

the americanization of arcadia

images of hispanic and gold rush california

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During the 1840s and 1850s California's landscape and inhabitants enjoyed a literary reputation as the geography and people of an earthly paradise, or a Romantic wilderness, or a peaceful, pastoral Arcadia, where fantasies of wealth, ease, sensual release and personal independence could be realized. At the same time, Americans in California reestablished with rapidity all the institutions and values of the urban East, the very social forces from which the myth offered an escape. The popular images of Hispanic California and of gold camp life, as expressed in the travelogues and personal narratives that gave Americans their initial impressions of these societies, contribute to this apparent contradiction between coveted freedoms and accepted restrictions. Although the discovery of gold changed the idealized image of California from that of a beautiful bucolic province thinly populated by a dashing natural gentry to one of a land of free gold thronged by roistering natural democrats, the expression of desires for liberation from worries and restraints remained constant. Yet the camps quickly came to be lauded as the proof of an inborn American penchant for self-government, order and progress. Where before had prevailed an archaic "Spanish tyranny" or chaos, miners were said to have almost instinctively organized popular tribunals and modern representative governments. It would be easy to resolve this apparent paradox by claiming that the romance of California had no influence on the actual immigrants there, but that I believe to be demonstrably false. A careful reading of the American writings on California establishes that these books and their authors did not espouse an escape from Eastern institutions and mores but, on the contrary, championed their expansion. The

almost mythical California Americans read about was created in part by the needs of an ideology of Anglo-Saxon destiny in the West.

The popular vision of California, both before and after the American conquest, derived in part from a number of personal narratives, composed during or shortly after a sojourn on the Pacific Coast and recounting the experiences and impressions of their authors. These writers were a homogeneous group—all male but one—of educated, middle class, self-consciously literary individuals. Most had commenced professional careers before coming West: Edwin Bryant and Bayard Taylor as journalists, Walter Colton and Daniel M. Woods as ministers, Lansford Hastings and Thomas Jefferson Farnham as attorneys. Richard Henry Dana had interrupted his legal training to sail as a common seaman on a ship engaged in the hide trade, and Alfred Robinson was an onshore agent in the same enterprise. Alonzo Delano was a banker, Hinton Rowan Helper a clerk, and Louise Clappe, after her divorce, a schoolteacher. Charles Wilkes, John C. Fremont and Joseph Warren Revere all trained as military officers. Finally, most of these writers were proudly Anglo-Saxon in background, and even those who were not joined in praise of the accomplishments of Anglo-American civilization.¹

The California books expressed values and aspirations shared by many Americans but thought to be especially relevant to the West. Part of their aim was to extol the nation's scenery, in response to a fashionable enthusiasm for "Nature" in all its various guises. Another goal was to satisfy the public's appetite for adventures in faraway lands with exotic or exciting societies. But within the format of an established, even hackneyed literary type—the recorded excursion in search of inspiring vistas and curious peoples—the works restated and reinforced the common commitment to progress, specifically to America's Manifest Destiny: that Anglo-Americans and their governmental institutions would, by Providential decree, spread across the entire continent and perhaps beyond it. Nationalism pervaded the books even when they focused primarily on "Nature" in itself; they described an American or potentially American landscape, superior to that of Europe, and the writers consciously treated natural beauty as symbolic of national virtue. More importantly, they constantly weighed the terrain and peoples they encountered against the demands of the Anglo-Saxon future. Just as such Romantic intellectuals as Parkman and Prescott praised the natural and the sublime but stressed social destinies through an inexorably progressive view of history, the California writers assumed that anything or anyone—forest, gold camp, vacquero, forty-niner—standing in the way of American civilization would have to be transformed or superseded. These celebrations of California, therefore, harbored attitudes potentially destructive of the very way of life, on the ranchos or in the diggings, which the authors and their audience seemed to find so alluring.²

The American accounts of both Hispanic and gold rush California depicted the land and its people by means of the three modes of some-

times contradictory imagery to which I have alluded: paradisiacal, wilderness and, most importantly, pastoral. Charles Sanford, Roderick Nash and Leo Marx, respectively, have demonstrated the importance of these three modes in nineteenth century prose, although rarely with specific reference to California. These scholars have also shown the fragility, in the face of technological advances, of America's commitment to the natural world the conventional images were meant to evoke. Descriptions cast in these modes tended to identify California and its peoples with a dreamlike, mythical past, a past that was irrelevant to the present reality of American occupation and even more so to the region's idealized future. The descriptive conventions of the travelogue would have to be transmuted into those of the prophecy—or at least the prospectus. An analysis of the ways in which writers on California used the images of a heaven on earth, a sublime wilderness and especially an Arcadia of herds and herdsmen, while exhausting neither the content of the narratives nor the possible approaches to their explication, can illustrate the way in which the impulse toward civilization, by limiting the simultaneous impulse toward unspoiled nature and the freedom of natural men, shaped America's perception of California.³

As far back as Drake's *The World Encompassed*, "Nova Albion" had appeared as a cross between Eden and El Dorado, where an innocently naked and loving people lived close to a bountiful nature, and where "there was no part of earth to be taken up, wherein there was not some special likelihood of gold or silver." Consciously or unconsciously perpetuating an ancient European belief in a Blessed Land to the west, nineteenth century travelogue writers sprinkled their descriptions of old California with paradisiacal references. It was a "land of perpetual spring," where time and the passage of the seasons had little meaning. The atmosphere was pure and filled with perfume; the climate mild but bracing. The inhabitants enjoyed long lives, and "most infirmities were unknown." Edwin Bryant recounted, jocularly, the story of a man who could not die in California even in answer to the fervent wish of his heirs, and seriously maintained that dead flesh did not rot there. Nature was endlessly beneficent to man; wild animals, especially harmless and edible creatures such as rabbits, ducks, quail and deer, crowded the valleys and ponds. Domestic animals provided abundance without effort, as stock "require[d] neither feeding nor housing, and were always sufficiently fattened." Flowers bloomed everywhere, and healing herbs cured infections and snakebite. California was truly God's Country; the land itself worshipped, offering "incense from the boundless altar of nature."⁴

Stock Romantic wilderness scenery appeared less prominently in the early travel books. "Alone with nature," the writers experienced a country of sharp contrasts, which they described in well-worn phrases. "Wild and picturesque" vistas included "steep and rugged cones," majestic mountains, deep ravines, soaring pines and dashing streams, while sudden storms and enraged grizzlies added suggestions of awesome peril. At

times the use of these and similar elements gives the impression of having been designed to conform to the preconceived requirements of a genre, rather than of being an authentic reaction to California.

Pastoral imagery lay at the heart of the books on California, and significantly, they depicted grazing lands easily and profitably convertible to a superior version of the American agricultural East. In part, this was purely a matter of circumstance; most of the writers spent little time away from the coastal pueblos and ranchos. The overlanders traversed the mountains as rapidly as possible to reach the beautiful valleys they expected, and the seamen knew the interior mostly by hearsay. The coastal region, the ranches and the potential farmland, were, in any case, the most fascinating parts of California for the writers and their audience. Primitive agriculture interested most Americans more than primitive wilderness; pastoral imagery, while in part congruent with the contemporary California reality, was essentially a projection of American hopes for the West.

In his report of his exploration of the Pacific coast, Commander Wilkes admitted that he had arrived in California anticipating "a fine climate, and a rich and productive soil" but he found barrenness along with fruitfulness, and seasonal changes from cold rains to drought. Pastoral California had an uncertain climate to overcome; Fremont even suggested that irrigation would be necessary in the Sacramento Valley. Men must work to achieve there, and must live with discomfort from fleas, dirt and wind. The returns, however, would be great, for California potentially was "not only not surpassed . . . but not equaled as an agricultural country." It yielded wheat and small grains "much greater per acre of land than in any part of the United States." Herds of fine cattle and flocks of sheep took second place in the narratives to the enthusiasm over fertility and prodigious vegetative productions. The writers took for granted that cultivating the soil—improving the land—was culturally more advanced, more American than merely living from the natural increase of herds and flocks. Reflecting this preference, most of the writers, including Wilkes, slipped at times into the rhetoric of land promotion developed on earlier agricultural frontiers; independent American farmers would create utopia by working with the rich arable soil and the perfect constant climate.

This emphasis on the pastoral mode and, more specifically, its usual conversion into practical agricultural terms, indicates the basic interests of the writers and their American audience. As Leo Marx has pointed out, the pastoral is a "middle landscape," lying between the savagery of the wilderness and the decadence of a too civilized society. In mid-nineteenth-century American writing the pastoral represented less a balance point than a tilt toward civilization; the artifacts of an expanding technology were included in scenes of tranquil rural life. Americans believed in an inevitable, scientific, industrial, urban form of progress, and had convinced themselves that it shared the moral values usually attrib-

uted to agriculture. They did not envision conflict between the technological and the pastoral, but just as comparatively advanced tillage would replace comparatively primitive grazing, cities and machines would eventually dominate farmlands.⁵

The use of the pastoral mode, therefore, enabled the reporters on Hispanic California to look into the future and see an urban society in the midst of abundant fields. The American writers projected railroads, mills, universities and churches onto the pastoral landscape. Both Bryant and Dana regarded the interior of California primarily as a fertile hinterland which would allow San Francisco and Monterey to aspire to world prominence. Lansford Hastings foresaw "a Boston, a New York . . . growing up in a day" when "those vast forests shall have disappeared before the hardy pioneer . . . [and] those fertile valleys . . . [shall] groan under the immense weight of their abundant products," and "all the vastly numerous and rich resources . . . will be fully and advantageously developed."

The American writers tied the peoples of Hispanic California fast to their land by showing them as the true inhabitants of a paradise, or a wilderness, or a pastoral landscape. There were hints that the Californians lived as the blessed. They had no material worries, and no interest in the passage of time. The Noble Savage theme produced fearless, handsome Indians completely at ease with fate and nature. Californio men of all classes could be fitted into the wilderness as naturally brave hunters, horsemen and warriors. Bold, exotic and compliant Spanish and Indian women and their violently jealous, vengeful men personified Romantic notions of sexuality outside civilized restraints. But given the central concerns of the traveler-writers, the controlling imagery for the Californios was naturally pastoral. They were the people, the masters and the servants, of the ranchos, who had found a full, sufficient, peaceful life. Stressing their "true contentment," Walter Colton, the American most favorably disposed toward them, maintained that "no people . . . enjoy life so thoroughly." In direct contradiction to the images of the wilderness mode, the heads of the households were hospitable, generous, open and honorable; their wives were pious, chaste and devoted to their large families. While not wealthy, Californios relished what they possessed and shared it freely, giving uninhibited fandangoes and making extended trips to visit relatives. Henry Clark has recently pointed out that this picture of rancheros drawn before the conquest contained the core of the later nostalgic glorification of Spanish California. But these favorable responses to an alien culture were commonly outweighed by negative stereotypes.

Most American observers had deeply ambivalent feelings about the Californios and their culture, and while praising them as exemplars of the values of spontaneity and simplicity that intellectuals were expected to respect, bitterly condemned them for lacking other virtues that Americans respected more. Leonard Pitt, Cecil Robinson and Kevin

Starr, among others, have demonstrated that anti-Californio attitudes were the products of cultural chauvinism, racism, sexual anxieties and greed, and of the uglier aspects of Manifest Destiny in general. These judgmental preconceptions can, in part, be traced back to the old anti-Spanish Black Legend, which grew out of similar antipathies to Catholicism, autocracy and miscegenation. In a larger context, the writings on California were part of, and shared both literary conventions and ambiguity of attitude with, the literature on the contacts of English and Americans with new peoples, especially those darker and "primitive," all over the world. Noble savages and pastoral peoples had appeared in descriptions of Africa and the South Seas as well as in those of America. While their simple, peaceful societies reproved the overly civilized, they were cursed with irredeemable failings. The men were indolent and cruel, and the women, while exotically beautiful, were wanton, and all were filthy, heathenish and servile. Above all, by accident of race, they were the antithesis of progress, and therefore, regardless of their good qualities, were doomed.⁶

Since the Californios and the California Indians shared the shortcomings of "primitive" peoples in Africa or Oceania, the same explanations could account for the failings of all these groups; the descriptions of California's inhabitants were designed to demonstrate that they lacked the virtues necessary for social development and, therefore, survival in a modern world. Just as Herman Melville's writings on the South Seas implied that a too exuberantly fruitful land or a too perfect climate could debilitate a people and make them helplessly dependent, Dana called laziness the "California Disease"; Californios had little need for industriousness in a land where nature did so much. So, the American writers believed, the paradisiac landscape itself helped make both Indians and Californios improvident, ignorant and addicted to gambling. Many English and American intellectuals held any religion other than Protestantism to be inherently decadent; the reporters on California accused the padres of authoritarianism and licentiousness, claimed that their oppression had further degraded the Indians and argued that their religious practices glorified a dead past. Americans insisted that an unregulated aristocracy was fatal to any country and that social democracy was necessary for progress; the rulers of California were arrogant, incompetent, venal, cruel, and concerned solely with maintaining their own superior position. Several Anglo-American writers hinted that too much freedom, especially sexual license, might reduce the individual to savagery; in California sex could lead to violence, or miscegenation, or at best, a gradual sinking into the somnolent life of the Californios.⁷

Most important, however, was the relation of race to civilization. The Anglo-Saxon was the harbinger of progress, and by necessity all others had to yield land and even lives to him. American racism placed Indians and mestizos beneath contempt, and the Spanish Californios were only "by courtesy called white." The more anti-Californio of the American

writers carefully drew parallels between Hispano and Indian life, and tended to deny the European racial component in the Californios. Lansford Hastings in this way linked their fate to that of the “savages,” while Thomas Jefferson Farnham drew the predictable conclusion: these “somewhat humanized” Californians were “an imbecile, pusillanimous race of men and unfit to control the destinies of [this] beautiful country.” Nothing could prevent California from becoming a great center of wealth and population—“Nothing but the character of the people,” claimed Dana, explaining why Monterey remained a village. Americans need only resist the temptations of California, reject its society, and remain faithful to their own characteristic values and institutions, and a glorious future would be theirs.

The most rabidly racist writers, Hastings and Farnham, hoped to duplicate the Texas revolution in California and accordingly created propaganda intended to depict the Californios as both personally despicable and militarily helpless. Colton recorded the necessary result of these attitudes, the contempt for Californio rights expressed by the complacent attitude of post-conquest emigrants that they had “taken the country” and now could help themselves to the private property of the Californians. But all the observers, even Colton who noted how some newcomers seemed to have “left their good principles” on the east side of the Rockies, especially when dealing with the indigenous population, assumed that the development of California’s projected urban civilization depended on occupation by Anglo-Americans. Revere typically counted on “that Anglo-Saxon race, which transplanted to the free soil of America has acquired new force, new impulses, new enterprise,” to ensure progress. Hastings’ culminating vision was pure Manifest Destiny; ignorance, superstition and despotism—that is, the faults of Mexican Catholic institutions—would flee forever “before the march of civilization and the blazing light of civil and religious liberty . . . genuine republicanism and unsophisticated democracy.” The conquest completed the first step toward realizing the American Romantic ideal of historical progress, the process which the early descriptions of California and Californians were meant to further.

The excitement accompanying Marshall’s discovery of gold pushed the early accounts of pastoral California to the center of national attention. Since they were among the only available books on the far west, works such as Bryant’s *What I Saw in California* and Fremont’s *Exploring Expeditions* were issued in new editions, the latter with addenda on the gold fields. Colton’s journal was first published to take advantage of the new market. The books of the writer-travelers in Hispanic California, therefore, with all their extravagances, became a prime source of information for the gold seeker, who often was already intellectually and emotionally prepared to accept both their values and their nearly fabulous descriptions.

Bucolic and wilderness imagery had predominated in the depictions

of the physical characteristics of pre-gold rush California with one important exception—the frequent reports of mineral wealth. References to traces of iron and coal and to the Almaden mercury mines dotted the journals, but reports of gold and silver overshadowed mention of baser minerals. Some of the stories were true, for example Alfred Robinson's tale of a local gold rush in the San Fernando Valley, while others were false or inconsequential. At any rate, the first images of California included gold, and the pastoral landscape included simple mines, with their hint of future industry.

The gold excitement in the East profoundly altered America's idea of California. A sleepy Arcadia with hints of gold became an El Dorado with pleasant pastoral attributes. The newspaper stories of gold were as unrestrained as the earlier descriptions of climate and landscape, and at times used the same literary conventions. California gold lay "in the shadows of the deep ravines, and glow[ed] on the summits of the mountains, which [had] lifted for ages their golden coronets to heaven." Opportunistic publishers hastened gold rush guides onto the market, reprinting in them excerpts from Bryant, Colton, Fremont and other travel accounts of Spanish California. The guides followed a fairly standard format: first an introduction in pyrotechnic prose, then a cursory review of the necessary preparations, costs, and routes to the gold fields. The guidebooks emphasized the conjunction of gold and Manifest Destiny. While "staid" citizens of the old world would find the tales coming from California hard to accept, Americans who had "participated in the well nigh miraculous growth and progress of the other portions of our country" could believe, and act. California gold would promote the "inevitable destiny" of the Anglo-Saxon race and the spread of America's "purified political institutions," and would people the region with "the richest and most powerful class in the world." To the prospective gold seekers, the guides offered promises of wealth and romantic adventure within the context of Anglo-America's past accomplishments. Gold, therefore, had both expanded the audience of the travelogue writers and fulfilled their predictions that Americans in California would produce prodigies.

Wealth attracted most men who risked the journey, but their journals and letters offer evidence that Anglo-Saxonism and hopes for adventure were inseparable from their visions of gold. Few expected to remain in California; their experience there would be an interlude leading to a richer life back home. California was to supply capital for use elsewhere. Still, among the gold hunters, "there was scarcely one who did not feel himself more or less a hero." Notoriously overequipped, overarmed, and overexcited, they constituted a danger to themselves and to anything that crossed their trail. Some began the journey in uniform, in paramilitary gold companies whose elaborate organizations combined aspects of corporate enterprise, elective democracy and conquest. Although they neatly embodied the dreams of Manifest Destiny and financial opportunity that fueled the gold rush, few of these outfits long survived the trip. For

some men, the sickness, boredom and drudgery of the trip were a series of shocks to their preconceptions. The final jolt, the realities of life in the diggings, inspired bitter complaints in letters and books, and charges of fraud and self-interest were leveled at the portrayers of Romantic California. Despite these accusations and the counter-images which disgruntled miners posted home, naive expectations of simply sitting down and raking in the gold and then spending the rest of the stay in the mines in celebration died hard. The hopes and preconceptions of gold seekers were similar whether they came in 1849 or 1851, and the warnings often failed to convince. "We thought as so many were getting rich they only wrote such letters to keep others away."⁸

The camps that sprang up wherever men found gold inspired a literature that preserved the imagery and values of the writings on Spanish California. Many forty-niners undertook to record their impressions of mining life; the best known resulting works, those of Bayard Taylor, Louise Clappe, Alonzo Delano, Daniel Woods, and Hinton Rowan Helper, retained even the literary conventions of the Romantic travelogues. The new writers on California differed from the old in one important respect; society more than scenery fascinated them. Landscape took a distinctly secondary place behind the search for gold in their works; despite the earlier publicists' expectations the American rush to California had not been agricultural. More importantly, mining life placed Anglo-Saxons in a social environment that tested racial preconceptions, and gold camp journalists endlessly recorded the results.

It was probably impossible to write on California with any literary pretensions without using the stock Romantic wilderness figures. The "awful magnificence" of mountain vistas loomed over the camps; pine trees "looked into heaven"; maddened, flooding rivers and mysterious crags all overshadowed man and his feeble works. Gold rush memoirists usually disdained the native inhabitants, but occasionally exhibited a Noble Savage or a gallant Californio. They rehearsed instances in which men suddenly freed from civilized restraints fell prey to an excessive Romantic individualism, throwing themselves blindly into all kinds of new experiences with a recklessness that sometimes twisted youthful exuberance into violence and death. Much of the effort of the California writers, however, went self-consciously into contradicting the spectacular reputation the camps had in the East. Delano and Woods set out specifically to refute stories that had led men from their homes with impossibly high expectations, and Louise Clappe, "Dame Shirley," sometimes appalled by the violence she had to relate, choked down her reticence and reported lynchings, drunken brawls and mining failures. Helper damned everything about the state. While they countered the stereotype of an easy, carefree life in the mines with descriptions of loneliness, unattended sickness, and crushing labor their works leave no doubt that these writers responded to the novelty and even more, the freedom and high hopes of camp life. Even the New England bluestocking Dame Shirley confessed

to a fascination with mining life and society, and acknowledged that it would be difficult to readjust to the forms and restrictions of middle-class gentility.

This striving for realism expressed itself in the most highly conventionalized American mode, the pastoral, or more accurately, the “middle landscape” that balanced the rural with technology. Obviously the camps were not agricultural, but as Earl Pomeroy has pointed out, the descriptions of the miners include ideals of opportunity and egalitarianism almost automatically associated by Americans with the independent, self-sufficient, land owning frontier farmer. Men quickly realized that striking it rich was only a tantalizing possibility, a hope that agitated a too-optimistic society. Drawing in a lottery, where most received blanks, became the most common analogy for mining. Taylor, Delano and Woods emphasized the sufficiency that every honest, hard working man could find in the mines; pastoral replaced paradisiacal conventions on abundance in camp literature. Accounts of gold so plentiful it made the mountains glow, of riches won by little effort, as in James G. Baldwin’s *The Flush Times of California*, were clearly intended as humorous tall tales.⁹ In the pastoral version of camp life, the availability of enough gold to produce contentment, together with the shared values of Anglo-American miners, helped create an atmosphere of order and cooperation, an aura of peace, trust and good will. Miners divided up claims according to rules they had previously agreed upon, and united to overcome obstacles to mining operations or to supply necessary entertainment. Tools and gold could be left in unlocked cabins. Honesty, good fellowship and generosity characterized mining society.

Americans often identified the frontier of “free land” with equality and democracy; mining camps claimed to possess these political virtues to a degree unknown in the East. According to this assertion, everyone participated in building and guaranteeing the order of the towns—everyone, at least, who shared the inherent “Anglo-Saxon genius” for self-government. Labor was capital in the placers, and willingness to work was more valuable than family and educational background. In a society where everyone worked, and there was enough to work for, there was no need for a social or political elite, and no chance for either to develop. Appearances were deceiving in California; since all had to work, all had to wear the standard red flannels and boots, and all were, at first, equally distant from barbers and baths. The small traders who served the miners were indistinguishable from them, and only gamblers and preachers dressed apart. Miners gloried in their dirt and beards, and a man who was too careful in his vestments might find himself forcibly democratized. The “honest miner,” unaffected, diligent, ready to share his last meal, the man with the “rough exterior but true heart within,” was the ideal citizen of a camp set in a “middle landscape.”

The absence of wives and families prevented any real congruence between camp society and a pastoral agricultural model. It was not that

miners did not value domesticity; Delano argued that the exigencies of the gold rush, the cost, and the uncertainties of travel, forced men to leave their women and children behind. Probably the most common set piece in the literary gold rush recounted men lining up to view with awe a recently arrived wife in a previously all male camp. Mentions of children brought effusions of sentimentality. Louise Clappe saw miners as family men without families, who worked for “laughing-lipped children, calm-browed wives, or saintly mothers, gathering around the household hearth” back home. According to the literature of the gold camps, the idyllic mining society survived for only one or two years. The explanations advanced for the brevity of the halcyon season further illuminate the values of the writers, and suggest that the dangers of camp life seemed to them similar to those their predecessors had found in Californio ranch life. Modern scholarship, while discounting the existence of any pastoral period, postulates that rapid industrialization and capital organization of mining totally altered gold rush conditions. At the time, however, the most common theory hinged on the advent of foreign miners, who supposedly shared neither American beliefs nor American talents. Violence and moral chaos arrived with the foreign born. This argument, rooted in the exaggerated Anglo-Saxonism that earlier writers had used to justify conquest, was part of an intellectual climate that permitted an almost automatic mistrust of “outsiders.” Dame Shirley observed the Anglo miners of neighboring Rich Bar passing resolutions stating that no foreigner could work there and then backing this decision with force, while at her home, Indian Bar, vigilantes rallied to drive out every “Spaniard” after a Sonoran had stabbed a naturalized Irishman in a drunken affray. On the other hand, in the most extreme rendering of the pastoral image Bayard Taylor argued that the cosmopolitan nature of gold rush society, with men of all nations working side by side, advanced fellowship and brotherhood, so that racial and cultural good will flourished in the diggings. Although Taylor’s view of ethnic relations was far too rosy, he did point out that there had always been foreigners in the mines and that their presence could not account for the ending of the peaceful days. He and those who agreed with him tended to regard the excesses of riff-raff from all countries, including America, as responsible for the coming of a new, violent time in the camps.

Middle-class observers found it hard to admit American participation in the morally destructive activities of the miners. Although most individual miners expected their own California experiences to be transient, they did not recognize any possibility that California itself might be only temporarily American. Bayard Taylor’s subtitle was *Adventures in the Path of Empire*. The importance of the pastoral motif in early gold rush writing rested in its implication that traditional American values already predominated in the camps. Later storytellers like Bret Harte were to romanticize the boisterous and the disreputable, the gambler and the prostitute with heart of gold. Earlier writers, like Dame

Shirley, Woods, and Delano, apologized for, feared, and attempted to explain away the evidence of social laxity they had to report, and exulted in the expulsion of black-legs and the closing of brothels.

It was, however, impossible for even the enthusiasts of Anglo-Saxonism to place all the blame for the decline of peace and growth of violence on the foreign born. Although Louise Clappe believed that most of the foreigners were disreputable, there were some whom she admired as gentlemen. She attempted to be fair in her accounts of fighting between the Americans and Latins, and since the native-born were usually the aggressors, she had to face reconciling American violence with her image of a co-operative egalitarian community. Her solution, accepted by Taylor and Delano, argued that there existed two societies in the mines. The first consisted of the worthy and the respectable, who wished to build a stable community as rapidly and completely as possible. The other drew its membership from the drunken and destructive of all nationalities, who took advantage of the mines' permissiveness. Turning nearly savage, they threatened and harassed the law-abiding among the native-born and foreign-born alike.

The recognition of the dangers of disorder forced Americans to abandon two essential components of the pastoral/agrarian view of community: personal liberty and equality. The writers had to admit that too much freedom from the civilized yoke, too much contact with nature and natural men, could be totally destructive. Taylor said no man in California could "expect to retain his old nature unchanged," and even though the idealized view of camp life attempted to place the mines at the peculiarly American midpoint between savagery and civilization there was too much temptation and too little contact with an established society for the equilibrium to be secure. The fact that some Anglo-Saxons reverted to barbarism in this environment led to another painful conclusion; the writers' accounts of equality in the camps demonstrate that it, and their acceptance of it, was more apparent than real. Underneath the dirt and beards, all writers were delighted to find men of "genuine refinement and taste," born leaders who leavened the lump of the whole and who were expected to maintain order and civility in the diggings.

Gold rush writing repeatedly marked the hazards to a cultured, middle-class identity attendant on life in the mines. Dame Shirley carefully listed the shortcomings of Indian Bar—no books, no innocent entertainments, no families, in short, none of the amenities of an established bourgeois life—as preconditions for the carouse that inspired her classic account of miners on a spree. Woods and Helper enumerated in detail the temptations of California, which had "the best bad things . . . obtainable in America." Many of these degrading influences seemed to be a legacy from Hispanic California. Bull fighting, horse racing, gambling, and the "senoritas," all were proofs that California was not yet sufficiently Americanized. The figures in Delano's sketches were painfully conscious that their roughening appearance reflected a loss in status. Men who had

once worn white shirts, short hair and trimmed beards were now anonymous wanderers. "Stranger, we were white men onst," laments a character in Delano's play, "A Live Woman in the Mines," suggesting how complete this loss of identity could be. In another scene from the play, Delano's miners beg the heroine, the only middle-class woman in the camp, to force them to return to their old ways, to "make us wear a shirt of a Sunday."

Bayard Taylor advanced the obvious solution to the problem of order, but in doing so had to abandon the egalitarian ideal he had developed for the camps. Taylor celebrated the high intellectual and class levels of the best emigrants, even more than a putative Anglo-American instinct for self-government. They, and the automatic deference with which they were treated, were responsible for the peace and quiet of the camps, and when anarchy or crime threatened they would exert their abilities and their influence to stifle it. Their Eastern, hierarchical, middle-class mores would ultimately shape mining society. The other writers agreed, in the main, with Taylor concerning the good traits and good offices of a better class of miners, who had "caught the fashionable epidemic" and come to California. Henry Nash Smith has shown that midcentury American writers were unable to transcend the limits of genteel literature to accept the frontiersman as a book's hero; the gold rush writers clearly share this bias. The figure of "Pike," usually rendered as ignorant, prejudiced, dirty and disorderly, expressed their contempt. "Pike," roughly-reared, culturally deprived, would have to be controlled by his betters if order were to reign in the mining camps.

To guarantee this order, a more structured, middle-class society would be necessary. Obviously, then, the camps would need families. Few Americans could have been more effusive over the civilizing influence of women than the gold rush writers, and the lack of families was commonly described as the root cause of all the moral confusion in the camps. Clergyman Daniel Woods accentuated the additional need for churches and organized religion. Banker Alonzo Delano welcomed the influence of pastors but also called for industry and a stable economy; his ideal was an Eastern factory village. Although Helper thought California society beyond redemption, the others insisted that it could be saved by rapidly approximating the middle-class, progress-oriented, urban civilization of the East and all its basic institutions. A freedom that threatened license, a democracy that verged upon anarchy could not be tolerated. Like Hispanic California, the gold camps leaned too close to savagery. For Delano, Taylor and Woods in particular, as for earlier writers, the solution was the fulfillment of the region's racial and industrial destiny. The discovery of wealth in California was important, but not so momentous as "the planting of the Anglo-Saxon upon the shores of the Pacific."¹⁰

Nothing brought the writings on the gold camps to popular attention in the way that Marshall's discovery had promoted the earlier books. Taylor's reputation and the abiding interest in California probably en-

sured him and Woods a readership, while Helper's petulance helped make his book a failure. Alonzo Delano and Louise Clappe, almost unknown in the East, alone remained in California. There, their contemporaries lauded their work, and they probably received more attention than the others. In California in the mid-fifties, when their publications appeared, the gold rush was beginning to fade into myth, and the surviving camps had turned to commerce and industrial mining. Delano's and Clappe's works implied that social and economic conditions in a rapidly tamed California were just, right and necessary—were, in fact, the natural end of the great adventure, the gold rush itself. They fed nostalgia for the past, but also implicitly argued that the present and the future were superior, and perhaps they helped sustain the prejudices inherent in the idea of Anglo-Saxon progress. As American California was Hispanic California transformed by a higher civilization, the future, with industrial, technological mining, a structured society and civilized values, would be the gold rush improved, Americanized.

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footnotes

1. The works under consideration here include: Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California* (New York, [1848] 1849); Louise A. K. Clappe, *The Shirley Letters* (Santa Barbara, Calif., [1851-2] 1970); Walter Colton, *The Land of Gold or Three Years in California* (New York, [1850] 1860); Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years Before the Mast* (New York, [1840] 1964); Irving McKee, ed., *Alonzo Delano's California Correspondence* (Sacramento, 1952); Delano, *Life on the Plains and Among the Diggings* (Auburn, N.Y., 1854); Delano, "A Live Woman in the Mines" (New York, n.d.); Delano, *Pen Knife Sketches or Chips Off the Old Block* (Sacramento, 1853); Thomas J. Farnham, *Life, Adventures, and Travel in California* (New York, 1849); John C. Fremont, *The Exploring Expeditions to the Rocky Mountains, Oregon and California* (Buffalo, 1849); Lansford Hastings, *The Emigrant's Guide to Oregon and California* (Princeton, [1845] 1932); Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Land of Gold: Reality vs. Fiction* (Baltimore, 1855); Joseph Warren Revere, *A Tour of Duty in California* (Oakland, [1849] 1947); Alfred Robinson, *Life in California* (Oakland, [1846] 1947); Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado or Adventures in the Path of Empire*, 2 vols. (Glorieta, N.M., [1850] 1967); Charles Wilkes, *Columbia River to the Sacramento* (Oakland, [1845] 1958); Daniel M. Woods, *Sixteen Months at the Gold Diggings* (New York, 1852).

2. Hans Huth, *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes* (Berkeley, 1957), 49, 84; Arthur Ekirch, Jr., *The Idea of Progress in America, 1815-1860* (New York, 1944), 84, 252; Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (New York, 1966), 24-5, 47; David Levin, *History as Romantic Art* (Stanford, Calif., 1959), 27, 74-6, 81. I am aware that some American Romantics rejected progress as an ideal; the dominant strain accepted it.

3. Charles Sanford, *The Quest for Paradise* (Urbana, Ill., 1961); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, 1967); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the American Pastoral Ideal* (New York, 1964).

4. Richard Hakluyt, ed., *The Principal Navigations . . .* 8, Sir Francis Drake, *The World Encompassed*, [1628] (London, 1910), 66, 118, 121, 131; all other quotations, unless otherwise cited, come from the California books under consideration. For complete references, please contact the author.

5. Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 3-5, 65, 192, 220, 226; Ekirch, *Idea of Progress*, 73, 106, 117, 118, 267; Levin, *History as Romantic Art*, 27, 43, 49; Nash, *Wilderness*, 40-2, 77.

6. Henry Clark, "Their Pride, Their Manners, Their Voices: Sources of the Traditional Portrait of Early Californians," *California Historical Quarterly*, LIII (Spring, 1974), 71, 75; Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios* (Berkeley, 1966), 14-20 and *passim*; Cecil Robinson, *With the Ears of Strangers: The Mexican in American Literature* (Tucson, 1963); vii, 15-16, and *passim*; Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream* (New York, 1973), 17; Charles

Gibson, ed., *The Black Legend: Anti-Spanish Attitudes in the Old World and New* (New York, 1971), 4, 18-19, 21-2.

7. Phillip Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison, 1964), 143, 219, 30, 48, 59-62, 223, 364; Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America* (Baltimore, 1953), 49, 53, 86, 200; Charles R. Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas* (New York, 1939), 86, 98, 157, 174; Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black* (Chapel Hill, 1968), 24-26, 32-3, 42-3.

8. George S. Foster, *The Gold Regions of California* (New York, 1848), 10-11, 14-17, 72-79; *Prentice Mulford's Story* (Oakland, [1889] 1953), 2; David M. Potter, ed., *Trail to California* (New Haven, 1945), 27, 58-60.

9. Earl Pomeroy, *The Pacific Slope* (New York, 1966), 44-5.

10. This desire for respectability has been examined in detail in terms of religion, education, and politics by Starr and by Louis Wright, *Culture on the Moving Frontier* (Bloomington, Ind., 1955), 123-167.