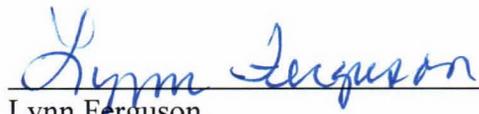
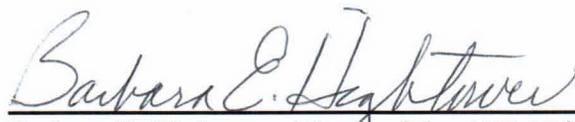
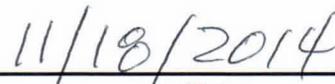


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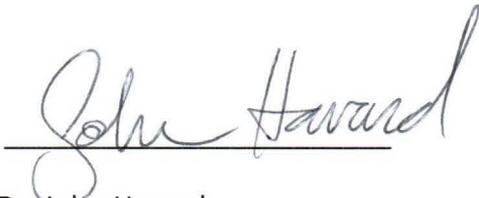
A Sense of Place in  
Montana Literature

By Lynn Ferguson

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Auburn University at Montgomery  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Liberal Arts  
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## Introduction

Many Montana writers invoke a sense of place and explore environmental issues within the narratives and memoirs they create. Writers from Montana or those writing about the state discuss Montana's natural terrain as part of the narrative. Each writer emphasizes that Montana's natural geography is at stake. Whether demonstrating the life of a cowboy, speaking to the various educational challenges in Montana, or examining relationships between Europeans and Indians, Montana writers generally embrace their natural landscape and welcome discourse on environmental themes. Even as Montana writers grapple with personal struggles, they continue to reach toward the natural landscape for answers. That said, despite their Montanan eye toward the environment and clear voice that celebrates the frontier, these writers remain American writers, illustrating many of the same struggles of all Americans. American heroism and American restlessness are outlined within the framework of sustaining the western landscape. Throughout much of Montana literature, preserving the terrain has become part of the Montana story, placing American wisdom and ingenuity into the discourse. In fact, writers such as Rick Bass, Ivan Doig and Wallace Stegner, continue the ideals of the American Renaissance such as Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

When students of western literature think of the American West, they are likely to think of the myth of the cowboy and the conjoining myth of the flat, dust-bitten prairie. In my beginning chapter, I discuss the fact that when Montana's writers speak of their state, they are pointing toward a multicultural West as they look past the tumbleweed prairie and the cowboy with an ace up his sleeve (Slotkin 83). Montana

writers break these icons with works such as Dorothy Johnson's "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," Mary Clearman Blew's *Jackalope Dreams* and Richard Wheeler's *Buffalo Commons*. These three works challenge the dual ideas of cowboy and of rancher. Within Montana literature, the cowboy is no longer within the myth of the six-shooter, and the rancher contemplates modern problems, such as urban expansion and the changing western geography. For instance, "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" is a short story by Dorothy Johnson that was the basis of the titular film, directed by John Ford. From the short story emerges the stalwart cowboy, quick to anger and in various scrapes with the law. Lingering beneath the surface is the cowboy with a moral compass, who considers the consequences of his actions. This cowboy of the new West is different from the six-shooter with an ace up his sleeve.

*Jackalope Dreams* features a woman who sees the ranch she has always known, and known to popular culture, as no longer sustainable. A deeper look into a modern Montana and self-evaluation allows her to pursue new interests outside the traditional ranch. After viewing a changing Montana, she pursues a career of artist and art teacher, but not without lingering guilt at abandoning the traditional ranching lifestyle.

Additionally, Richard Wheeler's *Buffalo Commons* debates a wildlife preserve for buffalo and its challenges to the cowboy and ranching lifestyle. While the ideal of a preserve for buffalo is a great idea on the surface, it is costly to sustain and destroys the ranching lifestyle and traditions that have graced the western ideal for almost two centuries (Matthews 150).

As we begin to see in *Buffalo Commons*, Montana writers discuss wilderness and stewardship of the land in myriad works of both fiction and nonfiction. Sustaining the environment is a key theme in Montana literature, making environmental writing a key aspect of the state's literary tradition. Montana writers speak to conflict and striving juxtaposed against the stark prairie, the indomitable Rocky Mountains, and the life-giving rivers that flow throughout Montana's cities and towns. Environmental writing, which seems aside from diurnal activities of the characters in the literature of the state, is designed to illuminate the complexities of living in a sustainable environment amid modern pressures. A recurring question within the structure of the narrative is "How do we sustain the West for future generations?"

My second chapter is about how many Montana writers, including travel writers, describe what is at stake as they examine their environment. While Montana sits squarely at the edge of America's Northwest, the fourth largest state in land area, it is also a place of historical and cultural associations. Developing a sense of place can be difficult for twenty-first century American writers because of the homogenizing of many towns in the United States (Kowalewski 12). Most Montana writers escape the dilemma of highways littered with Burmashave billboards and Starbucks-on-very-corner commercialism. While urban entrapments exist in the cities and villages in Montana, this state's writers travel beyond this terrain and exhibit stories and dialogues that point to a geography of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, West of the 98<sup>th</sup> Parallel, and the Continental Divide. Montana writers such as Mildred Walker use evocative metaphors such as winter wheat to outline the changing seasons in the life of an emerging adult, while Ted Leeson illustrates stewardship of the land from a tourist's

perspective. Norman Maclean combines sustenance of the river with familial conflict as he illustrates how the river envelopes the lives of the brothers and father of the narrative.

Environmental struggles are frequently at the forefront of Montana literature. However, instead of coming to us in lectures on sustainability, each environmental issue is draped into the discourse of the characters and becomes part of the narrative. As Rick Van Noy states in *Surveying the Interior*, “[Wallace] Stegner is interested not only in the consequences of the surveyor’s borders, in roles they play in history, but also in how geography affects character and belief” (Van Noy 148). If Montana writers, including travel writers, are invested in how the state’s land and people coexist, they are all the more invested in sustaining the state’s natural resources for future generations.

Norman Maclean’s *Young Men and Fire* and Richard Ford’s *Wildlife* are two environmental works that contrast loss with reclamation in the numerous forest blazes throughout Montana. Elegizing those who are lost, *Young Men and Fire* speaks of forest fire in the circle of loss and rebuilding of community. Richard Ford uses the seasonal forest fires as a metaphor for the messiness in the lives of the protagonist and the cleanup that ensues. Environmental study is also at the forefront in Maclean’s *A River Runs Through It*. Maclean wrestles with the freedom of living in a sparsely populated area, together with exploring his strained relationships with his brother and father while fishing on the Blackfoot River. Ted Leeson’s *Inventing Montana* is also about a fishing trip, but Leeson writes from a tourist’s point of view. Tourists look at the landscape from a different perspective than the inhabitant who has lived for many

years in one state. While tourists have the serendipity of finding interesting vegetation and landscape different from their own, they are not as invested in the region as the resident who senses urgency in preserving the land for future generations. Tourists and residents inhabit a sense of place differently (Weiner 323).

My third chapter investigates didactic literature. Montana's didactic literature can take many forms. Didactic literature involves literature that teaches an object lesson or moral lesson within the narrative. For instance, Mildred Walker's *Winter Wheat* is a *bildungsroman*, spanning the life of an adolescent to adulthood, which points to lessons that the character learns along the way. Historical fiction, young adult fiction, and memoir are also used as the memoirist or characters learn lessons over the course of the works.

The didactic literature conceives of learning in its many forms. Education is a subject of much of Montana literature, whether the struggles are inside the classroom or a working person's apprenticeship. Montanans utilize education in one-room schoolhouses, and students also learn through various service organizations. One common misconception of the western one-room schoolhouse is that upper-grade students are left behind when forced to work with lower-grade students from the same primer. More current is the small prairie classroom in which all students can reach their fullest potential (Boss 39). An updated version of the educational model that ensures that every student learns to his or her fullest potential can be found in the character of Morrie Morrison, a one-room school teacher in Ivan Doig's *Whistling Season*. Doig's protagonist, Paul Milliron, narrates this work, reminiscing about his years in the one-room schoolhouse as he decides the fate of the one-rooms across Montana. Milliron, as

an adult, is head of the school board and must decide the fate of Montana's one-room schools. Doig combines descriptions that define Montana such as riding horses backward and gathering at the flagpole with the encroachment of commerce that threatens to take what is pastoral out of rural America (Wyckoff 95).

Although much of Walker's *Winter Wheat* is about the protagonist, Ellen Webb, and her one-room classroom, the novel discusses lessons learned outside of the classroom. Although exhibiting a nice teacher in the prairie one-room school would be easy and safe, instead *Winter Wheat* tackles timeless themes, such as tension in families, employment termination, and the effects of World War II at home. The novel does much more to explore environmental writing, measuring Ellen's vicissitudes of life with the wheat planting season. Written in 1944, *Winter Wheat*'s subjects are as fresh today as *Winter Wheat* measures its protagonist's pains of emerging adulthood with the growing season of Montana's most cherished agricultural product.

*Winter Wheat* is a *bildungsroman*, a didactic narrative that teaches life lessons outside the classroom. Although the protagonist, Ellen Webb, is a one-room teacher in a remote area, the life lessons that she learns, while in tandem with teaching children social studies and reading, demonstrate a personal journey in which her life choices are at stake. Separate from didactic literature is environmental literature. Environmental literature does endeavor to teach and to persuade. However, its questions about sustainability and preservation are open-ended, and there is always an ethical dilemma in every choice. *Winter Wheat* is an equal blend of both kinds of writing, the didactic and the environmental, one that renders timeless lessons in wartime America. *Winter*

*Wheat* handily teaches mini-lessons throughout the wheat planting season while it offers life lessons.

Outside of the classroom, literature about working the various outdoor venues study education from an apprentice's viewpoint. The title of *Hitch*, by Jeannette Ingold, refers to an amount of time that a person is conscripted and is about a young man's experiences during his "hitch" in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the Great Depression. *Hitch*'s protagonist, Moss Trawnley, views the CCC as an extension of his education. Moss interprets his "hitch" as a way to extend his truncated education and learn trades that will move with him into adulthood. Completely didactic and targeted toward the young adult market, *Hitch* teaches timeless lessons about the nature of work and the character of youth.

Employees in Montana's National Parks have much to learn about the state and how to sustain it as they work in parks such as Glacier National Park. In *Dirt Work: An Education in the Woods*, Christine Byl uses her tenure with Glacier to teach herself what Montanans already know about healing the forests. Byl teaches herself by doing the work of a trail dog. While working the trail informs her vocational choices, it also teaches her about the juncture of work and life. *Dirt Work* teaches agricultural lessons while it points out practical sustainability in Glacier National Park.

In my fourth chapter, I discuss the myriad ways that Montana writers give voice to the many tribes and nations in the Native American culture of Montana. James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* and William Samuel Yellow Robe's *The Star Quilter* are only two of the many works written in the voice of the Native American. Welch places

his protagonist in *Winter in the Blood* as the lone Native who examines life on and off the reservation and makes the tortuous decision to return to the reservation to find out more about himself and his past. This unnamed protagonist is a Native of the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine tribes. In *The Star Quilter*, Yellow Robe chooses the give-and-take conversation of a play to illustrate differences between Europeans and Salish-Kootenai Natives. His choice of four scenes, set at three different eras, brings the conflict full circle of the women using the star quilt as a commodity.

Relations between the Native American tribes / nations and whites are examined through the lens of a young boy in Larry Watson's *Montana, 1948*. Watson is a North Dakotan who writes about eastern Montana. While postwar eastern Montana has many offerings for suburban and exurban Euro-Americans, families in the late 1940s grapple with crime and injustice toward their Native Sioux neighbors. While the protagonist, David, is largely kept away from the action, he faces adolescence with a new understanding of a larger world (Campbell 141). David must find a way to make sense of disturbing circumstances between Indians and Euro-Americans during a time in America when injustice toward Native Americans was commonplace.

As surely as struggles with education and relationships between Euro-Americans and Indians are modern problems that Montanans struggle with every day, Montana writers express personal struggles with a watchful eye toward the environment, which I discuss in my fifth chapter. The dual problems of midlife marriage and the aging process are tackled in both *The English Major* by Jim Harrison and *This Isn't the Story You Think It Is* by Laura Munson. Although radically different from each other, these two works speak of personal anguish in the middle of

acknowledging the Montana Big Sky landscape. Just as the more obvious works about stewardship of the land, these writers integrate an appreciation of the land and its people in tandem with their personal stories. While these works do not directly discuss stewardship of the natural environment, the action in the narratives and how the characters build upon it suggest that the wilderness holds answers to the questions that confound them.

Just as Montana writers struggle with issues of marriage and aging, there are other realities as well. *Rima in the Weeds* by Dierdre McNamer is a Cold War narrative set exclusively on Montana's Hi-line, the mountainous Northern Montana region that was built by the intersection of the railroad and US Highway 2, running from Glacier National Park to North Dakota (Bevis *All Our Stories* 95). Two characters in *Rima* are Dorrie and Margaret. Margaret is the sometimes babysitter for Dorrie, a single parent hoping to relieve her issues with her friends through alcohol. The narrative turns to the subject of forgiveness on a train trip through the vast plateau of the Hi-line after Dorrie, in a riotous drunken bout with her friends, shoots and kills Margaret's beloved horse. These two intergenerational friends are able to repair a broken relationship on their train trip to Williston, North Dakota. Again, McNamer does not place environmental issues at the forefront of the narrative. However, the landscape plays a role in the resolution.

My last chapter determines why these Montana writers are distinctly American. Rick Bass' *The Wild Marsh: Four Seasons at Home in Montana* continues the conversation begun by Henry David Thoreau in his essay, "Walking." The same celebration of the working man that is in the poems "I Hear America Singing," and

“Song of the Exposition” are renewed in Ivan Doig’s novel, *Work Song*. And lastly, Emerson’s voice in “The American Scholar” and “Self-Reliance” is carried forth in Wallace Stegner’s *The American West as Living Space*, a series of lectures delivered at the Law School of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in October 1986 (Stegner *American West* v).

These genres of Montana literature are only a few of the compendium of works whose subject is living in Big Sky Country. Discourse on preservation of the land does not wander far from each dialogue and each essay throughout Montana literature. Throughout conflict and striving there remain the truths about sustainability of the land and culture, together with a greater understanding of the true West, to those who call Montana their home.

### **Shot off the Saddle: Rethinking Frontier Conventions**

Wallace Stegner in *The American West as Living Space* says of the cowboy, “...even while the cowboy myth romanticizes and falsifies western life, it says something true about western, and hence about American, character” (Stegner *American West* 80). The stereotypes of cartoons and spaghetti western films create a broad construct that is mostly false, but continues as an imprint on the imaginations of the West. Although the West is mythologized in the minds of Americans as independent, rugged, and self-reliant, it is sometimes thought of as a barren desert (Mitchell 499). The new literature of the West reshapes the flat constructs of sparsely populated prairie states such as Montana and transforms them into a state that is vibrant and multicultural. Westerns and cartoons mythologize Montana land into either a verdant pasture that is for anyone to take or as a dust-bitten, disposable prairie (Mitchell 501). New writers of Montana transform the cowboy archetype to an everyman, show the rancher and Native American as intellectuals, and introduce new strategies to sustain and preserve Montana’s natural geography.

The new cowboy model, as the original tough guy, is demonstrated in Dorothy Johnson’s 1949 short story, “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance.” The cowboy, Bert Barricune, is paired with a feckless Easterner, Ransom Foster, who came West after arguing with the executor of his father’s estate. The cowboy is represented as a skilled marksman, frequently in scrapes with law enforcement, vigilant against his enemies, and the man behind the secret of the gun. The Easterner is represented as an intellectual, unsure of his place in the West. Both men are vying for the same woman and both are challenged by the town villain, Liberty Valance. Barricune protects the

major secret of Foster's life. Barricune nobly keeps quiet the fact that he, and not Foster, fired the fatal shot that killed Liberty Valance. While living a lie, Foster moves on to worldly success. Meanwhile, Barricune is viewed by the outside world as a lone cowboy, stoic in the wilderness and outside of the circle of society. When Barricune steps away from challenging Foster for his woman, he disproves the tough guy icon. In gentlemanly fashion, he places his love interest's needs before his own and guards a secret that, if revealed, would finish Foster.

Barricune is clearly the protagonist of Johnson's story. Barricune is distinctly Montanan, displaying the same characteristics of Stegner's truer idea of the cowboy. Stoic until the end, he is true to the ideals of both a westerner and an American. While Foster receives the credit for shooting Liberty Valance, he lives with a lifelong lie. Foster is the outward hero of the story, requiring the reader to look further into the motives of the individualist cowboy. Barricune's funeral, while sparsely attended, is an elegy to the cowboy, complete with a desert cactus. The funeral becomes a symbol of the individualism and stoicism that drives Barricune. Instead of a wild maverick cowboy, Johnson's short story illustrates a strong, stoic individualist who makes no apologies for being a cowboy. At the same time, the reader sees a man with strong moral standards. Barricune's character is a contrast to the cartoon of the six-shooter, always spoiling for a fight (Slotkin 83).

The film version of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* travels in a different direction than the short story. By illustrating Liberty Valance as the man with the black hat in the tumbleweed West, the director of the film, John Ford, plays to cowboy and frontier stereotypes because black costuming and the placement of tumbleweeds are

easy to film. Film is a more visual medium than a short story, and Ford has to show the characters without details of that would weigh down the viewing of a film. Although many American films have succeeded with weightier characterization, Ford appeals to the widest audience. The expectation of the audience is of a flat, deserted West, where cowboys wear Stetson hats, rather than a vibrant frontier with complex characters (Matheson 358).

What complexity the film does display is different than the regional complexity of the story. Ford chose to draw artificial sets, because “his primary interests lay in conveying the psychological elements of the story that he was directing,” as Sue Matheson states in “John Ford on the Cold War: Stetsons and Cast Shadows in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962)” (Matheson 363). Although Johnson’s short story illustrates the individualism of the frontier, Ford’s film opts for a psychologically Western. The noir effects and simple sets and costumes point to a psychologically complex characterization in the film. However, the film loses its Montana distinction with the setting in the town of Shinbone, which could be any town with a saloon in the American West.

Johnson’s short story, conversely, relies heavily on the self-reliant cowboy who knows how to handle his villain and lords his shooting skill over Foster to illustrate a completely western composite. By creating Foster as “a tenderfoot,” inexperienced in the ways of the West, she contrasts Barricune’s character against societal norms and outlines the cowboy as a maverick who navigates his own way, choosing isolation rather than a post in society. Johnson’s characterization changes the cowboy image from a poker-playing trailblazer to a self-reliant American maverick who makes moral

choices. This is the American character Stegner speaks of in *The American West as Living Space*. The individualist that Barricune exemplifies is a romantic construct. However, the self-reliant qualities Barricune epitomizes identifies the Western character as an individualist who stoically goes his own way.

Mary Clearman Blew also discusses the dilemma of the individualist Montanan in her novel, *Jackalope Dreams*. After a lifetime on the ranch, Corey Henry discovers new ways to build upon the Montana dream after ranching becomes a past life and after discovering a very different Montana than she enjoyed during her ranching days. Her father has committed suicide, leaving the ranch bankrupt. When she discovers that her neighbor and former student, Ariel is being sexually abused by the developer of a methamphetamine lab, she must face newer realities of the West. While Corey appreciates the old lifestyle of ranching, she realizes that ranching is dying as a livelihood.

In an effort to reclaim the glories of the West, she and her friends act out a train robbery for the local tourists. Although these acts are a release for Corey and her friends, they recreate a glamorous past that is a fantasy from new western realities. The West is mythologized in allegorical symbols (Christiansen 322) and the train robbery is one that is often repeated. It plays to an audience who has not lived in the West and understands a simplified form of frontier, the land of story and legend. While Corey and friends perpetuate tourists' imaginings of the West, Corey realizes the irony she has placed herself in. By perpetuating the myth about the West, she reconstructs the courage and risk-taking measures of Montana people, while at the same time she uses a trite convention of a "Wild West" Montana as a violent and forsaken wilderness. After

an episode in which a would-be robber gets shot, Corey chooses to forsake the train robbery illusion and to preserve her dignity. Corey realizes, reluctantly, that she is turning her beloved frontier into a carnival as she decides to stop. While it is true that Corey is a rancher, she now points to a more authentic American West (Limerick 74).

*Jackalope Dreams* clearly demonstrates a new way West. Although ranching is a deep tradition with her family, she must lift herself to newfound dreams. Corey eschews traditional ranching while remaining true to the ideals of the westerner. She must rely on her own resources as she searches for her truth. Corey speaks with a western, self-reliant individualist voice that emerges to fashion modern dreams of the West. This voice is distinctly American. Corey realizes that she must vigilantly protect Ariel from her predator and testify against him, despite consequences. She also must face the challenges of impending unemployment now that the ranch is in financial turmoil. Clearman Blew's version of the West takes place after the male fantasy of "virgin land" has ended. While she does not completely reject the cowboy West, she revises the West of community and family into her own tapestry (Bevis *All Our Stories* 81). Clearman Blew's woman rancher sets a new course for the cowboy with concerns for her community and in moving forward beyond the ranch.

In this way, Corey is similar in consciousness to Johnson's Barricune. She is stoic in the face of adversity and frees herself from societal pressures of keeping the ranch and keeping quiet regarding sexual abuse. She navigates her own way, using a moral compass and the reassurance that she can depend upon her own counsel. Although there is no overt victory in walking away from the ranch, she continues her

education, and the perpetrator of the sex crime is arrested. Similar to Barricune's travails, she cuts her losses with a mixture of victory and remorse.

*Buffalo Commons*, by Richard Wheeler also explores the ranch and all its possibilities. *Buffalo Commons* takes an ethical look at the best decision of land use for all concerned. Wheeler has an understanding of all sides as he discusses reasonable compromises between preserving the land and ranching. Everyone in the novel must reckon with policy decisions and government intervention and each character must decide for himself what is appropriate use of Montana land.

Wheeler takes as background how in the late 1980s, Frank and Deborah Popper proposed an idea to set aside a portion of Montana and various other states for the purpose of grazing buffalo. The Poppers wanted people to learn to coexist with the near-extinct animal. An urban studies scholar and a geography scholar, respectively, the Poppers viewed an ideological Buffalo Commons from the perspective of outsiders. Their idea was met with mixed reviews from ecologists, ranchers, broadcasters, scientists, and Rotary Clubs (Popper and Popper 495).

Wheeler fictionalizes this account with both a clear view of land preservation and an understanding that this type of wildlife commons would be an assault to the ranching way of life. The Nichols family, a ranching family in the narrative, believes that the outsiders are missing the sustainability of the land and that they are compromising the value of each acre of Montana terrain by insisting that the land is only good for grazing bison. The Nichols family treats the land with the dignity that it deserves and never wavers in its position.

The altruistic vision of a wildlife commons for grazing buffalo is on the outset a concept to preserve and sustain future generations of buffalo and to keep the land neutral, away from the government and the ranchers, who will claim it for their own. A proposed wildlife commons would give a near-extinct species, the bison, room to graze in a protected environment.

Separate from the trailblazing cowboy myth is the poetic idea of the blossoming agricultural society that must be used for grazing extinct species. Ranchers and cowboys dispel this myth by taking care of the land and its livestock every day. Their stewardship of the land is a testament to the fact that the land is being used as a viable resource. Each party – the outsider, the government, and the rancher – believe that his way will preserve and sustain the land more than the others. While the mythical land of promise represents hope and renewal, (Caldwell 31) each party's ideal of the land is threatened. The pastoral arcadia that must be used for each party's purpose further commodifies the land that all of them work so desperately to sustain.

The mythologized idea of the verdant backyard has its origins in manifest destiny. As Americans left Europe in the eighteenth century, they were seeking a land of abundance. Throughout history, many Americans have misunderstood that the land is a commodity to be freely taken. A wildlife commons is a scientific study to both utilize the pastoral garden and to set it apart for the grazing of bison. The Nichols family, by contrast, has a history of treating the land and cattle with respect, which is another use of the pastoral arcadia (Caldwell 33). Converse to this theory is the belief that the principles of the wildlife commons would claim grasslands that are only

inhabitable for the grazing of bison. This theory marginalizes the land upon which they are ardently endeavoring to protect the bison (Matthews 155).

Wheeler uses characterization to illustrate all sides of the wildlife commons argument. The illegal importation of wolves has added mischief to the wildlife commons plan, and Dr. Stanford Kouric comes to Eastern Montana to evaluate the entire commons problem. The addition of the mischief of importing wolves adds another set of problems to the already unresolved wildlife commons policy. Although he is a biologist specializing in wolves, he does not recommend a wolf habitat for Eastern Montana and is prepared to pay a price for his testimony. Kouric loses his position as a researcher after testifying the ecosystem would be in danger if wolves were allowed to roam free. *Buffalo Commons* illustrates the many layers of environmental policy and teaches the repercussions of well-intentioned conservation policy at the risk of the ranching way of life.

Another character who is influenced by policy is John Trouble, who is Cheyenne Indian. Because Trouble lives and works in the white man's world, he is at risk of losing his Native American identity. In the midst of the controversy of the Nichols Ranch, Trouble takes a few days off for pilgrimage. Previously out of touch with his Indian roots, he journeys to reclaim them. Trouble knows that there are changes on the ranch and revives his spirituality to weather the tides of change in his employment.

The ideological concept of a wildlife commons looks attractive at first glance. But the realities of the wildlife commons would change the ranching landscape forever. Wheeler straddles the wildlife commons idea with dignity and sensitivity, while

underscoring his view that constant custodial care of the land by ranchers is in the best interest of preserving the land. *Buffalo Commons* views the idea of a wildlife preserve, at the expense of the ranch, from all angles and introduces a satisfactory conclusion for all involved. *Buffalo Commons* addresses the myth in the garden idea (Caldwell, 32) that a verdant, “free” natural backyard must be used to suit each party’s purposes.

The cowboy, the Native American, and the woman rancher of modern literature are characters of complex difficulties and who navigate the western wilderness with quiet dignity, while keeping their own counsel. Johnson, Clearman Blew and Wheeler free their characters from a romanticized West while demonstrating their American ideals of self-reliance and preservation of the land.

### **Lay of the Land : Environmental Conversations**

Since the early days of the Montana territory, the ideology that the West must be sustained and preserved has been a dialogue within the community. Within this framework is the idea that when there are losses against the natural terrain, they must be recouped. While Richard Ford takes a darker look into fire in *Wildlife*, Norman Maclean uses story mixed with elegy in *Young Men & Fire*. Maclean also combines family conflict together with dilemmas of the natural landscape in *A River Runs Through It*. Maclean's fish story navigates between understated family conflict and reverence for the natural landscape. Ted Leeson, in his *Inventing Montana*, looks at the state's culture and geography from the perspective of a tourist who is also committed to keep the land unviolated. These four narratives, told by three authors, move issues of sustaining and preserving the natural terrain to the forefront of every conversation.

Set in Great Falls, Montana in the 1960s, Richard Ford's *Wildlife* explores destruction through fire as a metaphor for the breakdown of the institution of marriage and complications and disillusionment that the protagonist, Joe Brinson, and his family experience. Joe's father, Jerry, implies that the fire is too far from Great Falls to affect the residents of the city, but its impact reaches further. The wildfire represents the anxieties of the inhabitants of Great Falls – the racial tensions with the Indians, the economic uneasiness and the lack of control that the residents of Great Falls have over the circumstances of their lives.

Tamas Dobozy, in "Burning Montana: Richard Ford's *Wildlife* and Regional Crisis," examines Ford's complexities of regionalism. Dobozy believes that Joe is

confused about his identity because of his family's shifting status within a close-knit community such as Great Falls. Joe experiences a regional affiliation, a link to a community, but he grapples with his family within this framework (Dobozý 6). The wildfires perpetuate a lack of permanence in an ever-changing landscape. Jerry joins with others to fight the fire 100 miles away. Jerry reaches for another chance at manhood after he has been humiliated and terminated from his position at a golf pro shop. Meanwhile, Joe's mother, Jeannette, becomes infatuated with a wealthy grain operator, Warren Miller. The cohesiveness of the community serves as a further reminder that his family is separating and that Joe must stand alone to face the consequences.

Jerry is shocked at the capriciousness of nature when he reports over the telephone, "I saw a bear caught on fire, Joe ... You wouldn't have believed it. It just blew up around him in one instant. ...It was like balled lightning" (Ford 60). Jerry fails to adequately articulate the dangers and disarray of the natural terrain. He has no larger context in which to place the fire, and stammers at the phenomenon. Jerry cannot connect the fire with the turmoil in his life. When Greta Ehrlich describes fire in the larger context of climate change in her essay, "Where the Burn Meets the Dead," she illustrates the aftermath of a forest fire by stating, "[The Trees] are human-like and disturbing, black arms on one slope, brown needles on the other" (Ehrlich 182). Ehrlich places the fire in a way that describes its destructiveness and permanence. While Jerry expresses shock, he stops short of delineating the specifics of how volatile the fire is and the danger that ensues. The aftereffects of the fire and the ensuing clean-

up would help Joe understand the significance of the fire if Jerry could adequately express its mercurial nature and its lasting effects.

While Joe's family struggles with the wildfire that consumes part of Montana, Joe has to learn quickly how to manage his dysfunctional family. To explain Jerry's actions in the arson of Miller's home, Joe states: "We were alone there in Great Falls. Strangers. We only had ourselves to answer for us if things went bad and turned against us" (Ford 167). Joe and his family have not yet developed a place in the community, and Joe defends his family against its uncertain environment. While standing united with his father, Joe is the one who must reckon with family hardships while his parents are emotionally dumbfounded.

Nature's wrath in the form of fire is at the forefront of Norman Maclean's *Young Men & Fire*. Maclean spent two summers of his youth in the U. S. Forestry Service and came back to Montana to write about the Mann Gulch fire of 1949 in its aftermath. Maclean's *Young Men & Fire* is part detective story as he tries to unpack the etiology of the fire and endeavors to calculate how twelve of the fifteen airborne smokejumpers could have lost their lives in a period of an hour.

*Young Men & Fire* is also a western story. Fires in the West are common, and westerners learn to coexist with the fire (*Coexisting with Fire* 4). As Maclean meticulously traces the pattern of the fire, he salutes the land that is his home. Mann Gulch is located just above Lewis and Clark's beloved Gates of the Mountains, Meriwether Canyon and Frenchtown. He talks about the Continental Divide between Helena and Missoula that marks a geographical pattern through the United States.

Maclean compares the ruins of the Mann Gulch fire to Custer Battlefield, which is a recognizable comparison that most Montanans who understand history will appreciate. Maclean blends elegy with fire science as he calculates the August 5, 1949 fire and its ruins:

It's different with me now from when I first started climbing Mann Gulch. Now I carry inside me part of the purgation of its tragedy. It is part of me and the tragedy that knows more about forests and fires because of this forest fire. If now the dead of this fire should awaken and I should be stopped beside a cross, I would no longer be nervous if asked the first and last question of my life, How did this happen?

(Maclean, *Young Men* 87)

*Young Men & Fire* shapes history with storytelling and eulogizes those who died. This work demonstrates care for the land while underscoring the tendency toward forest fires in the West. As Maclean seeks answers to his questions about how the fire was able to swiftly burn and get ahead of the smokejumpers, he is reclaiming a part of the Mann Gulch for posterity. Only after he finds scientific answers to his questions can he allow the fire to take its rightful place in history. This book was published posthumously and was completed by editors (Maclean, *Young Men* xiii).

Instructional in tone, *Young Men & Fire* could be utilized as a manual to teach fire science at fire colleges across the United States, especially in the forested Northwestern states. There is much to learn from the book about fire forensics, the root causes of fire, and the deaths of twelve smokejumpers at the twitch of the wind. Maclean captures cleanly the analysis behind the fire and the risk factors that all fire

fighters take. Firefighters must scope the territory and act quickly as fire events change rapidly.

Throughout the literature of the West, there is a sense of loss and reclamation. Maclean realizes that while he cannot recover the lives that were lost, he can prevent more tragedies from occurring. Prevention becomes reclamation in the fire wilderness. Just as surely as new trees are planted to replace the trees which were burned, prevention seeks to pull new smokejumpers from the clutches of new hazards to reclaim what was lost in past fire tragedies.

A valuable moral lesson in the Mann Gulch fire is that young and strong men who seemingly have every advantage on their side are just as vulnerable to fire as the next man. Wildfire has no favorites and no predictable pattern. The hazard is part of the position of smokejumping, and firefighters know the hazards from the beginning. They are motivated by the sheer will to conquer the fire and reclaim the forest.

When Maclean sums up his account of the fire, he speaks of the fire metaphorically as the fire in a person's life. As he looks back on the Mann Gulch Fire, he states, "In the journey of compassion what we have ultimately as our guide is whatever understanding we may have gained along the way of ourselves and others" (Maclean 296). Maclean extends the conversation to tribulations in a person's life. In William Kittredge's *The Nature of Generosity*, he clarifies Maclean's narrative of the Mann Gulch Fire as he measures literary themes with anthropology and science. Kittredge comments, "Maclean implies that we live in fire as well as water, that love and not justice is more often than not the best we can expect. We sense the fire in our

lives, livid and actual” (Kittredge 45). In this context, it is easier to understand Richard Ford’s Jerry and Joe Brinson and their struggle with fires and their aftermath.

In *Young Men & Fire*, Norman Maclean demonstrates his stewardship of the land. Maclean’s *A River Runs Through It* is a *roman a clef* demonstrating conflict between two brothers, suggested in a subtle undertone, while Maclean freely connects his readers with the river and its surroundings. While seeking permanence in the river, he gives studied, methodical fly fishing mini-lessons that teach the patience necessary for fly fishing. This patience is carried forth in the conflict between the brothers. Like Joe Brinson in *Wildlife*, Maclean feels that he is at the precipice in his relationship with his brother. While Joe has only his immediate family to cling to, Maclean draws his strength from the permanent tides of the river.

Maclean’s family has not demonstrated outward conflict in the past, so Maclean tiptoes around conflict while waiting for the fish to bite. Since fly fishing requires a quiet reflectiveness, Maclean uses the silence to avoid the conflicts that are troubling his conscience. The brothers’ conflict is placed aside in honor of the catch. Fly fishing requires the skill of lying in wait and striking. There is timing and patience to fly fishing that Maclean endeavors to illustrate – “Poets talk of ‘spots of time,’ – but it’s really fishermen who experience eternity compressed in a moment” (Maclean, *River* 70). Maclean speaks of the tension and surprise in fishing when he shares this experience, “Something odd, detached and even humorous happens to a big-fish fisherman a moment after a big fish strikes” (Maclean, *River* 69). In Maclean’s account, the fisherman wants to know immediately how much the fish weighs. He must have patience and deftness in catching the fish, yet he hastens to find the ostensible value of

his treasure. This analogy gets to the heart of the trouble between the brothers. Maclean has been quietly teaching his brother Paul the inherent value of the river as a method for keeping Paul's violent tendencies and loutish behavior in check. Maclean leans too heavily upon the river to change his relationship with Paul, and discards the idea of outward confrontation.

Wallace Stegner has reviewed Maclean's novella. Stegner states that Maclean and his brother had to balance the "harsh, limited, demanding code of their frontier society with the larger codes in which grace and personal salvation ultimately lie" (Stegner, *Lemonade Springs* 193). As sons of a Presbyterian minister, the Maclean sons were disciplined in the ways of the church and also accustomed to the ways of the frontier. This duality is essential, because the characters must learn to match their religious beliefs with the harsher behaviors of frontier life, from hard drinking to gun violence. Maclean relies heavily on the redemptive grace of the Blackfoot River to save Paul from his hard-drinking ways (Bevis *Ten Tough Trips* 175).

While Maclean studies conflict in slow motion and renders mini-lessons in fly fishing, he demonstrates an overarching reflection of the river and how it interacts with the brothers' conflict. In lyrical prose, he details how the river was formed. Although the lessons are about fly fishing, the river points the fishermen in the direction of sustaining and affirming life. The fishermen and the river intersect when, "Fishermen also think of the river as having been made with them partially in mind, and they talk of it as if it had been" (Maclean *River* 98). Maclean has a strong affinity with the river. He points to a river he has known since childhood, "We regarded it as a family river, as part of us, and I surrender it now only to dude ranches, the unselected inhabitants of

Great Falls, and the Moorish invaders from California” (Maclean *River* 98). Maclean shows a possession of the river that is not truly his. He uses “surrender” while knowing that he will not be able to protect the public river from tourists and developers. This statement is part of a vanishing landscape. Maclean is keenly aware that, just as in his family relationships, he must play the role in sustaining. Only this time, he must sustain the river.

*Inventing Montana* by Ted Leeson is a fish story of another kind. Leeson has been fishing on the Madison River for more than twenty years. Instead of giving his reader tips on the best places to fish in the Madison Valley, Leeson gives an aerial view of the town of Ennis and the Madison Valley that is respectful to the area and that encourages tourism. He gingerly discusses urban sprawl and the tensions between tourists and homesteaders. He imagines himself as a resident while he surveys the offerings at the local dump, speaks to the consumer-to-consumer loop and refuses to engage in the wheels of conventional commerce in the transfer of commodities. Leeson empathizes with the residents as he imagines household items in his own home in Oregon that he cannot bear to throw away (Leeson 75). Leeson is careful not to enter the repetitive consumption that has recurred since the 1920s (Slade 23) so that he can reduce his ecological footprint on the terrain.

Although Leeson is only a visitor to Ennis every year, he is an invested tourist. He empathizes with the shopkeepers who reside in a community adjacent to Yellowstone National Park, shopkeepers who cope with vacationers every day. He uses demographics to illustrate that what is today charming and complete about the town of Ennis could be uninhabitable if tourists were to continue to encroach on the ranching

lifestyle and the seasonal retail industry (Leeson 108). Leeson points out that there is not enough infrastructure to sustain sprawling suburbs (Diamond 74).

When Leeson discusses his “leave no trace” (Harmon 15) ethic of tourism, he comes close to the same sentiments that Maclean, a longtime resident, has about the natural wilderness that is Maclean’s home and Leeson’s reason for writing the book. While Maclean, in *A River Runs Through It*, endeavors sustaining the river in tandem with healing his family, Leeson leaves a smaller ecological footprint as a tourist. Leeson’s vision is an altruistic one – he simply wants to ensure that he does not traffic in the consumerist culture and that he leaves the natural terrain behind for the next tourist or homesteader. Leeson teaches against trampling the landscape and vacationing as if the local terrain is disposable.

Leeson embarks upon the exercise of placing leisure studies into an idealized view of the world. This is the point at which the term “inventing Montana” is celebrated. Leeson “invents” an idealized place to connect with nature. Leeson takes the pastime of fly fishing out of the construct of place and discusses it as an end on its own. Fishing becomes what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes as “flow” in his book, *Finding Flow* (Csikszentmihalyi 75). Leeson is not enjoying a pastime from boredom. Rather, he is exploring beauty and knowledge during a pastime to enhance his understanding of the world. When Leeson states: “Any trout fly that catches a trout gives some fragmentary hint of the ideal, a partial glimpse into a transcendent reality that we will probably never arrive at” (Leeson 131), he takes the simple fishing fly and uses it as a vehicle for discussing the quest for perfection.

Leeson speaks of the West, idealized in his consciousness. This is the same West that Wallace Stegner writes of in *The American West as Living Space*. Stegner states:

If there is a western speech, I speak it; if there is a western character or personality, I am some variant of it; if there is a western culture in the small-c, anthropological sense, I have not escaped it. It has to have shaped me. I may even have contributed to it in minor ways, for culture is a pyramid to which each of us brings a stone (Stegner *Marking the Sparrow's Fall* 214).

This passage enhances Leeson's vision of the West. In Stegner's view, every westerner contributes to the West to make its community. This idea extends the resolve of Leeson's tourist to leave a smaller ecological footprint. Leeson "leaves no trace" so that future generations will enjoy the natural landscape. Stegner, additionally, suggests that the culture of the West is born of building a community.

In these four works, every conversation brings the environment to the forefront. Rather than having environmental issues as incidental to the discussion, sustaining and cultivating the natural terrain is the reason for each work. In each work, there is loss and reclamation, and there are solutions to navigating and sustaining the natural landscape. Embedded in each work is the study of relationships, whether within a community or within a family, that illustrates how the western geography influences both community and family.

### **Prairie Schooler: Literature Intended to Teach**

Didactic literature is one of the many genres of Montana literature. Literature that teaches a moral or object lesson is didactic literature. The *bildungsroman* is a coming-of-age work that gives life lessons along the span of a character's growth from adolescence to adulthood (Ronald *Reader* 96). However, didactic literature can take other forms – from historical fiction to young adult literature that is intended to instruct, to memoir that exemplifies ideas the memoirist learned along the way. These narratives give insights that readers cannot find sitting at a school desk. Rather, didactic literature achieves educational lessons outside the pedagogy of a classroom.

Mildred Walker's *Winter Wheat* is a *bildungsroman* that teaches lessons outside of the schoolhouse. Ellen learns from her teaching experience as well. Ellen demonstrates an inner courage when she faces the harsh tragedy of a child who dies in the snow on her watch at the teacherage. Ellen has misgivings about her parents' marriage, which shapes her experiences with dating. When her boyfriend dies in World War II, she keeps her own counsel because she does not want to burden her parents. At the beginning of the novel, Ellen misunderstands her mother's Russian accent and is resentful of her mother's Russian background.

When Ellen views her family for the first time as an adult, she further learns that the love of her parents has matured over time. Until she uncovers the truth of her family, she cannot move forward with her life. As Elaine Jahner states in *Spaces of the Mind: Narrative and Community in the American West*, "The novel unfolds as a series of events that teach her the conditions under which her life can be perceived as a

narrative construct and these conditions are bound to place, even though she [Ellen] does not want them to be” (Jahner 142). Ellen learns from the harshness of the prairie winter, as well as the experience of having to dig her car out of knee-deep mud. As Ellen stumbles along the way, she learns from her mistakes and sees her errant behavior from a long view.

The growing season is in tandem with the various teachable moments within the novel, which summons hope and wisdom from the prairie, rather than the caricature of western films of prairie as wintry, flat dirt (Mitchell 498). Ellen ties her story to a sense of place. The prairie buttes of eastern Montana shape a timeless story of inner strength and perseverance. Ellen grows as the winter wheat as she becomes a full-fledged adult, moving through the pangs of emerging adulthood.

Walker demonstrates throughout her novel that the fulfillment of time will yield the harvest. The cumulative events that structure the novel allow Ellen to realize that she can work through her difficulties through the passage of time. At the beginning of the novel, Ellen is resentful of her familiar prairie home. Toward the end, the planting seasons on the prairie teaches her patience and tolerance of her Russian-born mother and a deeper understanding of her parents’ marriage.

The trajectory of *Winter Wheat* is similar to the pattern of Willa Cather’s short story, “The Enchanted Bluff” (Cather 308). Five young Nebraska boys covet the Acoma pueblo near Albuquerque, New Mexico, a place that they have never been, all while camping in the sandbar of a Nebraska river. While imagining a place where they will never visit, they enjoy the natural wonders of a Nebraska river and constellations in the Nebraska

sky. While not completely overlooking Nebraska, they long for a land that is not their own and that they never visit after they reach adulthood. Ellen, like the five campers, surmises how life would be easier in Vermont, a state that she has never visited, while missing the rare magnificence and steady work ethic on the Montana wheat farm. Ellen, over the course of the work, comes to appreciate the steadfastness of the western prairie and its planting seasons. This irony is a specialty of both Walker and Cather. They both place nostalgia in the reminiscences of their protagonists so that there is sadness that something genuine has been overlooked. The protagonists spend the rest of their works searching for what has been lost. In this way, the vision of both Cather and Walker is defined by the contours of the prairie and a demonstration of hearty Americans and their strident work ethic.

Using simple, yet poetic language combined with life experiences reads very much like the writings of Cather and her Nebraska. Walker uses straightforward language in a poetic way that appeals to the middlebrow readers and invites them to explore the Montana prairie as Cather invites readers to Nebraska (Homestead 77). Both Cather and Walker make wisdom from nature accessible to the modern reader while they use simple language, a modern voice and a strong sense of place. Walker uses the wisdom from the prairie to describe the planting season when she states: “Ground sparrow dart up from the stubble, ants crawl across the bare ground, and green shows bright in the winter and up the side of the coulee. It’s a thing you can feel. Then you know it’s time to plow” (Walker 334). Like Walker, Cather uses the imagery of Nebraska to navigate her readers to her homeland: “Our water had always these two moods: the one of sunny complaisance, the other of inconsolable, passionate regret”

(Cather 312). Both Walker and Cather invite readers to contemplate the depths of the prairie through simple, yet poetic language and nostalgia for one's home.

Although *Winter Wheat* teaches lessons outside the classroom, Ellen's experience at the teacherage and her college experiences emphasize traditional education, both in Montana and out-of-state. Traditional pedagogy in its various forms is illustrated together with life instruction, which work together to develop a *bildungsroman* that places educational attainment as a desired quality for Montana women.

The one-room teacherage is a model that is still in existence today. But instead of a schoolhouse that holds the older children hostage to diurnal ABCs, the one-room school model seeks out hearty teachers who can teach all grades with versatility and strength (Boss 37). Ivan Doig's historical fiction in *Whistling Season* reflects on the one-room schoolhouse of 1909 in the fictional town of Marias Coulee, Montana. Doig places the modern-day classroom in closer view when Paul uses his past memories to decide the future of the one-rooms in 1957.

The character of Morrie Morris provides this kind of strength in *Whistling Season*. Morris is called upon to teach multiple grades with strength and ease. As the oldest student in the class, Paul Milliron states, "...those tingling moments when the entire might of learning seemed to have descended into the one-room school for my benefit...But my experience with Morrie this far was that any mental extravaganza he went to the trouble of staging was worth some reflection" (Doig 146). From viewing Halley's comet to performing with harmonicas for the school inspector, Morris drives each student at his or her current level to perform at the peak of their abilities.

The protagonist of the story is Paul. Although teacher Morris is a prominent figure in *Whistling Season*, Paul tells the story. Paul uses humor to talk about riding to school on horseback and sitting in the classroom with the same eight students year after year. Although Paul uses humor, he discusses the downside of the one-room classroom with angst. There are simply not enough voices to contribute to a fair discussion, and Paul needs to be challenged. Morris encourages Paul in his academic pursuits, despite the disadvantage of fewer students and no students at Paul's intellectual level. This is the kind of specialty learning that the one-room teachers achieve with a flourish.

With few resources and students, one-room teachers exhort each student in each grade to achieve at top performance, despite the difficulties of not having enough students for a well-rounded discussion in each subject (Boss 40). *Whistling Season* illustrates the one-room schoolhouse where students of varying ages learn to be strident and self-aware through persevering through shortages of teachers, students and, sometimes, supplies. Doig uses humor and irony to demonstrate a traditional form of pedagogy. Sparsely populated areas still utilize the one-room teacherage, although it is rare. The unique quality of individualized attention makes the one-room schoolhouse an under-recognized resource in education.

In *Whistling Season*, Doig uses Montana history to illustrate how the lifestyles of Montana ranchers and farmers factor into Milliron's administrative decision in 1957 to keep one-room schoolhouses or to send students to state-funded boarding schools. As Elizabeth Simmons states in *Earthlight, Wordfire, The Work of Ivan Doig*, "Doig, a historian himself, makes it clear that a sense of the past is crucial to a sense of personal and community identity" (Simmons 110). Milliron chooses to stay with the one-room

model where children on Montana ranches and farms thrive. Children are expected to work on the farm, and if they are boarded throughout the state, they will not live on the farm throughout the year. Milliron uses his personal experiences of the one-room in his administrative position with the school board as reasons to keep the one-room alive. Doig allows Milliron to make a wise, if controversial, choice to allow the children to stay on the ranch throughout the school year. Doig's understanding of Montana history and his loyalty for Montana lifestyles gives Milliron the voice to choose the ranching lifestyle instead of boarding them in a faraway city. Because he favors stewardship for the land and its people, he chooses to continue the tradition of the one-room teacherage so children can work the ranch (Egan 178).

Young adult literature is another form of didactic literature, written to instruct and enlighten. Jeannette Ingold's *Hitch* is written to inform its readers about life in the 1930s and the effects of the Great Depression. *Hitch*, which is a reference to a length of service in the Civilian Conservation Corps, the CCC, demonstrates the tough times endured by people during the Depression, seasoned with hard work and character-building.

Ingold illustrates a hardscrabble Montana during a drought season and during a time in history when millions of people in all states were suffering from unemployment. *Hitch* portrays a gritty Montana, describing a dry place in need of some new ideas to revitalize its farms. Montana of the 1930s was one of many states that was a victim of the Western Dust Bowl, and Ingold's depiction is more Great Depression than Montana. The solutions of the CCC bring many new irrigation ideas to Montana, but the novel stops short of presenting the CCC as the panacea for all of Montana's

problems in the Great Depression. The novel often gives its youthful readers the idea that the Great Depression was a problem on a national scale and that Montana was in the midst of local poverty stemming from the national economic problems.

In 1936, the protagonist, Moss Trawnley, chooses between jail and the CCC and eventually becomes a foreman in the CCC at the age of seventeen. CCC enrollees are treated as if they are regular Army enlistees and make numerous conservation improvements in the fictional town of Monroe, Montana. Moss has not had the guidance that he needs from his father or any other family member, but the CCC toughens him up and teaches him the ways of the trail while inculcating an appreciation of wildlife and conservation techniques. *Hitch* demonstrates how the CCC changed the lives of young, unemployed men across America while illustrating the virtues of conservation and teamwork.

The cold climate becomes part of the story as Moss struggles to build barracks and chop down trees in sub-zero temperatures. Moss' struggle in inclement weather toughens him for the road ahead and is used as a vehicle to teach him how hard life could be as a leader in the CCC. While Ingold's narrative is instructional in nature, it speaks to the legacy of the CCC during its nine-year history. Extensive work was completed in Glacier National Park and a major wildlife refuge was built in Medicine Lake, Montana (Cohen 151).

While Moss emphasizes hard work in the cold wilderness, he learns to appreciate spring in the woods, as well. When Montana "greens up," the enrollees can hardly contain their excitement. Moss extols the virtues of the CCC when he states:

Byl argues for managing the trail experience for tourists. Although many tourists want the land left the way it is naturally, Byl takes the stance that the manmade trail brings tourists closer to nature than if there were no trail. “Trails in national parks and state forests and city preserves help people be ‘in’ nature in a way that they don’t dare, aren’t able or don’t have the time to on their own” (Byl 183). The experience with the trail brings tourists to know a place better than if the land were left unmarked. Tourists from the city will not venture on an unmarked trail to discover nature, and the trail is the avenue that encourages them to explore the natural world. Wallace Stegner, in *Marking the Sparrow’s Fall*, discusses how denizens of rural areas wear their own paths, “Wearing any such path in the earth’s rind is an intimate act, an act like love, and it is denied to the dweller of cities. He lacks the proper mana for it, he is out of touch” (Stegner *Marking* 15). A manmade trail signals to the urban dweller that the trail is a safe path upon which to continue his sojourn.

Byl takes a look at the reservation just outside Glacier National Park as the tourist might see it, as a “desolate and hardscrabble place” (Byl 96), with the purpose of exhorting her readers to take a second look at the lives of the Native Americans who live on the reservation and work at Glacier. Instead of speaking of Native Americans in general, she keys in on one specific Indian worker, Dwight, who drinks alcohol to excess. Byl speaks to race relations at the workplace. By describing the “edge of the dust-scoured plains” (Byl 96) as a jobless future on the reservation, she facilitates an understanding that her work on the trail is a career option that Dwight feels lucky to have. She walks on eggshells while hoping Dwight does not get dismissed from his position, just as she wishes that he would not drink. Byl speaks to the paradox that is

race in America. Western Americans who reconcile the isolation of the reservation with the propensity toward alcohol without generalizing and without feeling guilty can look to the individual and his shortcomings without judgment. However, the challenge of race is always a slippery slope between patronizing individuals and treating them with dignity.

These four works illustrate education that is outside the confines of formal pedagogy, but is education, just the same. They teach and inspire with insight and, sometimes, humor. The four works include the *bildungsroman* and young adult literature that is instructional, a memoir outlining lessons along the trail, and historical fiction that looks at the one-room teacherage that is still in place in sparsely populated corners of Montana today. These four works demonstrate examples of various teaching methods outside the walls of a classroom.

### Literature by and about Native Americans

Montana writers are a diverse group, most of whom write about reverence for land and culture. Expansive contributions by and about Montana's Native Americans continue the conversation of culture and land. The nameless protagonist in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* straddles the line between the reservation that has been marginalized and the white man's world in which he concludes he is not comfortable. *The Star Quilter*, by William Yellow Robe, explores a relationship between an Assiniboine and a white woman from a nearby community spanning 30 years. Another work, *Montana, 1948*, by Larry Watson, explores the racial division between Natives and Europeans through the eyes of a 12 - year old boy. The conflicts and attendant challenges between Indians and Europeans are key to understanding Montana literature.

James Welch is a Native American writer who communicates the struggles of the Native Peoples and their uncomfortable fit in a white person's world. His *Winter in the Blood* is an examination of Indian life on and off the reservation. Our unnamed narrator, a Blackfoot Indian, understands that Native life has been marginalized, and this knowledge exacerbates his frustrations with himself. The reservation holds few possibilities for employment. When he had an opportunity for employment in a suburb of Seattle, he was offered a position due to the fact that he is Native American. He declines the offer because he does not appreciate being hired merely because of his ethnicity. When the narrator says, "It took a nurse who hated Indians to tell me the truth, that they needed a grant to build another wing and I was the first of the male Indians they needed to get the grant" (Welch 17), the reader can see that an offer of

employment on this basis demoralizes him. The unnamed protagonist refuses to be placed in a game in which he is hired only because of his ethnicity.

The namelessness of the protagonist is not an inadvertent omission. Louis Owens, in his work, *Other Destinies* believes that the name has been intentionally left out to illustrate that the nameless protagonist does not know himself. “The landscape through which he moves is a bleak Montana wasteland rooted immediately in the painful dislocations of the Blackfoot and Gros Ventre history” (Owens 128). Our nameless protagonist mixes the frustrations with these dislocations with his Native American heritage in a white man’s world. Our narrator does not know in which area he wants to live.

The struggles of the nameless Native in *Winter in the Blood* are numerous. His girlfriend is of another tribe, the Cree. She absconds with his gun and electric razor, and he wants to retrieve his belongings. The unnamed narrator hesitates to confront his girlfriend about taking his gun and razor. His grandmother “had told me that Crees drank too much and fought with other Indians in bars, though they had never fought on the battlefield” (Welch 27). Although the narrator knows this is a generalization about the Crees, he does not want to make trouble between the tribes. His painful attempts to negotiate breaches between tribes make it all the more difficult to reconcile his differences with the white community. Since he is not able to reconcile differences between the tribes, he feels all the more frustrated as he negotiates with Anglos and their differences with Indians.

Another struggle is that his grandmother is dying. There is a sense that with the death of his grandmother, there will be one fewer Blackfoot Indian to carry on the legacy and to impede the further marginalization of the reservation. Due to money issues, the family will have trouble with the burial of the grandmother. He feels the humiliation of his family because they do not have money for his grandmother's burial. His family's financial burdens further damages his self-esteem.

He embarks on a journey by bus to confront his girlfriend who stole his gun and razor. As he travels the Hi-line, the mountainous Northern Montana region that was built by the intersection of the railroad and US Highway 2, running from Glacier National Park to North Dakota (Bevis *All Our Stories* 95), he catches a glimpse of small-town Montana. To the narrator, the white ranchers, cowpunchers, barmaids and businessmen who inhabit the bar scene seem to have a better standard of living than he does. When he befriends a con-artist who buys him a car to drive to Canada, the nameless protagonist is suspicious. It is not until he sees his con-artist friend get arrested that he realizes that if he had driven his friend to Canada, he would have been an accessory to a crime. The business world of the white men is riddled with complications, and the narrator's experience with these complications prompts him to identify with his reservation. The unnamed narrator wants no part of the problems that beset white people in the community and readies for home.

Before leaving for the reservation, he searches for the woman bartender whom the businessman accompanied to obtain a complete picture of why the businessman was arrested. Our narrator demonstrates the struggle of living between two worlds when he states, "Again, I felt that helplessness of being in a world of stalking white men. But

those Indians down at Gable's [bar] were no bargain either. I was a stranger to both and both had beaten me" (Welch 96). When he concludes, "Those Indians down at Gable's were no bargain," this is his way of stating that he sees himself between the worlds of the white man and the Native. He cannot reconcile the two.

He remembers when his brother and father were alive and acknowledges a reluctant love for them and a longing to have more time with his family members who are now deceased. He feels guilty for surviving the stampede that killed his 14-year-old brother and injured him twenty years before. He identifies with his father and struggles with his mother. Our protagonist's conflict with his mother is directly related to his lack of his own self-knowledge (Owens 130). As the novel progresses, the narrator interweaves his past with his present and future, and only toward the end of the novel copes with his mother and demonstrates more tolerance toward her.

His identity crisis is eased when he realizes that Yellow Calf, a man whom he has known all his life, is actually his grandfather. After his grandmother dies, the truth about Yellow Calf can now be told. Yellow Calf shares the story of his grandmother as a chief's young widow and this knowledge helps him come to terms with his identity issues. He has a natural affinity with Yellow Calf and is relieved to realize that at last that the puzzle is complete. His newfound knowledge about his people and their struggles make him proud to be Blackfoot.

*Winter in the Blood* does not end in a neat package, in which all loose ends are tied. Readers of *Winter in the Blood* experience a sense of disresolution on each page. The dual society that our protagonist lives in places the Native American outside the

main street that is white society, and renders him uncomfortable with reservation life that is politically marginalized and slowly disintegrating. Although our unnamed protagonist has some new directions in his life, he can still see poverty and the propensity to drink alcohol, all the while facing the possibility of a much-diminished, if not extinct reservation.

An understanding of *Winter in the Blood* is key to understanding the compendium of Montana literature. Our narrator's road trip on the Hi-line is an excellent place to find small-town Montana, as it is juxtaposed with life on the nearby reservation. Descriptions of the Hi-line and its various working Americans helps readers see why our unnamed protagonist does not fit in either the society of working Anglos or a disintegrating reservation. *Winter in the Blood* is revolutionary in demonstrating the enigmatic battle that many Native People struggle with on and off the reservation.

William Yellow Robe's one-act play, *The Star Quilter* illustrates differences between a white woman, Luanne, and a Native American woman, Mona. Among the tensions is the fact that the star quilt that Mona has worked diligently on is reduced to a commodity by Luanne. Sioux and Assiniboine women have traditionally made and given away quilts such as the star quilt at powwows and as gifts to mark births or even funerals. Native American quilters sometimes refer to the star quilt as a representation of a sacred circle of continuance of family generations. Sometimes the designs are a pictorial representation of Native American culture. A quilt is a ceremonial object of Native American women (Murphy 40).

For this reason, Luanne's attempt to commodify the star quilt is a very sensitive issue to the Assiniboine Nation and to Mona, who has partnered with Luanne. Mona had trusted Luanne to respect the traditions of Native American culture and to treat quilts not as commodities for sale, but as the ceremonial gifts of a unique culture. Luanne, even after being censured by Mona, still does not understand Native culture or Mona's role in the culture. Luanne embodies Mona's frustrations that Anglos will never understand the ceremony and the significance of Native American culture. Although Luanne slowly becomes more aware of the Assiniboine Nation throughout the decades, she ultimately fails to fully understand Indian culture and fails to know Mona as an individual. Just as Luanne is not aware that she commodifies Indian culture, she is also oblivious to the tenuous thread between generations of Natives and Europeans.

Throughout the play, Luanne is blind to the differences in culture and continually crosses the cultural boundary that Mona sets up in the first scene. When Mona and Luanne discuss the events of Wounded Knee, they have two different interpretations of the story. By insisting that Montana Indians know their place, Luanne is perpetuating a tired stereotype of Native Americans. Luanne believes that each culture has a "place" and that European culture is dominant. She states that Mona's culture has adjusted to stepping aside for the dominant culture, instead of examining each culture equally.

Many Anglos like Luanne are not students of history and superimpose "American" values onto a culture that has been alienated from mainstream America for centuries. As Barry Lopez discusses in his "A Dark Light in the West," the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1894 and the Wounded Knee Incident of 1973 are heated topics

between whites and Native peoples. The gap between the historical facts of events and the interpretation of those events vary greatly. Incidents against minorities are difficult to judge unless one studies all the facts. Incidents against Indians can become misconstrued in the popular culture, and misunderstandings continue to arise (Lopez 308). Luanne could better understand the cultural boundaries if she read historical accounts and had a grasp of the Native American point of view in the Wounded Knee incident of 1973.

Mona's inferences are so subtle that Luanne seldom catches on to the misunderstanding that she has toward Native Americans and, personally toward Mona. Throughout the play, Mona uses an undertone of disapproval, giving Luanne a clue that her assumptions are wrong. It is only when the star quilt becomes a commodity that Mona directly points to Luanne's mistaken assumptions. Luanne's impatience with Mona is evident in her company's name of "Princess Light Sleeps." Mona is sarcastic when she asks, "Is she Canadian?" (Yellow Robe 25). Luanne's failure to understand sarcasm and the mispronunciation of the Assiniboine Nation suggest her lack of understanding of the Indian Nations.

When Mona and Luanne do find common ground, it is in the experience of both losing a grandchild to death. Even while Mona experiences grief, Luanne asks for one more quilt. When Mona refuses because she is grieving, Luanne says that she understands. Mona exits the scene stating, "This time, I hope you do" (Yellow Robe 34). Mona's exit, together with her verbal indications that Luanne will never understand what it means to be Indian, points to a frustration that has been festering in

Mona. At this point in the play, Luanne has been acquainted with Mona for over 15 years, yet she has not done the difficult work of knowing her Indian friend.

Originally, this play was broadcast on the radio (Yellow Robe xiii). The radio, with its inflection in voices and its absence of physical staging, is a good vehicle for this play because the voices in a teleplay are more distinct on the radio. Because there is no physical staging, the listener can hear the subtlety in the voices and more easily can pull apart the frustrations between Luanne and Mona. This one-act is pivotal to understanding the racial tensions between Anglos and Native Peoples. Through understatement and stagecraft, readers can visualize the tensions between Mona and Luanne, who are struggling with varying identities within their respective cultures.

Larry Watson's *Montana, 1948* communicates the conflicted territory between Native Americans and Anglos just after World War II. Written in 1993, Watson demonstrates the attitudes of people in a small town in the 1940s as the protagonist, David Hayden, looks at a childhood incident through adult eyes. As a crime unfolds in his fictional town of Bentrock, David, the then 12-year-old protagonist, is faced with divided loyalties. His father Wes is the sheriff, and his Uncle Julian has murdered their Indian housekeeper, Marie. Wes must choose to uphold the law over family loyalties.

David is a child who is listening at the fringes of what is going on around him. Watson's device of using a child's perceptions of Native American and white relations is fundamental to the story. As an intelligent child, David reports that the "real Indians" were not the mythological Indians of the movies, but his peers in "their jeans and cowboy boots, their cotton print dresses, or their flannel shirts. Instead of shouting war

cries to the sky, they were simply milling about, talking low, mourning Marie” (Watson 102). The town that he lives in crackles with prejudices against Native Americans, and young David tries to keep the myths separate from what he has already experienced in relations between Anglos and Indians.

Within the story, David describes Wes’ prejudices against Indians as outward respect with a lingering dismissal of most Native Americans as “ignorant, lazy, superstitious, and irresponsible” (Watson, 34). To the casual observer, Wes’ and Uncle Julian’s behavior is correct. Because they are outwardly courteous, they are above criticism. But as the inward hatred and generalizing simmers, 12-year-old David observes the prejudices and dismissive behavior of Wes and Uncle Julian and can see the path that leads to later struggles. David realizes that while an outward demonstration of courteousness is a beginning, Wes and Uncle Julian are headed for problems with keeping the peace unless they practice genuine tolerance.

The vision of the Hayden family and their role in Bentrock gradually becomes more tarnished as the work progresses. When David describes prairie Montana as “hard country” (Watson 13), he speaks of Bentrock in 1948 as the new frontier in a peaceful era (Watson 16). The war is over, and ranchers and farmers are ready to go back to work. Gradually, David witnesses hidden secrets that interrupt the peace. Bentrock is the kind of town whose “citizens tolerated all kinds of behavior from the eccentric to the unusual to the aberrant” (Watson 128). The failure to confront a prominent physician, David’s Uncle Julian, for his molestation of Indian women is easier for David to view because Bentrock’s residents are prone to overlooking aberrant behaviors.

Similar to the nameless narrator in *Winter in the Blood*, David has no place to call home after Wes imprisons Uncle Julian in the basement of their home, instead of escorting him to jail. The outside community of tolerance of aberrant behaviors and prejudices toward Indians is brought into his home, so he no longer has a safe harbor. His understanding of what his family really values is questioned. Uncle Julian's temporary confinement in the basement is a cover because Wes is trying to reduce the shame placed upon his family. David knows that Uncle Julian belongs in jail, rather than a temporary imprisonment in the basement of his home, and this fact exacerbates the violation of David's home and hearth (Campbell 149).

Ken Egan in *Hope and Dread in Montana Literature* sees the basement scene of *Montana, 1948* as "fodder for the Gothic imagination" (Egan 59), a kind of horror story that traffics in macabre events. Rather than considering it a Gothic point of view, Neil Campbell in *American Youth Cultures* views the culmination of events in *Montana, 1948* (Campbell 150) as hurtful to the family of the town sheriff. The basement scene, rather, reveals that Wes endeavors to protect a family member, who is a criminal, from humiliation. Wes' protection of Uncle Julian alienates David in the process. The consequence of a series of Wes' bad judgments is that David and his family must relocate. Many years later, with a deeper perspective of the events, Wes instructs his family, "Don't blame Montana" (Watson 175). Wes implies that the blame belongs squarely on the shoulders of himself and Uncle Julian.

The conclusion of the story, with "Don't blame Montana" as its last scene, accounts for the fact that the adult David now understands his father's shame over the incidents of 1948. Wes' dismissal of Indians as superstitious and irresponsible

ultimately leads to the downfall of his family. While outwardly courteous, he demonstrates to his friends and family that he has mistrusted Indians as a group. He allows smaller injustices to happen until an accumulation of incidents escalates, causing the Hayden family to pay a price.

These three works wrestle with the complications of Native Americans in Montana and throughout America. *Winter in the Blood* illustrates a lone American Indian, alienated and confused by events, who feels that his homeland has been decolonized and marginalized. Although the role is unresolved at the end of the story, our unnamed protagonist comes to accept his role on the reservation through new eyes. *The Star Quilter* is an unsettling theatrical performance. The interaction between the two characters, Mona and Luanne, illustrates longtime misunderstandings between Anglos and Native Americans. And *Montana, 1948* is an unsettling story about a white family grappling with issues of race and sexual abuse, which escalates to murder. The unravelling of the murder is all the more painful when it is brought into the home of the Hayden family. These works, when viewed together, address the many cultural differences and misunderstandings within both the Euro-American and Native American cultures. Together they illustrate many possibilities of unity that can be studied and worked upon between Native Americans and Anglos.

### Self - Discovery under the Big Sky

Jim Harrison's *English Major* contains a narrator who addresses the natural world along with the civilized world. He takes his roots from his pioneering ancestry as he travels the US in search of himself. In the memoir, *This Isn't the Story You Think It Is*, Laura Munson is an author who has relocated to Montana from the Midwest and uses her past frustrations to help her move forward in her marriage. Dierdre McNamer is a Montana writer whose quirky characters address a difficult time in US history, the early 1960s during the Red Scare. In these three works, the characters travel through the lens of the past to inform their present struggles. While issues of the land are not at the forefront of these works, they are not incidental to the works. The natural wilderness helps these characters view their struggles in a new light. In rugged prairie wilderness, the characters in these three works choose eccentric, unconventional methods to wrestle with issues of the heart.

Cliff, the displaced titular protagonist of *The English Major*, blends his frontier upbringing with his education to shape his perspectives on his world. He places past college education together with his trip throughout the US, particularly through Montana, to navigate the difficult terrain of divorce and its aftermath. Cliff's natural affinity for the farming culture blends with a well-read compendium of first impressions about the states he visits: "In short, Montana was fraught with sporting peril though contemporary versions of the sporting magazines used words like 'sustainable' and 'megafauna'" (Harrison 75). Cliff is a farmer for every man, with collegial sensibilities.

Traveling west from Michigan to San Francisco to see his son, he shares his ride with his former student and newfound lover, Marybelle. He tours the sites along the way with a less than enthusiastic Marybelle. He arrives at Custer National Battlefield frazzled and dazed at his present circumstances. While touring the sacred battlefield of General Custer's famous "Last Stand" at the Crow Agency, he takes an inventory of his life. He has divorced his wife, lost his farm, his dog has died, and he has attained the age of sixty. Drenched in the mystique of the Battle of Little Bighorn, he acknowledges that he must start a new life. The history and mythology of the battlefield reinforce his resolve to pull himself out of the doldrums.

The natural terrain of Montana and the Custer Battlefield stretch Cliff to new understandings of his marital breakup. The spirits of the Battle of Little Big Horn at the Crow Agency help Cliff gain a perspective on how he will live the rest of his life. Ann Ronald, in her book *Ghostwest*, describes the Custer Battlefield as follows: "I wondered if a place teeming with the energy and life of spring would still seem haunted by the ghosts of battle" (Ronald *GhostWest* 14). Ronald's journalistic account seeks the memories and the spirits of the battleground to better understand the Battle of Little Bighorn. Like Ronald, Cliff searches the site of the battleground to interpret the history and mythology of the fateful Last Stand.

Although Cliff originally sees Marybelle as a new beginning for himself, he cannot wait to leave his erratic passenger so that he can set himself free of the past. After travelling six states with her, he is relieved when she rejoins her family in Malta, Montana. As Cliff leaves Montana, heading for Spokane, he announces to himself in newfound self-awareness: "Take a ten-mile hike, something sensible. All your life is

new like a warm rain after a movie” (Harrison 96). Cliff is at last free to make new plans with his life after viewing the site of the Battle of Little Bighorn and returning his passenger to her family.

Cliff encounters Marybelle again in San Francisco, as she teams up with his son Robert out of concern for Cliff’s mental well-being. By skipping to Arizona, Cliff once again dodges Marybelle. Cliff completes two journeys to Montana in search of himself. Cliff makes a return trip to Montana en route to his new home in Michigan. The purpose of his return trip is to fish with his friend, A D and to complete a personal goal of renaming the states after the Indians who once inhabited them and to rename the birds of North America. Cliff blends his farming background with his understanding of Ralph Waldo Emerson as he states:

All those years as a nickel-plated farmer had made my brain a shabby compass. I ruminated like the cattle I raised but lacked their three stomachs to digest the information at hand. Perhaps the dozen times I had read “Self-Reliance” had made me a unique individual but the exact contents of my person had yet to be determined (Harrison 188).

In this passage, Cliff once again, blends his farming life with his collegial sensibilities. Although he digests works such as “Self-Reliance,” he has a difficult time acting upon them. For example, his generalities about women hold him back, intellectually. Cliff refuses to view women as equals – they are either good cooks or sex objects. While eavesdropping on women coping with divorce, he mocks one of them, “she had found her husband’s obsession with fishing too ‘phallogentric’ for words.” He concludes that

“even commonsensical [ex-wife] Viv used to have only ‘problems’ but now had ‘issues’” (Harrison 211). Cliff uses his intellectual skills to lampoon the new language of feminism that he reads and hears, but cannot abide the self-examination required for tolerance toward women.

Cliff reconstructs the state and bird names to rebuild his life after his retirement from farming. While justifying his hobby, he uses it to rethink his life: “Sitting in this car after ten in the morning in mid-July, I felt called to do so. I don’t mean like Moses and his burning bush or Paul on the way to Damascus, just a retired farmer who sees a job that needs to get done” (Harrison 190). Throughout the novel, others keep telling Cliff how lucky he is. Until Cliff can take stock of his life and move on, he does not feel lucky. Cliff takes a hobby to rediscover his drive.

This same idea is expressed in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s *Finding Flow*. Cliff no longer has a farm to return to, so he needs a hobby that will engage his mind and motivate him to decide which course to take next (Csikszentmihalyi 39). By choosing an eccentric hobby, Cliff frees his mind and gathers his resources to change his lifestyle and to focus on the future. While a hobby such as renaming states and birds seems frivolous at first glance, it engages Cliff to think beyond himself. The hobby challenges his mind. His new home is his grandfather’s old place that has suffered from a fire. Cliff plans to repair the old farm and live there, while continuing his hobby.

In much the same way as Harrison, Laura Munson, in her *This is Not the Story You Think It Is: The Season of Unlikely Happiness*, finds unconventional ways to manage a foundering marriage. Although Munson’s style is radically different from Harrison’s, she navigates a path with a newfound understanding of the natural beauty of

Montana. As a memoirist, her style is truthful to the point of pain. But the beauty of the natural terrain always surpasses the pain of the frailties of her marriage.

As Munson traverses the painful terrain of her foundering marriage, she expresses a determination to stay in it. When she realizes that she could lose her Montana home, she remembers why she came to Montana from the Midwest. As she introduces friends and family from other states, she observes, “A country club swimming pool or a suburban nature trail looks a little silly next to what Montana delivers without even trying, like the most well-trained, effortless, gorgeous, hostess” (Munson 65). Munson’s friends cannot miss the natural beauty of the Montana landscape, but they must make the trip to Montana to see it. Friends from the city will understand only a glimpse of what the locals have always understood about Montana: “Land that has been our teacher, like the wise Indian chiefs whose spirits still roam these woods (Munson 63). Although she travels through a painful experience in her marriage, Munson continues throughout her journey to keep one eye out for the natural beauty and grace that is Montana.

Munson’s work is part memoir and part Christian living guide. This kind of memoir appeals to readers who look for lessons along the way, much as Christine Byl’s *Dirt Work* recounts experiences working as a “trail dog.” Munson reflects on innovative strategies to move past the malaise of midlife, without dragging the reader into the depths of midlife anxieties.

The natural geography of Montana factors into Munson’s Christian principles. While Munson is self-conscious about her finishing school upbringing, she is quick to point out that Montana has given her not only a home, but a more tolerant approach

toward other Montana lifestyles. As she purchases fresh vegetables from a Hutterite farmer, she declares, “I am officially at home and present on this Hutterite bus full of vegetables” (Munson 296). This statement is an example of her tolerance toward her neighbors who are engaged in a different lifestyle than Munson’s. Additionally, Munson lives her principles when she fights against a local subdivision that will ultimately destroy a river and erode the soil (Munson 297).

While expressing the myriad ways that living in Montana has helped her become a better person, she also expresses her frustrations in her marriage. Munson intends to enlighten others to her plight so that others can be helped by her painful journey – the realization that her marriage is imperfect and that she bears shared responsibility, together with her spouse, in a less than successful relationship.

As Munson struggles to forgive three months of neglect from her husband, she takes a reasoned look at her own role in the weakened marriage and can more easily forgive her husband. Munson moves homeward toward her Christian roots in the discovery of her role in her troubled marriage and sets forth a plan to make the rest of her life succeed. At the end of her wrangle with her husband, she states: “Maybe you think I should require jewelry. Frankly, I’d rather put my faith in potatoes and sports channels any day. More and more, it seems inherently important to be a realist” (Munson 242). Munson places her faith in her home and family, planted in Montana, and at the end of the journey, she is proud of her stand. Her fanciful notions of marriage have been redefined to realism.

Just as Munson struggles with problems in her marriage and finds unconventional ways to manage complex difficulties, Dierdre McNamer’s *Rima in the*

*Weeds* utilizes innovative ways to find solutions to modern struggles. *Rima in the Weeds* is set against the backdrop of The Red Scare, or the encroachment of Communism, on the western plateau.

The novel's historical context, the late 1950s and early 1960s, was a time of anxiety in America. The US was at the height of the Cold War and was anxious about the encroachment of Communism. Because it was located on a high plateau, Great Falls and its surrounding areas were the first testing sites for nuclear missiles. During this time, Montanans did their part for the Cold War effort against Communism.

Madrid is a fictional town located on the Hi-line, the mountainous Northern Montana region that was built by the intersection of the railroad and US Highway 2, running from Glacier National Park to North Dakota (Bevis *All Our Stories* 95). *Rima's* narrative is expressed entirely on the Hi-line, and the high plateau, while beautiful, has an isolating effect on the characters of *Rima*. The provincial town of Madrid, Montana holds annual parades and rodeos that color the landscape, while cafes and restaurants in the area help the missiliers cope with the long winters on the lonely prairie. Madrid is the home of a singular missile site and ranchers but not much industry. During the 1960s, the alcohol flowed on the Hi-line. This alcohol consumption eased the trail for many a rodeo star and US serviceman.

The lives of a preteen and a young adult intertwine in this novel. Dorrie is the girlfriend of a US Serviceman and a single mother in the 1960s; Margaret is her babysitter. The fact that they are both stifled in a small town is their common bond. In small ways, Margaret helps Dorrie cope with the isolation on the prairie. Margaret has a

particular preteen insight into Dorrie's struggles. Margaret provides a strong, confident preteen woman, proud to make her home in the West.

Dorrie's problems mount as she struggles to raise a baby in a small town that is unwelcoming to single parents. Single motherhood was difficult in the 1960s because of the stigma attached to unwed mothers. To simplify the issue, Dorrie sometimes lets people in town think that she is divorced, which is a way Dorrie copes with her situation. Dorrie keeps her single parenthood as quiet as possible, keeping her own counsel.

When Dorrie takes a position as a waitress in a restaurant that is marketed to missiliers, she encounters problems of the modern world that are many times more complicated than single motherhood, such as drinking to excess and a stifling sense of boredom. There are tell-tale signs of the stress of single parenthood when she drinks with her friends and sometimes becomes rowdy. In a climatic end to the riotousness, Dorrie accidentally shoots and kills Margaret's beloved horse.

Months after the accident, Dorrie prepares to move with her baby back to Chicago to complete her education, and Margaret rides with her as far as Williston, North Dakota. Just as Cliff from *The English Major* chooses travel, Dorrie and Margaret journey on a road trip by train to sort out the thorny issues of accountability and reconciliation. The train that Dorrie and Margaret are traveling on crosses directly on the Hi-line, and they work out the messiness of reconciliation while observing the vast upper prairie that is their home. These two women, wise beyond their years, talk about the accident and the hurt that it has caused. The reader will be surprised at how

mature the sixth-grade Margaret is. She simply wants accountability for the accident and nothing more. The two young women become stronger friends on the road trip and learn lessons along the way. Yet, it is not the trip that is the remedy. It is the understanding and wisdom of Margaret, who forgives wild, drunken behavior that ends up with the death of her beloved horse.

The novel draws a generalized representation of the US missiliers. Some male officers were callous and hostile toward women. McNamer portrays a time in American history when men treated women as playthings and made no apologies for misbehavior. However, McNamer demonstrates cultural differences when young men from all over the United States are dropped in Montana without their social support or without the niceties of a large city. These young men are bored and pass the time with the locals, but they are outsiders who misunderstand the local stratification that defines the fabric of the West. While they are respected US military officers, some of the behavior is not conducive to the sustainability and work ethic of the West. Dorrie and the women of her day tolerate cavalier behavior toward women and do not speak out. There are few opportunities for women outside of waitressing and marriage within Madrid, so Dorrie bravely continues her education in Chicago (Egan 156), demonstrating once again, that Montana writers value educational attainment. Walker emphasizes educational attainment in the strong character of Ellen Webb and Clearman Blew's Corey Henry pursues a college education in midlife.

*Rima in the Weeds* is yet another coming-of-age novel. Ken Egan in *Hope and Dread in Montana Literature* states that when readers view Ellen Webb of *Winter Wheat* together with Dorrie and Margaret, they are reminded of how central coming-of-

age stories are to Montana literature. One reason for the popularity of coming-of-age stories is that they point to larger truths within a western society that is still young itself (Egan 154). Because the West was the last American territory settled, it is still young territory. Coming-of-age narratives parallel the youth of the West, and youthful spirits allegorize the struggles of the West.

As writers such as Dierdre McNamer and Mary Clearman Blew speak to a new West, without the authority of the mythologized cowboy, they speak to a woman's experience in the West and challenge male authority (Bevis *All Our Stories* 83). Novels of the West, and particularly of Montana, challenge traditional cowboy stories and place the intimacy and wisdom of women as one answer to myriad difficulties in the West (Egan 142). Although the cowboy ideal is not abandoned, it has evolved. Interpersonal relationships and family relationships are interwoven into the story of western toughness and heartiness. The inward strength of working with people who work the land becomes the new cowboy narrative.

The characters of *English Major* and *Rima* and the memoirist of *This Isn't the Story* are in the midst of their struggles at the climax of the respective stories. Much of the self-discoveries and the answers come closer to the end of their stories, as the characters come full circle with the recognition that their respective struggles have many layers and demonstrate the messiness of the modern world. They gradually come to resolutions and can appreciate the journey that they have taken on the way to their conclusions. All of these writers resolve their difficulties by thought-provoking, innovative methods. While issues of the land are not the center of the narratives, all of

these writers use Montana's rugged beauty to point the way out of the struggles of their characters.

### Montana Writers Continue American Ideals

Many modern Montana writers extend the foundational ideals that nineteenth-century writers have given to American. As Henry David Thoreau identifies trees in his writings about nature, Rick Bass narrates an account of the natural geography near his home in the Yaak Valley. As Walt Whitman illustrates the triumphs of every man, Ivan Doig extends this idea by helping readers understand the working people of Montana. Further, as Ralph Waldo Emerson challenges readers to rise above mediocrity and stand for themselves, Wallace Stegner exhorts westerners to take caution to preserve land as a lifestyle. While these American Renaissance writers built the foundation of American ideals, modern Montana writers have renewed these principles and placed them in a modern context.

Rick Bass' *The Wild Marsh: Four Seasons at Home in Montana* is a month-by-month account of the Yaak Valley, located at Montana's most Northwest point. Bass finds that he must reserve the few months of summer for camping and hiking, when the weather is warm. Bass knows, as does Thoreau, that nature is more available to those who walk. By walking, both men decide how to approach the wilderness. Bass questions the constant "whirlingness" of humans as "seeking to rest and finally fit between the cracks of all the other existing systems of grace" (Bass 202). In his essay "Walking," Thoreau examines man's experience with nature. Thoreau defines the meaning of the word "sauntering," based on its etymological roots, into *sans terre*, which means without a home. At first, it would seem that not having a home is undesirable, until he interprets sauntering as, "having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere" (Thoreau 59). Rick Bass, in *Wild Marsh*, considers man restless,

without a home, ceaselessly moving in hopes of finding direction. However, as he contemplates the physical beauty of the Yaak Valley, he defines the natural wilderness as home.

Thoreau is not a novice to nature and speaks with an earthy tone in “Walking.” He does not dress up nature with fanciful phrases, but rather suggests that man understand nature by getting down in it when he says, “When we should still be growing children, we are already little men. Give me a culture that imports much muck from the meadows, and deepens the soil, not that which trusts heating manures, and improved implements and modes of culture only” (Thoreau 84). He is imploring his readers to till the soil and get dirty. In similar fashion, Bass discusses how man can look to science and nature to better understand culture. He blends nature and society together when he asks a question about man and his struggles amid the backdrop of bountiful nature, “And what is the purpose of such war within us? Is something forged and fitted by such strugglings – something graceful, and worthy of the world – or lost, in each of us as individuals, and as communities, and as a culture?” (Bass 197). Bass’ plea is to balance natural resources with our needs and strengths and to protect the natural world. While Thoreau is advocating working the soil, Bass is speaking of the complication of conservation. Because the Yaak Valley is sparsely populated and is resplendent with natural wonders, the need to conserve is all the more urgent.

Thoreau and Bass traverse in a timetable of the natural world. They write their respective works through examining the seasons. Both these works blend science with their narration to give a mini-lesson on the growth of indigenous plants. Bass speaks of the larch tree:

The larch needles, expelled from the larch trees, cast themselves down onto the forest floor, returning nutrients to the soil, but perhaps even more important, in areas that might have been burned in the summer or fall, they provide a woven net that helps to stabilize the tender burned soil, minimizing the loss and damage from erosion (Bass 289).

Bass gives a botany lesson in how the larch tree protects itself and other plants in the ecosystem as winter approaches. Similarly, Thoreau teaches horticulture when he speaks of dwarf andromeda, a japonica shrub that is also known as lily-of-the-valley, that is indigenous to Massachusetts. He finds this wild plant while walking in the woods, “There are no richer parterres to my eyes than the dense beds of dwarf andromeda which cover these tender places on the earth’s surface” (Thoreau 77). A parterre is an ornamental garden, planned and cultivated. The dwarf andromeda is a wild shrub growing naturally in the forest. Thoreau is exhorting his reader to look to the naturally growing shrubs to comprehend nature. In this way, both Bass and Thoreau use nature to teach science. Using nature to teach science is a recurring theme in much of Montana literature, such as the fire lessons in Norman Maclean’s *Young Men and Fire*.

Both these works could bookend a study of Aldo Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac*. Aldo Leopold was a naturalist who studied the indigenous plants and animals of his home in Sauk County. Leopold was the first environmentalist to assert a holistic ethic regarding land, or land ethic. According to Leopold’s land ethic “that land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics” (Leopold x). Throughout the journal, Leopold

demonstrates land ethic by describing the plants and animals of Sauk County in their natural habitat. *Sauk County Almanac* is a model of environmental writing. *The Wild Marsh* and the essay “Walking” could accompany this journal when teaching high school and college students to write about their natural environment.

While Rick Bass extends the conversation that Thoreau began, Ivan Doig’s *Work Song* speaks of the working man to extend Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. Morrie Morris is again the principal character in *Work Song*. In this work, Morrie tells his own story, taking place in 1919, ten years after his one-room teacherage position in *Whistling Season*. Morris is now a library employee who helps copper miners in Butte, Montana. Because Morrie is outside of the mines, he can see miners and their struggles objectively. He gives noble purpose to the hard work of mining as he teaches first aid to miners’ children and helps the miners compose their fight song as they campaign against the company bosses.

Because Morris is outside the Anaconda Company, he can more acutely define the struggles of the miners. Morris is thrust in the middle of union disresolution as he reacquaints himself with his former pupil, Barbara, and her fiancé, Jared. Jared enlists the sympathy and help of Morris to compose the campaign song to rouse the participation of the mine workers. On Butte’s Miner’s Day, Morris celebrates with the rest of Butte. He speaks of the Miner’s Band:

Bearing down on us was what looked like an army of toy soldiers magnified to heroic size. Each marching man wore a uniform of emerald green with gold-thread embossing across the chest and down the sleeves,

gaudy uniforms and shiny musical instruments suggested an orchestra conscripted onto the stage of an operetta (Doig, *Work Song* 149).

This celebration of working men and their leisure pursuits continues the conversation that Whitman speaks of when he addresses the working men. Whitman admires the pursuits of the working men in “I Hear America Singing,” when he writes, “The day what belongs to the day – at night the party of young / fellows, robust, friendly, / Singing with open mouths their melodious songs” (Whitman 10). Both Whitman and Doig not only illustrate the employment of the working man, but also his leisure pursuits. Doig, like Whitman, respects the working man so much that he honors their leisure, which gives the working man the dignity he deserves.

Doig celebrates America’s and Montana’s diversity when he points out Butte’s immigrant communities:

Finntown, straggling below the colossal Neversweat. The Italians, it was stressed to me, occupied Meaderville, not to be confused with Centreville, where the Cornish congregated. Griff proudly singled out the smallish Welsh area of St. David’s, christened for its church, near our boardinghouse; beyond that, the Serbians had several blocks ... (Doig *Work Song* 23).

Doig demonstrates a vast knowledge of Butte and the surrounding areas as he stresses the immigrants and their local areas within Butte (Wyckoff 97). Doig extends contributions of immigrants that Whitman began in “Song of the Exposition,” in which Whitman invokes the muse to inspire him to sing the song of a diverse America.

Whitman acknowledges the contribution of immigrants when he states: “Bronze, lilac,

robin's-egg, marine and crimson, / Over whose golden roof shall flaunt, beneath thy banner Freedom, / The banners of the States and flags of every land, / A brood of lofty, fair, but lesser palaces shall cluster” (Whitman 167). When Whitman documents all the colors of the flags, he speaks of all immigrants from all countries. When he includes the “lesser palaces,” he incorporates a universal idea of the immigrant experience, even from the smaller and lesser-known countries.

Morris displays a shrewd understanding of the working man when he meets Jared, the union organizer. Morris blends his knowledge of the Roman Empire with the working world when he says of Jared:

The better I came to know and observe him, I could not help thinking of [Barbara's] beau as a paradoxical version of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, the Roman soldier who fought his battle and returned to his plow; Jared had been summoned from the battlefields to plow the ungiving ground of Butte's conflicts” (Doig, *Work Song* 104).

By referencing Cincinnatus, a man from a Patrician class in Ancient Rome who prefers simplicity (Wills 23), Doig places an ideal of leadership into the work of the union, which struggles for the fair employment of all workers. Doig extends the idea of working for noble reasons just as in “Song of the Exposition” in which Whitman writes, “Somewhere within their walls shall all that forwards perfect / human life be started, / Tried, taught, advanced, visibly exhibited” (Whitman 168). Just as Americans marvel at “Milan's spired cathedrals” (Whitman 167), the offspring of immigrants will one day appreciate the new industries and edifices of America. This celebration of America's accomplishments, and more specifically those of Montana's, is represented throughout

Montana literature. For example, Morrie Morris in *Whistling Season* displays pride in his one-room teacherage and the accomplishments of his students when the students play their harmonicas for the school inspector.

Just as Bass and Doig extend the conversation on American ideals, Wallace Stegner writes with Emerson's nature themes in mind. Stegner points to Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and "The American Scholar" when he writes about the West (Stegner and Etulain, 3). In his *The American West as Living Space*, he additionally responds to Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur's *Letter from an American Farmer*. Crevecoeur was a naturalized American citizen who wrote extensively of the role of a farmer in the eighteenth century. Stegner blends the ideas of Crevecoeur and Emerson in his series of lectures delivered at the Law School of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in October, 1986 (Stegner, *American West* v). Stegner discusses the vast space which engulfs the westerner when he states, "And it does contribute to individualism, if only because in that much emptiness people have the dignity of rareness and must do much of what they do without help, and because self-reliance becomes a social imperative, part of a code" (Stegner *American West* 80). Stegner sees vast western space as a reason for exhorting westerners to rely upon their own minds and wills; they must rely upon themselves because they do much of their work in solitude. When Emerson, in "Self-Reliance," states, "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of our own mind" (Emerson 725), he speaks figuratively of the lonely road of a person who refuses to accept the mediocrity of his peers. Similarly, the lonely road of the American westerner is self-reliance. Westerners depend upon their own resources for survival. They have utilitarian reasons for making solitude part of a code. Stegner extends

Emerson's ideals of a man who thinks for himself because westerners think and do for themselves as a lifestyle.

Stegner speaks of the hero, elevated by western space outdoors. If a westerner has heroic qualities, he learned them in a country with western geography:

Western writing turns out, not surprisingly, to be largely about things that happen out of doors. It often involves characters who show a family resemblance of energetic individualism, great physical competence, stoicism, determination, recklessness, endurance, toughness, rebelliousness, resistance to control. It has, that is, residual qualities of the heroic, as the country in which it takes place has residual qualities of the frontier (Stegner, *American West* 83).

Determination and stoicism are qualities that can be found and molded into heroic qualities, just as surely as the frontier is found in western terrain. Stegner's text extends Emerson's "Self-Reliance," when Emerson compares the simple deeds of "a common day's work" of housekeeping and farming with the work of power and estate. Emerson states: "When private men shall act with vast views, the lustre will be transferred from the actions of kings to those of gentlemen" (Emerson 731). Emerson's common day's work, when completed with self-reliance, is as heroic as that of kings. While Emerson's qualities of heroism are exemplified by power and estate, Stegner's are exemplified by the frontier. Emerson and Stegner speak for every man and project those qualities to a higher ideal of heroism. While Emerson's example is a private man who believes he is as worthy as a nobleman, Stegner's example is the frontiersman who relies upon himself.

The conclusion of “Variations on a Theme by Crèvecoeur,” is that westerners are unified by their common geography, “...these towns and cities still close to the earth, intimate and interdependent in their shared community, shared optimism, and shared memory” (Stegner, *American West*, 83). Just as the West is an interdependent community, Emerson writes in “The American Scholar,” that “man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all” (Emerson 694). Emerson advocates against a division of labor in which individuals are defined by function, as in an assembly line. While Emerson is critical of the social state where each person is limited to a job, Stegner examines the West where there is shared community and a common terrain in which man must be everything to himself. Stegner envisions a West in which there is little social stratification and men can be free of the limits of one job per individual. With determination and individualism, the westerner must have the knowledge and skills of all occupations.

“Variations on a Theme by Crèvecoeur,” juxtaposes the 1980s westerner with the frontiersman of the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries. Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur was an aristocrat who elevates farming to a noble pursuit (Branch, 166). Emerson and Stegner extend the celebration of farm work in “Self-Reliance” and in “Variations on a Theme by Crèvecoeur.” When Crèvecoeur speaks of America, he celebrates the country by saying, “...this is every person’s country; the variety of our soils, situations, climates, governments, and produce hath something which must please everybody” (Crèvecoeur 450), he is speaking of a country that is rich in natural resources and welcomes everyone. Crèvecoeur describes the small town where there is an abundance of prosperity and hospitality. This description is similar to the kind

Stegner writes about Missoula, Montana: “some settlement that has managed against difficulty to make itself into a place and is likely to remain one” (Stegner *American West*, 87). Stegner speaks of Missoula as a quintessential western that has managed against difficulty. Although Crevecoeur sees charm in rural living, the successful western town has thrived, despite weathering hard times.

Crevecoeur displays an undertone of distress as he states at the conclusion about France, his native country, “you cannot avoid mourning with me over that load of physical and moral evil with which we are all oppressed” (Crevecoeur 457). This distress is similar to Stegner’s stresses throughout *The American West as Living Space*, as he tempers his paean to the West with warnings about what will become of the West if it should become overcrowded and homogenized. Additionally, Crevecoeur writes in much the same style as Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” when he states “we are nothing but what we derive from the air we breathe, the climate we inhabit, the government we obey, the religion we profess and the nature of our employment” (Crevecoeur, 445). While Crevecoeur states that his home in America has agreed with his nature, Emerson speaks of the pride of every man, freed from the oppression of status and making his home in America. Stegner extends Crevecoeur’s and Emerson’s ideas by considering the West an interdependent, shared community.

Although Crevecoeur is enchanted with rural life, he speaks of country living with ambivalence. While he enjoys living in rural districts, he differs with his neighbors:

This surrounding hostility immediately puts the gun into  
their hands, they watch these animals, they kill some: and

thus by defending their property, they soon become professed hunters; this is progress; once hunters, farewell to the plow (Crevecoeur 448).

Crevecoeur believes that while it is noble to be a farmer, the pastoral bliss of the farm is interrupted by the savagery of killing of predatory animals. Emerson displays this disconnection when speaking of the farmer who thinks of himself as a commodity: “[The farmer] sees his bushel and his cart, and mothering beyond and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man of the Farm” (Emerson *American Scholar* 694).

Stegner extends the themes of Crevecoeur and Emerson when he compares the realities of the West with the popular-culture frontiersman: “There is a discrepancy between the real conditions of the West, which even among outlaws, enforced cooperation and group effort, and the folklore of the West, which celebrates the dissidence of dissent, the most outrageous independence” (Stegner *American West* 68). Stegner implores visitors to come to the real West, the West where people work hard, rather than to rely upon a cultural construct of the frontier. Crevecoeur observes the realities of the frontier, such as killing predatory animals, Emerson laments the farmer as a commodity, and Stegner delineates the realities of the West and disparages the West of legend and half-truth.

Thoreau, Leopold, Whitman, Emerson and Crevecoeur conclude about their frontier of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries that Americans could think for themselves, regardless of station, and could enjoy the abundance of nature by observance and stewardship. Montana writers such as Bass, Doig, and Stegner continue the conversation and extend the ideals of earlier Americans and place the ideals of The

New World into a modern context. These writers transcend region and write of the values that define the vision of modern America that were grounded in the writings of Thoreau, Leopold, Whitman, Emerson, and Crèvecoeur.

## Conclusion

Many Montana writers complete their narratives with the state's natural wilderness as a backdrop. They may use the landscape as a setting to open discussions about environmental issues. Or, they may use conflict within the natural terrain to describe more fully the enriching contours of the West. In almost all of the literature, the natural geography becomes a topic for discussion between characters on the western plateau and between the writer and the reader.

Much of the literature in the aforementioned chapters emulate the style of western writers such as Willa Cather and Wallace Stegner. Some of the literature evokes nostalgia for the West, reminiscent of Cather. Other literature is journalistic, discussing the importance of land conservation and continuing the conversation begun by Stegner. While writers such as Mildred Walker appeal to a middlebrow consciousness (*Homestead* 79), still other Montana writers, such as Ivan Doig, incorporate environmental concepts. Writers such as Doig do so while developing their own style, which, in Doig's case, is a blend of Montana history and personal remembrances of ranching as a child (*Wyckoff* 96).

One mischaracterization the student may conceive about Montana is a dominant cowboy culture. While the cowboy still exists in Montana, he has evolved. No longer a six-shooter in various scrapes with the law, he remains in the collective consciousness of Montanans an independent individualist, courageous and free-thinking. The new cowboy is evolved and is multi-dimensional, with many interests and ideas. Sometimes in Montana literature, readers may find a straight-talking woman

rancher who exemplifies many of the same qualities, free-thinking and individualist, as the men she has seen model “cowboy” behavior. Montana literature finesses a new cowboy, wiser and more courageous, and many cowboy models are women. They are part of a vibrant West, and they search for answers within familial and community relationships (Egan 154).

Another challenge in the complexities of living in Montana is the idea of the vast and open range, only suitable for grazing livestock and its opposite: the welcoming, green backyard for anyone to take. Montana writers strike a balance and unpack the many fallacies of each of these ideas. While undertaking myriad environmental issues, Montana writers dispel the fallacy of both the green backyard and the one-dimensional vast and open range. Montana writers who focus upon the environment use narrative to illuminate the many issues of the natural environment and help readers understand the impact of urban sprawl (Caldwell 32).

Narratives involving young adults finding their place in western society is a recurring theme in Montana literature. As the western frontier struggles to define itself as the younger counterpart to the Eastern US, a coming-of-age novel set in a “new” wilderness is perhaps more substantial to an audience reading about the West (Egan 154). Just as Moss Trawnley of *Hitch* must find his way in the Civilian Conservation Corp and continues his education in the woods, so does Christine Byl in her *Dirt Work, An Education in the Woods*. While Trawnley learns leadership lessons quickly, Byl employs her teaching skills to coach apprentices, while encouraging them to teach the next one. Byl is speaking from a remembered experience, while Trawnley is a fictional construct.

Mildred Walker's *Winter Wheat*, a novel set during World War II, incorporates some of the elements that Nebraska writer, Cather utilizes. In *My Antonia*, Cather uses straightforward language, enlightening imagery of the prairie West, together with its multicultural society of immigrants. Walker's protagonist, Ellen Webb struggles with the traditions of her Russian mother while linking her post-adolescent struggles with the wheat-planting seasons of the prairie. While she employs ordinary language, she uses it poetically to illustrate a mystique of the prairie, broadened by the rich landscape. This writing is redolent of Cather and her fiction in plain language that is poetic and writing about people whom she knows on the Nebraska prairie (Abate 100). Another coming-of-age novel in Montana literature is Dierdre McNamer's *Rima in the Weeds*. Set during the early 1960s during the Red Scare, McNamer utilizes Montana's Hi-line, the mountainous Northern Montana region that was built by the intersection of the railroad and US Highway 2, running from Glacier National Park to North Dakota (Bevis *All Our Stories* 95) to illustrate a narrative of forgiveness and acceptance.

Native American writers and writers who explore experiences between Native Americans and whites have a prominent place in Montana literature. From James Welch's novel, *Winter in the Blood* to William Yellow Robe's one-act play, *The Star Quilter*, the interaction between Native American and Europeans play a role in Montana's culture. And in Larry Watson's *Montana, 1948*, post-World War II prejudices become part of the everyday experience of small-town Montana on the North Dakota border. When a young adolescent, David, witnesses the treatment of the Indians, it changes the family dynamic of his family and how they continue to respond to issues of race between Europeans and Indians in the future.

Lastly, Montana literature is regional literature of America's Northwest. This regional literature continues the conversations begun by nineteenth century American writers regarding culture and the environment, and is distinctly American. Montana writers extend the arguments of Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Rick Bass' *The Wild Marsh* continues the conversation of Thoreau's essay, "Walking." Ivan Doig celebrates Montana workers in the same way that Whitman celebrates American workers in his *Leaves of Grass*. Additionally, Wallace Stegner has similar methods of conserving the land as Emerson.

Many of these works could have taken place in any region of the country. The struggles in the narratives are struggles of all Americans. However, Montana's rich landscape, with its rivers, prairies and mountains enhance the narratives and place these works in a western context that, blended with the struggles in the narratives, illustrate timeless lessons and facts about Montana and the West.

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