate too strictly between frontier literature and regional literature. However, movements *to* places have played a vital role in shaping people's sense *of* places.[7] Frontier process-centered and place-centered regional realities are fundamentally intertwined through the collective memory of earlier times. People move to and adjust to new places, and those processes of movement and adjustment become vital to the formation of regional identity. Boxing authors into either the "to-the-West" or "in-the-West" category has its dangers, since writers often cross such categories in their careers. Take, for example, Jack London, whose early "frontier-fiction" phase, featuring most notably *The Call of the Wild* (1903), transitioned into a "regional phase," evident in his California-based novel, *The Valley of the Moon* (1913). Similarly, John Steinbeck transitioned from "to-the-place" to "in-the-place" writing, moving from the group journey narrative, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), to the microcosmic study of life in a place in *Cannery Row* (1945). Jack Kerouac moved from the frenetic travel narrative *On the Road* (1957) to the more place-bound and introspective *Big Sur* (1962). A more recent example is William Least Heat-Moon, who transitioned from the road book, *Blue Highways: A Journey into America* (1983), to the intensive exploration-of-place book, *PrairyErth: (A Deep Map)* (1991), and then back to his river-journeys book, *River Horse* (1998). Similarly, separating the regional literature of the early to mid-twentieth century from the so-called post-regional and post-western literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries may assume a more significant break than actually exists.

This assumed epistemic break has been influenced, in its turn, by the aesthetic representational shift from the modern to the postmodern that also marks the caesura in material output from manufacturing to service economy, electric to electronic, and so on. As British sociologist Mike Featherstone has suggested, a more accurate representational term may be the more inclusive "*trans*-modern," since elements of modernity and postmodernity exist contemporaneously within cultures.[8] Similarly, the West (a culturally diverse place to begin with) has become increasingly diverse, and its

7. Fred Erisman also emphasizes mobility as an important element of western writing in Erisman, "The Changing Face of Western Literary Realism," in Gerald D. Nash and Richard W. Etulain, eds., *The Twentieth-Century West: Historical Interpretations* (Albuquerque, 1989), 361–381.

8. Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London, 1991), x.

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already rich and varied literary tradition has become ever more so over time to reflect the evolving cultural and demographic realities of the region. Nevertheless, the mythic West has certainly not disappeared from popular consciousness. The mythic and the actual coexist in western writing, as do the regional and the post-regional, much like the modern and the postmodern. Indeed, terms such as "*trans*-mythic" and "*trans*-regional" or "*trans*-western" may, for the purpose of discussing issues of identity and cultural expression in the West, be more useful and more accurate than "post-mythic," "post-regional," or "post-western." Categories such as frontier, region, and post-region, if employed at all, should be treated as fluid, as more likely to merge with one another than to be strictly delineated from one another.

In addition to facilitating cross-cultural and cross-chronological comparisons, a more fluid model may help to bridge the great divide that separates popular western writing from more "literary" works. Efforts to illuminate the excesses, oversights, and inadequacies of popular, mythic, frontier conceptions of the West have been a little too dismissive of the "to-the-West" mindset. Scholars often imagine a progressive model in which the influence of the popular diminishes as that of the literary increases throughout the course of the twentieth century.[9] In charting the ascendancy of so-called "serious" literature and the presumed decline of "pot-boiler" frontier writing, literary scholars have paid much attention to what they value and considerably less to what the public reads. Many literary scholars tend to presume that figures such as L'Amour are somehow floating in a sea of cultural insignificance, buffeted only by the undiscerning tides of popular opinion. But, as Wallace Stegner once replied to a probing question concerning the main difference between himself and L'Amour, the answer was "a few million dollars."[10] The point here is not to elevate L'Amour above Stegner, based upon the simplest yardstick of measurement (approximately 250 million copies of L'Amour's works have been sold to date).

9. As noted at the outset, these two seemingly contradictory processes—the rise of a more diverse and demographically representative body of western literature and the persistence of the popular frontier-western literary tradition—have unfolded together.

10. Wallace Stegner and Richard W. Etulain, *Stegner: Conversations on History and Literature* (Reno, Nev., 1996), vi, and in Etulain, *Telling Western Stories*, 118. Jane Tompkins pays considerable attention to public opinion in Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York, 1992).

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Rather, it is to emphasize that our existing models may construct the parameters of the literary canon too definitively, thereby rendering judgments about the popular and the literary too cavalierly and exaggerating the divisions that exist between "real" and "mythic."[11]

So, how do we begin to dissolve or at least deemphasize the dichotomies of frontier and region, "to-the-West" and "in-the-West," region and post-region/post-western in western American literary history and criticism? The recently opened Tate Modern Art Gallery on London's increasingly fashionable South Bank is indicative of a trend in exhibition management that offers a possible answer. At the Tate Modern, a wondrous array of works of twentieth-century art and sculpture is arranged thematically, not chronologically, nor by school, movement, or style. This arrangement might seem jarring to the viewer at first (and it has garnered criticism from more traditional cultural critics who favor more rigid delineations based upon chronology), but it enables viewers to compare works in broad categories such as "Landscape/Matter/Environment" and "History/Memory/Society."[12] This thematic approach is becoming increasingly common in the art world, and we can adopt it for rethinking American western writing and drawing connections across chronological and cultural divides.[13]

11. It is important to note that Etulain provides us with a more subtle analysis of Louis L'Amour's works than most critics; see Etulain, *Telling Western Stories*, 94–106. For more on the distinctions between popular culture and high culture, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983). Levine wonders, with regard to such divisions, whether, "by making those distinctions as rigidly hierarchical as we tend to, we are not limiting the dimensions of our understanding of culture, which could be furthered by having a more open and fluid set of divisions more conducive to facilitating truly complex comparisons," in *ibid.*, 7–8. Levine's ideas about the distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow are worth considering in relation to western American writing since it is an area of study where such distinctions have been so commonly drawn.

12. See [no author], "New Ways of Seeing," *tate: the art magazine*, 21 (2000), 48–49.

13. Another image that springs to mind in connection with twentieth-century western literature and the ways in which scholars have studied it is that of a Rubik's Cube, a malleable, six-sided, multicolored plastic device that provided hours of frustrating diversion for adults and children alike in the pre-Internet age. The trick was to line up the colors on each of the six sides. There were nine separate moveable pieces on each of the cube's surfaces, a total of fifty-four mini-cubes in six colors: blue, red, yellow, green, white, and black. The goal was to get each side of the cube to be comprised of the same color squares. It might be argued that western literature, as traditionally conceived by critics, consisted of five white sides and perhaps one side containing the literatures of peoples of color. Perhaps the Rubik's Cube in its unfinished, mixed-up state is a better represen-

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Somehow, in our assembling of chronological frameworks, the writings of different racial and ethnic groups have become increasingly disconnected. The autobiographical writings of Mourning Dove in the early twentieth century and Nate Love in the late nineteenth, for example, have come to be viewed as precursors of later works by Native American, mixed-blood, and African American writers. In constructing literary canons, we have, in fact, often taken such works out of chronological context in order to place them into cultural groupings. A strictly thematic model, one that is neither chronologically hidebound nor divided up into separate racial and ethnic groupings, may produce more meaningful cross-cultural and cross-chronological comparison. But to do this is to set aside notions of a western literary mainstream broadening to include minority literary streams and consequently becoming post-western.

Western writing in the twentieth century, regardless of the subregion, racial and ethnic groupings, or rural or urban locales from which it has sprung, has centered primarily on the topics of *movement* and *adjustment*.[14] People have of course migrated to places and adjusted to them in all parts of the nation and the world since the beginning of human history. The West is different not by nature so much as by degree. The themes of physical movement and psychological and cultural adjustment seem more applicable to this region of the country since the West increasingly became, in the course of the twentieth century, a locus for immigration from all other parts of the country and the world. Because the rates of migration to the West and within it have been so high, the processes of adjustment have been particularly pronounced. Highlighting these ongoing processes of movement and adjustment leads to a natural emphasis on certain historical continuities and cultural parallels.[15] But my

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tation of the diverse range of voices that have always been a part of the western literary landscape.

14. A particularly useful source for the theme of movement or mobility is Virginia Scharff, *Twenty Thousand Roads: Women, Movement, and the West* (Berkeley, 2003). It is worth noting that James R. Hepworth, in his "Introduction" toTeresa Jordan and James R. Hepworth, eds., *The Stories that Shape Us: Contemporary Women Write About the West: An Anthology* (New York, 1995), suggests "space" and "mobility" as the defining themes of western literature. However, the "space" category seems to play to the tendency to equate westernness with ruralness and wide open spaces, and seems to deemphasize western urban literature.

15. The best account of western migration and demographic change is Walter Nugent, *Into the West: The Story of Its People* (New York, 1999).

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purpose is not intentionally ahistorical or consciously incognizant of the different circumstances experienced by various racial and ethnic groups. Rather, it temporarily eschews emphasis on those temporal and cultural divides in order to draw parallels across boundaries of race/ethnicity and time.

Unlike other organizing themes, movement and adjustment apply equally well and at all times to all the peoples within the West, and they are themes that, not surprisingly, have proven irresistible to western writers. Movement and adjustment, while they seem to parallel frontier and region as organizing categories, offer much greater fluidity for cross-cultural and cross-chronological comparison. But how do we link these various writers together within the thematic framework of movement and adjustment? Three possible sub-themes within the framework spring to mind, all three of which emphasize both movement and adjustment in varying degrees. They are: 1, the individual travel narrative; 2, stories of family migration to place and the intergenerational tensions that accompany the subsequent processes of adjustment; and 3, works of autobiography and reminiscence, which often emphasize journeys to and around western regions and adjustments to change in those places. I shall focus just on the first of these three possible sub-themes here—the individual travel narrative, which, it goes without saying, is marked by movement. This genre is also marked by attention to the physical and psychological adjustments that residents have made in their places. Travel narratives, it is worth adding, are literary works, even if they are often categorized as nonfiction.[16]

The individual travel narrative tradition, as it relates to the American West, stretches back at least as far as Lewis and Clark at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the closing decades of that century, the West was still largely unknown terrain for most Americans, at the same time that many observers lamented that the frontier's journey across the West was over and that the West was becoming just like the rest of the nation.[17] A multitude of travel narratives met the reading public's curiosity about the region, including Isabella Bird's *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1879), Rich-

16. Travel narratives, as a genre, help us to bridge the divide between fiction and nonfiction.

17. For more on these concerns, see David M. Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence, Kans., 1993).

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ard Harding Davis's *The West from a Car Window* (1892), and Charles Fletcher Lummis's *A Tramp Across the Continent* (1892). As the West became increasingly well known during the course of the twentieth century, the travel narrative remained a staple of western writing—Steinbeck's *Travels With Charley* (1962) and Kerouac's *On the Road*. Even in the closing years of that century, the lure of the West remained strong for travel writers, and scores of notable books in the genre appeared: Robert Kaplan's *An Empire Wilderness: Travels Into America's Future* (1998), Ian Frazier's *Great Plains* (1989), and Dayton Duncan's *Out West: An American Journey* (1987) and *Miles from Nowhere: Tales from America's Contemporary Frontier* (1993).

Contrary to the expectations one might draw from the writers listed above, western travel literature is not an exclusively white European American endeavor. A wide range of travel writings by writers from varied cultural heritages illuminates the themes of mobility and adjustment and the variety of lived experiences in the region. One thinks immediately of Chinese American writer Frank Chin's gripping California travel narrative, "Pidgin Contest Along I-5" (1998). Chin recounts the reactions of white Americans—from skinheads to little old ladies—to himself and his son Sam as they travel on I-5, "the road between Seattle and LA I've called home for thirty years." The chronological backdrop of Chin's journey narrative is the immediate post-Gulf War euphoria and accompanying heightened jingoism in the white mainstream, which he juxtaposes with the rage and confusion of LA's multiple minorities during the April 1992 riots. Frank and Sam are made to feel like aliens along I-5 as they are refused service at a restaurant in Northern California; the owners unashamedly tell them that the place (which is filled with white customers) is closed. Then, in the sunny Southland, during the riots, Chin wryly notes that white news anchors and reporters comment on how "most of the looters look like illegal aliens." At the same time, the National Guardsmen and Secret Service agents who descend upon the city seem like alien invaders to the culturally diverse residents of the city.[18]

Chin's "Pidgin Contest Along I-5" is no *Travels With Charley*, although this reader is reminded of the treatment endured by the

18. Frank Chin, "Pidgin Contest Along I-5," in Brian Bouldrey, ed., *Writing Home: Award Winning Literature from the New West* (Berkeley, 1999), 32–43, quotations from 35–36 and 37; originally published in Frank Chin, *Bulletproof Buddhists and Other Essays* (Honolulu, 1998).

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Joad family in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* as they traveled into the Golden State, where native and neo-native Californians viewed the Okie migrants as sub-human, "dirty and ignorant . . . degenerate, sexual maniacs."[19] Even Kerouac's *On the Road*, with its Benzedrine-fueled prose and wide-eyed dreams of the West from Denver to San Francisco, seems tame and romantic compared with Frank and Sam Chin's observations and experiences. Equally memorable is African American Evelyn C. White's essay, "Black Women and the Wilderness" (1995), which might be described as an anti-travel narrative of sorts. White describes her reluctance to explore the great outdoors when conducting a writing workshop in the foothills of Oregon's Cascade Mountains. White writes that she experienced "a sense of absolute doom about what might befall me in the backwoods" but had difficulty articulating those anxieties to students and colleagues. How can one convey to white Oregonians the "genetic memory of ancestors hunted down and preyed upon in rural settings"? White's response to wilderness as she ventures out into one of the West's great "natural wonderlands" departs radically from the standard white "master" narrative of western travel literature.[20] She eventually manages to overcome some of her fears and starts to enjoy wilderness treks. But she does this in much the same limited way that Frank and Sam Chin enjoy truck stop food bars along I-5—with the knowledge that white people are staring, wondering what such "outsiders" are doing in wilderness areas, at truck stops: in white, western, Ecotopian America. White and Chin take the reader on western journeys that underscore the value of multiple angles of cultural vision. Indeed, our vision of the West seems rather peripheral without them.

A problem with adopting this more inclusive model is that not all people of color in the West will want their literature subsumed within the category of "modern western writing." There remain obvious advantages to separate literary canons for those groups that are underrepresented or unrepresented in the prevailing mainstream canonical tradition. Every racial and ethnic group could argue that it has experienced special circumstances and has had special concerns that render its modes of literary expression distinct from those

19. John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939; New York, 1976), 363; quotation is from the reprint.

20. Evelyn C. White, "Black Women and the Wilderness," in Jordan and Hepworth, eds., *The Stories that Shape Us*, 376–383, quotation from 378.

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of other groups. Native American writers might resent comparative analyses of Indian sense of place and white western sense of place, finding the two sets of cultural traditions essentially incomparable. Native writers might argue that white western writers, while they may have moved from a tradition of "to-the-place" literature to an "in-the-place" literary framework (from frontier to region), are not "of-the-place" in the way indigenous peoples are. Or, again, they might emphasize the incompatibility of Indian oral storytelling traditions and linear western literary models. Minority writers and scholars may argue that a literary model that places the majority culture and minority cultures together, within a single framework, would simply perpetuate the canonical hegemony of the majority and render minority literatures indistinct and unexceptional.

These issues lie at the heart of age-old and contemporary debates about race and ethnicity in America, about cultural inclusiveness and individual assimilation versus group-centered collective action and cultural separateness and preservation. I am not suggesting that we overlook issues of racial disparity; nor am I naively assuming that integration is preferable to cultural separation in every case. Neither am I implying that chronological context is unimportant. Still, writing about western writing has dwelt on the great divides at the expense of the connecting streams, and the latter warrant more attention.

Ultimately, we need to broaden the concept of westernness and find ways to apply it to all the people of the region residing in its many and varied locales, or we will have to reject westernness as a construct that is too rigid and simplistic. As cultures increasingly mix in the West, scholarly models that fail to mirror those cultural intersections will become increasingly irrelevant. The challenge, it seems, is for literary historians and critics to catch up with writers of western literature and create organizational frameworks that facilitate the processes by which works by a culturally diverse body of authors can speak to each other. Following such a course might give a new relevance to regional writing in "the global and postmodern age."[21]

21. Blake Allmendinger, "Through the Looking Glass: What Western Historians and Literary Critics Can Learn from Each Other," in *Pacific Historical Review*, 72 (2003), 415–420.

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