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THE CALIFORNIA DREAM DENIED:

NARRATIVE STRATEGY AND THE CALIFORNIA LABOR DILEMMA

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

English Composition

---

by

Joseph Notarangelo

September 2001

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September 2001

Approved by:

Renée Pigeon, Chair, English　　　　8/8/01 Date

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ABSTRACT

A significant amount of California literature represents labor strife in the state as a central theme in the work. For instance, the California labor novel repeatedly revisits owner-laborer relations from the exploited laborer's perspective, whether it be Steinbeck's Joads, Barrio's Ramiro Sanchez, Boyle's Rincóns, or others.

Often, the migrants' disillusionment with their California experiences stems from how the reality of their current predicaments strays from their perception of imaginary California as a utopia, a garden, or a city of gold. A curious aspect of this theme of the California labor novel is that, although over seventy years of labor strife in California is depicted, rather than snuffing out this dream through the portrayal of the real hardships endured by its pilgrims, it instead plays an important role in the California Dream's continued manifestation.

This thesis explores the relationship between differing interpretations of the California Dream and the narrative strategies through while they are expressed in three California labor novels during three different decades of California literature: John Steinbeck's novel,

The Grapes of Wrath, uses a documentary-style narrative to juxtapose the reality that migrant labor workers experienced with the potential of California under reform. Raymond Barrio's The Plum Plum Pickers manipulates the documentary style used by Steinbeck to appropriate the California Dream for Mexican and Mexican American farm laborers. Most recently, T.C. Boyle's The Tortilla Curtain seems to depict the absurdity of the California dream in a postmodern society but also seems to reaffirm aspects of its existence.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In his book Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era, Kevin Starr describes the development of California's cultural identity as a dialectical process by which "the California of fact and the California of imagination shape and reshape each other" (vii). Starr argues in part that the abundance (both real and perceived) of California's natural resources, the efforts of ambitious speculators, and the response of a nation hungry to realize its myriad versions of the American Dream combined in the late 1800s to initiate a mythical construction of California as a promised land in which an individual "freed from the back-breaking ordeal of the New England and Midwestern farm . . . had time and means for the finer things" while living in a world "of beauty and memory and sunny afternoons" (46, 62). Starr's argument is a provocative one: it implies that the cultural identity of what California "is" and "will become" is informed substantially—and legitimately—upon the fictions it inspires.

Starr's hypothesis, in and of itself, may seem rather

pedestrian. Arguably, every region is defined to some extent by the overall human perception of that particular area. But California seems to be one of those rare examples of a region that has been mythologized by different cultures as a potential utopia, whether by Spaniards and Mexicans as El Dorado or by U.S. citizens as America's Eden. In addition, this mythologizing process seems not to be limited to distinct historical or religious doctrines, such as the Near East, but to integrate these classic agents with economic and political philosophies as well. When analyzed from these perspectives, Starr's binary becomes quite complex, for even if one were to assume that there is a real California and a mythical California, the numerous influences upon both leave the distinction between the two nearly impossible to delineate.

The works of authors who have written about California reflect the tension between the real and the imagined as described by Starr. The focus of this thesis will be three California labor novels from different periods of California's history and how they portray the socioeconomic oppression experienced by the manual laborers who came to the region with dreams of improving their social situation. Common sense might dictate that a literary work focusing on

the oppression of California's manual laborers would necessarily expose the California Dream as somehow fraudulent. Certainly, the protagonists of John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath (1939), Raymond Barrio's The Plum Plum Pickers (1969), and T.C. Boyle's The Tortilla Curtain (1995) more often find themselves desperately battling to survive rather than frolicking among California's riches. However, closer analysis of these examples of the California labor novel strongly supports Starr's hypothesis. While a primary function of these works is undoubtedly to depict the suffering of the California manual laborer in a world where immense beauty and wealth is discernible yet unattainable, the theme Starr refers to also stubbornly persists: the authors struggle to reconcile the dramatic tension between debunking and perpetuating the California Dream, and instead of attempting to resolve this paradox, the authors themselves conclude their works with this paradox in flux. Subsequently, these texts are included into California's cultural lexicon, and therefore incorporated into both sides of Starr's binary, further complicating the cultural perceptions of what is real and what is not.

All three novels represent the idea of California not

as a running cruel joke played on the migrant worker but as a struggle to reconcile the perception of the region as idyllic with the realities experienced by those who migrate into it. Curiously, despite these characters' own experiences providing significant evidence to the contrary, the authors represent many characters (and their narrators) as continuing to express hope for the ideal of a utopian California in which their dreams can be achieved. The difficulties for these characters seem not to revolve around surviving the realization that their dreams are unattainable, for they are rarely portrayed as such. Rather, their difficulties are usually attributed to their need to overcome certain exploitative forces that stand between them and their dreams.

In addition, because these novels imagine California from three different periods and perspectives, they contain a certain sociological element: not only do they represent interpretations of the California Dream during the 1930s, 1960s, and 1990s, but they also record its metamorphic internalization into the American psyche. What is originally depicted as a dream whose validity is expressly questioned by characters in The Grapes of Wrath is subsequently portrayed as a reality ripe for appropriation

by a marginalized subculture in The Plum Plum Pickers and later represented as merely assets to be hoarded in The Tortilla Curtain. In Steinbeck's work, a basic humanism is expressed: although several characters question the validity of the California Dream, the narrator notes that "the people . . . go on" (383), implying that to some extent the process of change for the better is inevitable. He implies that, despite the efforts of those who exploit the migrants to further their own agendas, the migrants continue to pursue those dreams. Steinbeck leaves the reader with the idea that to some extent the migrants' dreams will eventually be realized.

Barrio's work, on the other hand, is a retelling of Steinbeck's novel from a Mexican American perspective, and although Steinbeck's dream of a Californian utopia is occasionally satirized, it is not debunked. Rather, it is redefined. Although the "stoop laborer" is once again portrayed as pushed to the ends of endurance, Barrio, like Steinbeck, allows room for hope. Barrio predicts that the nascent self-awareness of the Chicano culture emerging from this particular era will eventually repopulate California, and through the propagation of its own offspring shift the balance of power more in their favor (229).

Finally, despite Boyle's attempt to distance the reader's sympathies from both the upper-middle-class Anglo and the exploited undocumented Mexican and despite his extensive juxtaposing of "real" California with "imagined" California for satirical effect, neither the characters nor the narrator of The Tortilla Curtain question the existence of a dream in and of itself. However, in a distinct shift from the earlier novels, not even the privileged class is portrayed as having achieved their California Dreams.

Though the wealthy in The Tortilla Curtain own things that have previously represented the outward manifestation of the dream in Steinbeck's and Barrio's works (nice homes with new appliances and plenty of food), they remain discontented, for they now need more. *Everyone* is portrayed as struggling to actualize their own versions of utopia, and the yardstick of their success is no longer the right to self-determination; it is now simply the accumulation of goods. The binary of landowners who "own" the dream versus the laborers who want the right to pursue their own dreams found in the earlier works is replaced by individualistic obsession for protecting the portion of the dream they have already purchased. The essence of the dream itself is diminished; certain characters are left with only the

physical manifestations of what was once considered ideal. However, even Boyle seems ultimately unwilling (or unable?) to debunk California's potential, as is evidenced by the novel's own humanistic conclusion: an image of Cándido holding out his hand to save Delany from the flood (355).

It is in this fashion that seventy years of literature depicting labor strife in California, rather than snuffing out this dream through the portrayal of the real hardships endured by its pilgrims, instead plays an important role in the California Dream's continued manifestation. As Starr's theory suggests, these books record contemporary struggles of the dream's reconciliation with a form of reality and help inform its future expression.

Before I begin more detailed discussion of these novels, however, it may be useful to define what I mean by the term "California Dream." A number of critics responding to The Grapes of Wrath have argued that the California Dream is an amalgam of several distinct cultural myths. According to David Cassuto, the first is the American Dream, which is the belief that America offers an individual the opportunity to improve upon his or her station in life through diligent hard work and thrift, regardless of initial social standing. The second, Cassuto

argues, is the ideal of the Jeffersonian yeoman farmer, in which "land and settler could merge into a single corporate entity and recover, through diligence, husbandry, and mettle, the lost paradise of Eden" (4), which, he goes on to state, is the incorporation of the concepts of landownership and social responsibility into the American Dream. Third is the perception that the West provides a "superabundance of resources" (4) from which these industrious and diligent settlers could construct their idyll. In particular, Cassuto argues that this confluence of beliefs is what initiates the Joads' move west from Oklahoma to California.

This perception of the California Dream is useful when applied to Steinbeck's work but proves somewhat limited when discussing the two later novels. For instance, Barrio occasionally satirizes and ultimately rejects these precepts of the California Dream in The Plum Plum Pickers. He reimagines the California myth from a Mexican Californian perspective: it is not an untapped resource ripe for development as the Anglo promised land, but a land promised to the Mexican by his forefathers, and one that will eventually be rightfully returned to its original settlers. The protagonists in The Tortilla Curtain are not

agrarian laborers but urban laborers, and undocumented aliens as well, thereby rendering the agrarian aspects of the definition and the Americanness of the dream no longer appropriate. Therefore, although Cassuto's description of the genesis of the California Dream as applied in The Grapes of Wrath with its emphasis on American and agricultural belief systems is interesting, it may be less germane when analyzing the later works. For the purposes of this paper, I apply a more inclusive definition of the California Dream to the California labor novel: it is a phenomenon in which characters maintain a faith that California offers the best available environment for them to strive toward a better socioeconomic future, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary gleaned from their current situations.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CALIFORNIA DREAM DELAYED: STEINBECK'S DOCUMENTARY NARRATIVE AND THE REALITY-IMAGINATION CONTINUUM

The California labor novel's genesis can be traced to works earlier than Steinbeck's _The Grapes of Wrath_, such as Josiah Royce's _The Feud at Oakfield Creek_ (1887) and Frank Norris's _The Octopus_ (1901). However, since Steinbeck's novel has been accorded seminal-work status simply by the huge amount of scholarship produced on it and since it explores the tensions between immigrants' perceptions of their imagined California and the reality they experience once arriving in the state, it is an excellent starting point for this discussion.

The encroachment of the California of the imagination onto the California of fact is a central theme in Steinbeck's _Grapes of Wrath_. That members of the Joad family are captivated by the image of California as a cornucopia cannot be denied. The most fanciful conceptualization may be Grampa Joad's, who pictures a place

> where I can pick me an orange when I want it. Or grapes. There's a thing I ain't never had enough of. Gonna get me a whole big bunch a grapes off a bush, or whatever, an' I'm gonna squash 'em on my face an' let 'em run offen my chin. . . . I'm gonna pick me a wash tub full of grapes, an' I'm gonna set in 'em, an' scrooge aroun', and let the juice run down my pants. (107, 119)

Grampa Joad's perception of California is founded on an ideal completely divorced from his actual experience. Having never been to California (indeed, he never gets there) and currently subsisting in a situation of extreme poverty and severe drought, he imagines a utopia that is constructed solely from hearsay—and maybe a single flyer offering work in the fields.

Grampa Joad's dream is just one example of how California dreams in The Grapes of Wrath are expressed within a continuum of imagination and reality. What gives the notion of reality in Steinbeck's work its sense of credibility, however, is that the concept is expressed in a documentary-style narrative. Starr states in Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California that The Grapes of Wrath may be interpreted as an example of "documentary

fiction, an effective, even great, statement" (256). Superficially, the novel certainly is not an example of what is commonly assumed to be documentary. First, it is a fictional account. Therefore, the family being documented, the Joads, are not historical entities per se but a construction of the author's imagination. Nor can the novel be considered objective—it reads as a strong rhetorical treatise calling for labor reform. However, William Stott, in his book Documentary Expression and Thirties America, argues that the traditional ideas regarding documentary style are misapplied to documentary tracts during this era. He states,

> How does a document convey spirit? How does it reveal the secret roots of experience? . . . Through sensibility. We understand a historical document intellectually, but we understand a human document emotionally. In the second kind of document, as in documentary and the thirties' documentary movement as a whole, feeling comes first. (8)

Stott notes that when beginning The Grapes of Wrath, "Steinbeck actually started out to write not a novel but a 'documentary book,' text with pictures" (122). He adds,

> The radicals and the New Deal each used the

> documentary approach. For both, documentary was the means of gathering the stubbornly particular facts most liable to be trusted then and of communicating these facts in the way then most likely to persuade. (122)

Therefore, the fictional nature and the strong rhetorical position with which the book is framed were specific features of the documentary during this era. And the documentary nature of the novel can be discussed at an even deeper level than these content-related characteristics; it can be clearly discerned within Steinbeck's narrative framework itself.

One striking component of this narrative strategy is how Steinbeck intersperses chapters of social commentary and generalizations about the American migratory experience with the more traditional fictional narrative style of the Joad family experience. Occasionally, intercalary chapters are allegorical, such as the turtle narrative (introduced in chapter 3). At other times, they represent technology as a dehumanizing agent for capitalism (chapter 5), relate dialogue from unnamed characters (chapter 9), or personify the West, replete with emotional responses toward the activities of the migrant laborers (chapter 14). These

interruptions to the Joad narrative occur in roughly alternating chapters, implying that they are to be interpreted through the reader's discovery of certain relationships between them and the more linear development of the Joad plight.

The effect of the novel's structure—narrative interrupted by social commentary—has been widely debated. Several critics, such as Rideout and LeRoy, argue that the intercalary chapters lead the reader to view the text from a Marxist perspective. Others, such as Chametzky, note that the Marxist thrust of the intercalary chapters is somewhat mitigated by the ultimate ending of the novel.

What these differing opinions have in common is that the intercalary chapters are interpreted not by the juxtaposition of their viewpoints with the Joad story but through their synthesis into the meaning of the novel as a whole, much to the same purpose as a voice-over narrative in a documentary film. A standard framework for documentary filmmaking is the implementation of the voice-over narrative to contextualize the subject; the subject is used as evidence to forward the general rhetorical thrust of the narrator's argument. Steinbeck uses events in the Joad experience to support the more generalized discussions of

humanism and corporate responsibility prevalent in the intercalary chapters. One such example is how the narrative describes the tractors leveling the tenement farms in chapter 5:

> [The tractors are] moving like insects, having the incredible strength of insects. . . . The man sitting in the iron seat did not look like a man; gloved, goggled, rubber dust mask over nose and mouth, he was part of the monster, a robot in the seat. (45)

Later in the same chapter, the following exchange between an unnamed tractor driver and an also unnamed farmer takes place: "You filled in the well this morning." "I know. Had to keep the line straight. But I'm going through the dooryard after dinner" (49). Exchanges such as these have a rather odd function in the novel. Because this exchange between unnamed speakers occurs in an intercalary chapter, there is a legitimate question as to whether the exchange really took place. Is it an actual exchange between two people, or is offered by the narrator as representative of dialogue that may have taken place? Because of this ambiguity, this dialogue does not act as direct documentary support for the narrator's argument. In essence, when compared with the real experiences of the

Joad family, it may be considered fictional in terms of the novel's documentary structure because it is not attributed to a real, nonfictional source or incorporated into the narrative.

In the next chapter, Steinbeck provides "real" evidence of technology's destructive effect on the Joad situation:

> Young Tom stood on the hill and looked down on the Joad place. The small unpainted house was mashed at one corner, and it had been pushed off its foundations so that it slumped at an angle, its blind front windows pointing at a spot of sky well above the horizon. . . . "Jesus!" [Tom] said at last. "Hell musta popped here." (51)

With this interplay between a fictional narrator and documentary-style commentary, Steinbeck creates a hierarchy of reality: the intercalary chapters expressing the idea that technological advances often have inhumane consequences are the documentary's argument; the intercalary narrator's "imagined" dialogue is an example of the anguish migrant farmers may have experienced during this period; and subsequently, this argument is documented by the "real" image of the Joads' specific experience of

having their family home plowed under in the name of progress. The intermediary level of fictional dialogue gives an added sense of realism to the Joad narrative, lending it additional weight as legitimate support for the rhetorical position of the narrator.

This strategy is implemented at the opening of the novel; the tractor example is not an isolated occurrence but is representative of the narrative framework Steinbeck uses throughout. The author applies the same documentary-style technique to broadly sketch the reasons why the Joads must leave their homestead in the first place (drought, debt, homelessness), juxtaposing these burdens with the promise of California (water, jobs, land). Steinbeck's implementation of a documentary narrative structure to relate the fictional experiences of migrant labor families is evidence of how the distinction between a "real" California and an "imagined" California in this novel is, at best, blurred.

There is no logical link between the Joads' desperate situation in Oklahoma and their belief in a brighter future in California. Their dreams are not based upon their educational abilities or wealth or on guarantees of future employment; they are based on faith. Rather than depicting

this faith as absurd, Steinbeck describes it as something of great value, something beautiful, and at times, something ethereal. Sarah Wilson, on her deathbed in Needles, California, speaks to the importance of the other migrants continuing to strive to achieve their dream:

> Sairy lay on the mattress, her eyes wide and bright. [Casy] stood and looked down at her, his large head bent and the stringy muscles of his neck tight along the sides. And he took off his hat and held it in his hand.
>
> She said, "Did my man tell ya we couldn't go on?"
>
> "That's what he said."
>
> Her low, beautiful voice went on. "I wanted to go. I knowed I wouldn' live to the other side, but he'd be acrost anyways. (280)

That Sarah chooses to tell this to the group's preacher emphasizes the value of the collective goal as more important than individual survival and speaks to the subject in terms of religious metaphor. This demonstrates the importance the narrator places on the power of faith and of dreams, particularly when dreams are essentially the only remaining source of the group's ability to endure.

The Joads' decision to leave Oklahoma is evidence that they maintain a certain hope for their future; their destitute situation necessitates that they imagine their future through something more than reason alone. They know they have to leave Oklahoma and have the wherewithal to do so, but they have no evidence that their destination will provide a better future. They can only imagine the ways the new land will provide for them. It is on this simple faith that their California Dream is built, and it is through the narrative structure that the conflict between their reality and their imagination of this dream is negotiated.

Steinbeck's narrative proffers an environment in constant flux between various levels of reality and imagination, and the characters' individual dreams of California and their modifications to these dreams when faced with the realities of their struggles represent the concept of the California Dream as existing more on an imaginative-realistic continuum than in a binary opposition. At one extreme of the continuum is Grampa's perspective: California is more than a region that will give his family a fighting chance to survive. It is a cornucopia, a land of near-infinite resources. This dream is never compared with personal experience: he never gets

to "scrooge aroun'" in grapes for he dies long before the family even arrives in the state.

The Joad family members who do make it to California respond differently when the reality of their experience does not mesh with their individual dreams. Pa, for instance, seems to reject reality altogether in deference to his imagined utopia. As the family crosses the Arizona border and reaches Needles, the following exchange takes place:

> "We come through them," Pa said in wonder.
>
> Uncle John ducked his head under the water. "Well, we're here. This here's California, an' she don't look so prosperous."
>
> "Got the desert yet," said Tom. "An I hear she's a son-of-a-bitch. . . . Never seen such tough mountains. This here's a murder country. . . . I seen pitchers of a country flat an' green, an' with little houses like Ma says, white. Ma got her heart set on a white house. Get to thinkin' they ain't no such country. I seen pitchers like that."
>
> Pa said, "Wait till we get to California. You'll see nice country then."

> "Jesus Christ, Pa! This here *is* California." (262-63)

Pa again reiterates his rejection of reality in preference for the imagined ideal in a discussion with other members of the family as they view the Central Valley for the first time:

> Pa sighed, "I never knowed they was anything like her." The peach trees and the walnut groves, and the dark green patches of oranges. And red roofs among the trees, and barns—rich barns. . . .
>
> Ruthie and Winfield scrambled down from the car, and then they stood, silent and awestruck, embarrassed before the great valley. . . .
>
> Ruthie whispered, "It's California." (292-93)

Pa's comments and Ruthie's and Winfield's responses imply that they are looking upon California for the first time, despite the fact that they have been in the state for nearly a week.

Grampa's, Pa's, and the children's comments about the state emphasize the Edenic aspects of the California Dream. Pa seems particularly stubborn in relinquishing his dream—to the point that he rejects evidence that may refute its existence. However, although the characters'

interpretations of the California Dream have been discussed in terms of Cassuto's amalgam of the myths of the American Dream, the yeoman farmer, and the West's infinite resources, the myths are not sufficient to entirely define the Joads' dreams. Individual family members imagine California independently, and their creations seem based as much on their value systems as on these overarching mythologies. There is a third factor involved in the construction and modification of these dreams: the myths, the realities, and the icons that represent their manifestation.

One such variant is Rose of Sharon's vision. Despite the straits in which the family finds itself in Oklahoma, Rose of Sharon makes a similar leap of faith as Pa and Grampa do. When discussing her plans for her husband and child in the new land, she too imagines a world based not on evidence but on hope—but to entirely different ends:

> Ma, we wanna live in town. . . . I'm gonna have a 'lectric iron, an' the baby'll have all new stuff. Connie says all new stuff—white an'— Well, you see in the catalogue all the stuff they got for a baby. Maybe right at first while Connie's studyin' at home it won't be so easy, but—well, when the baby comes, maybe

> he'll be all done studyin' an' we'll have a place, little bit of a place. We don't want nothin' fancy, but we want it nice for the baby. (212)

Rose of Sharon's myth of California is unlike Grampa's, Pa's, or the children's, whose dreams emphasize the agrarian aspects of the idyll. Instead, her invention revolves around a concept of suburban utopia and includes some of the basic creature comforts that advances in technology provide. Rose of Sharon proffers a more consumer-oriented view of how California will provide for her—she wants all new "stuff"—and her utopia centers on her perception of the needs of the child, a representation of the future of the Joad clan.

Similar to the ideals discussed earlier, however, Rose of Sharon's comments imply that she does not concern herself with how she will attain the components of her rather modest dream but only that these features will be made available to her. Notably, Rose of Sharon does not mention that she will work (an aspect of Cassuto's American Dream theory), nor does she mention what Connie will work at; she leaps from the dream of his education to the promise of a home of their own. So, the iconic representation of the dream is not really the sum of a

specific ratio between myth versus reality; the conceptualization of the dream is a factor in and of itself. Grampa Joad's triumph of myth over reality results in a grape-juice bath. Rose of Sharon's emphasis on myth over reality results in household appliances. Each character's dream is shaped by their preconceived notion of its manifestation.

While Rose of Sharon's perspective may be partially explained by the traditional gender roles of 1930s America, it is notable that Steinbeck even calls these roles into question in his work: although great care is taken to describe the patriarchal rituals at family meetings, it is also obvious that Ma Joad plays a critical leadership role in the family. In addition, during the family's preparation for its exodus, Casy salts down the pork (portrayed as normally a woman's responsibility). In this context, that Rose of Sharon chooses to construct a dream based on traditional gender roles, despite specific evidence within her own family that these roles may be necessarily blurring for the family's immediate survival, is significant. It may be simply that her ideal prioritizes California's "infinite resources" and ignores the American Dream and yeoman farmer aspects completely. Yet from her perspective, the concept

of the California Dream continues to play a critical role: it hold the promise for fulfillment of their imagined utopias, whether Edenic or otherwise.

These examples of blind faith in California's promise are questioned by other members of the family, specifically by those who do temper their hopes with the evidence of the reality that surrounds them. Tom and Uncle John are obviously skeptical about California's promise as they discuss their new environment with Pa, and Ma's comments elaborate upon these men's concerns. Ma admits to Tom how the new land "seems too nice, kinda. . . . I'm scared of stuff so nice. . . . I'm scared somepin ain't so nice about it," and she ultimately concludes that she "suddenly seemed to know it was all a dream" (117, 213).

However, when taken as a whole, the novel implies that these dreams are difficult to realize, not because they are inherently flawed but because they cannot be achieved within the current socioeconomic situation. From certain characters' perspectives, California is not culpable for the inability of the migrant workers to achieve their myriad utopias. Ma says *something* isn't nice about it, not that nothing is nice about it. Steinbeck uses the documentary style of his narrative to argue not that

California is incapable of providing for these masses of migrants but that the free-market system, large corporate concerns, and technology stand between the migrants and their realization of the California Dream.

One of the fellow migrants the Joads meet up with on their trek explains it this way:

> She's a nice country. But she was stole a long time ago. . . . You never seen such purty country—all orchards an' grapes, purtiest country you ever seen. An' you'll pass lan' flat an' fine with water thirty feet down, and that lan's layin' fallow. But you can't have none of that lan'. That's a Lan' and Cattle Company. An' if they don't want ta work her, she ain't gonna git worked. You go in there an' plant you a little corn, an' you'll go to jail! (264)

These are words from an individual who already has been to California, who had a dream of his own, went to California to fulfill it, and had it denied. But instead of perceiving California "herself" as physically unable to make his dream manifest, he sees corporate interests as the barrier between him and his beloved California. The reader can infer from his tone that California existed as the garden myth before corporate interests took it over. In addition,

the speaker implies that California was once owned by the common farm laborer and that corporate interests stand in the way of the farmworkers' destiny. (Barrio has plenty to say about this perception in The Plum Plum Pickers.) California is personified, idealized; the speaker sounds more like a forlorn lover whose bride has been stolen than an irrational idealist who awakens to a nightmarish reality. Or the text implies that this man has awakened to a nightmarish reality not because the California Dream does not exist but because it has been appropriated by others. In this way Steinbeck constructs a rhetorical environment within the Joad story itself that affirms, instead of denies, the potential for California to become a utopia, despite the nearly unendurable hardships his characters face in their failed attempts to achieve it.

As mentioned above, these individual expressions of the California Dream by the migrant families act as documentary evidence for the intercalary argument in The Grapes of Wrath. They are contextualized by the intercalary chapter narrator who argues for the need of social reform in the state. As such, the unnamed migrant's perception of California as "stolen" can be seen as "real-life" documentation for a running argument that has been

developed and expanded in several preceding intercalary chapters. In chapter 14, California and its neighboring states are described in animate fashion: "The Western States, nervous as horses before a thunder storm" (192), which foreshadows the migrant's personification of the region. The narrator proceeds to discuss how they are animated:

> The great owners, striking at the immediate thing, the widening government, the growing labor unity; striking at new taxes, at *plans*; not knowing that these things are results, not causes. . . . And this you can know—fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept, for this one quality is the foundation of Manself, and this one quality is man, distinctive in the universe. (192-93; emphasis added)

The narrator proposes that the owners are attempting to destroy the effects of a concept (the apparati of labor reform), not the concept itself. And cause for change does not necessarily stem from a specific concept but from the general ability to conceive—or to dream. The documentary narrative goes on to relate an "imaginary," or representative, discussion between migrants much in the

same fashion as was related in the tractor episode described above:

> The two men squat on their hams and the women and children listen. Here is the node. . . . For here "I lost my land" is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate—"We lost *our* land." . . . Only a little multiplication now, and this land, this tractor are ours. . . . This is the thing to bomb. This is the beginning—from "I" to "we." (194)

Again, the documentary nature of the narrative establishes a fictional hierarchy within which an argument is proposed, augmented with plausible discourse, and finally supported by specific evidence of the Joads' experience. Even as the migrant recounts his tale of woe regarding his experiences in California, he distinctly places the blame for his misfortune directly upon the socioeconomic climate, not on a misguided delusion that California simply cannot fulfill his dream. And if the narrator is correct in saying that the exploitative forces in California focus on repressing the effects—and not the causes—for unrest, the implication is that these attempts must ultimately fail. The narrator's comments, interpreted through the documentary filters established by the author, seem to suggest that the state

need not become an idyll for an elite few but for the common masses—provided that significant social reform is implemented. The migrant worker's California Dream, along with those of the Joads and hundreds of thousands of other migrant laborers, has not been destroyed, merely delayed.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CALIFORNIA DREAM APPROPRIATED:

BARRIO'S THE PLUM PLUM PICKERS

In "Arts of the Contact Zone," Mary Louise Pratt describes an authoethnographic text as one in which "people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (524). Pratt describes this phenomenon as transculturation, "a process whereby members of a subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (526). Barrio's The Plum Plum Pickers is a prime example of this phenomenon: it appropriates a number of features from Steinbeck's presentation of the California labor novel and retells the nature of the migrant labor experience from the Mexican and Mexican American perspective.

By imitating, parodying, satirizing, and reimagining the model established by Steinbeck, Barrio's work is a good example of the transculturation process. Some may take issue with the fact that Barrio is not truly describing his own culture, for he is a Spanish American from New Jersey, and therefore autoethnography is technically an inaccurate

term. However, it is obvious that the narrator of The Plum Plum Pickers is writing from the Mexican and Mexican American perspective, and a focus on the narrative itself will clearly show its autoethnographic properties.

Set in the Santa Clara Valley, the story line of The Plum Plum Pickers revolves around the daily lives and experiences of pickers living in the Western Grande Compound and depicts how the activities of specific field bosses and landowners affect the quality and conditions of the pickers' lives. Like Steinbeck's work, there is a distinct separation between owner and laborer; unlike Steinbeck's work, the owners are not faceless corporations with a single amoral agenda but individuals named Turner and Schroeder who have different philosophies regarding the treatment of the "stoop laborer." Like the earlier novel, the plight and experiences of the pickers are carefully delineated. However, these representations differ from those in The Grapes of Wrath in that they do not depict a strictly proletarian perspective—there are economic, class, and cultural distinctions between the pickers themselves.

Notably, The Plum Plum Pickers does not revolve around the migratory experience itself, nor does it follow the progress (or regress) of a particular family; rather, it

depicts several families after their migration to the state. Because a significant part of the novel is not only these characters' struggles for survival but also their struggle to comprehend the nature of their relationship with the California Dream, the narrative style emphasizes this change in emphasis: rather than depicting dialogue and framing that dialogue as documentary support for an argument, as in Steinbeck's novel, the narration of The Plum Plum Pickers often moves from monologue to stream of consciousness and back again.

Barrio gives himself significant poetic license in constructing a narrative that has been described as employing an "'alliterative and reiterative style'" (Yvette Miller qtd. in LaPresto 186), emphasizing the thematic and symbolic aspects of imagery as opposed to recounting "real" events, as Steinbeck does, to support his vision of the migrant experience. This style can be directly related to the omniscient perspective of the narrative. That this license is extended even to the repetition of the word "plum" in the title of the work emphasizes the importance of this feature for Barrio. The repetition in the title serves at least two purposes: it focuses attention on the cyclical nature of the workers' existence by emphasizing

the idea of repetition and, when spoken rapidly, can be understood as "plump plum," a direct reference to California's burgeoning natural resources of which all inhabitants should be allowed to partake. Brigitte LaPresto explicates how this effect is manipulated throughout the narrative:

> Repetition as well as the frequent use of asyndetons and polysyndetons are appropriate means of presenting the repetitive nature of the ripening cycle of the plums, consequently of the perpetual sequent of harvesting, and the resulting endlessness of the migrants' journey from one fruit picker's job to the other.[1] (186-87)

Barrio's rather avant-garde prose style serves purposes that go beyond the stylistic self-indulgence that some critics claim. He takes certain aspects of the documentary nature of the California labor novel as established by Steinbeck and manipulates them to represent the perspectives of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the agricultural workforce.

Although Barrio does not use voice-over narrative in the way Steinbeck does, he includes other aspects of the documentary narrative and uses them to serve his own

particular purposes. In essence, Barrio introduces yet another variable into Starr's equation of California's cultural identity: the importance of perspective in the dialectic between the California of fact and the California of fancy.

For instance, an extremely common strategy for a documentary work is to include external texts—or, if one prefers, documents—to provide evidentiary support for the narrator's argument. Steinbeck includes an external text in The Grapes of Wrath: a flyer advertising the need for pickers in California. This flyer is read and discussed by the Joad family, and its promise of work is an important factor in the family's decision to migrate west.[2] Barrio includes external texts as well; he interrupts his running narrative with a number of newspaper articles and agricultural reports.

However, unlike Steinbeck, Barrio does not necessarily represent these texts as factual. Instead, he often uses them to satirize the contemporary California labor environment. These reports give ironic thanks to "the brave, beleaguered growers, investors, and gamblers" for their resistance against labor strikers (76); occasionally

include expletives (198); and at times refer to state political leaders by unflattering nicknames (196).

This emphasis on the fictional nature of his work may have been made possible in part because of the huge amount of real documentation depicting the plight of the California laborer in the thirty-year span between the two novels. Steinbeck had little reason to satirize or parody the California migrant situation. His intent was to tell the story of California migrant workers with the hope that reforms could be made to aid them in their plight. Therefore, although it really is fiction, to emphasize the fictional nature of Steinbeck's work would obviously be counterproductive. In contrast, by the time of the publication of <u>The Plum Plum Pickers</u>, the hardships faced by these individuals had been well chronicled, and so from a pragmatic standpoint Barrio's satirical tone would do little to diminish the desperate nature of these migrants' situation.

Instead, Barrio's blatant reminders to the reader of the fictional nature of his narrative serve a more important purpose: they lampoon the documentary narrative style itself, continuously reminding the reader that the work is indeed fiction. This satirical appropriation of the

documentary style urges the reader to make comparisons with the earlier work, with the implication that the Steinbeck narrator's underlying philosophy and proposals for reform do not necessarily resolve the problems experienced by the characters in The Plum Plum Pickers. This is not to say that Barrio's spoofing of the documentary style is intended to refute the argument forwarded in The Grapes of Wrath; rather, it reminds the reader that the earlier work is presented from a different perspective. One infers from Barrio's narrator that, yes, the story of the California migrant worker must be told, but the story as presented by Steinbeck is not representative of the entire migrant worker experience.

The result of this satirical treatment of the documentary is that Barrio's narrator seems to be questioning the very nature of The Grapes of Wrath's representation of the California Dream itself. Steinbeck's construction of the California Dream, as described earlier, is based on the amalgam of the American Dream, the Jeffersonian yeoman ideal, and the garden myth, all of which can be considered Anglo (though not necessarily exclusively) in nature. In contrast, the primary characters of The Plum Plum Pickers who represent Barrio's revisionist

account are Mexican or Mexican American. The roots of their claim to the region are portrayed as stemming from a much older tradition than one beginning with Anglo immigration to California. Quill, the Anglo Western Grande manager, lumps these ethnic Mexicans with the Anglo immigrants from Steinbeck's novel, noting that "whole families came by in their truly astounding clunkers, the Joads all over again, in a ridiculous thirty-year re-run" (164). The narrative argument in Barrio's work posits that the plight of the Mexican California farmworker is significantly different. Margerita's claim for equal economic opportunity is based upon a long history of her culture's stewardship of the land. The Joad claim for economic equality is based upon the idea that thieves should equally share their booty.

By extension then, Barrio's narrative style of satirizing the documentary and illustrating the fictional nature of the work itself, in direct contrast to <u>The Grapes of Wrath</u>, represents the idea that not only are the Anglo myths no longer fundamental to the Mexican American characters' interpretations of the California dream but that the Anglo basis for the dream's expression is no longer fundamentally sound either. Barrio subsequently includes language, images, and expressions representative

of the Mexican American, as opposed to the Anglo American, concept of California. For the Mexican Americans in _The Plum Plum Pickers_, California is not an open land available to the Anglos from which they could reconstruct a contemporary version of Eden. Instead, it is a land promised to Mexican Californians by their forefathers that has been stolen by the United States. The Anglo presence in California is essentially an occupational force, and more important, this occupation is temporary; the land will eventually be returned to its rightful owners. This argument can be deduced by comparisons of the California dreams of three specific groups of characters and noting how they internalize or reject Anglo norms and how they appropriate or reject Anglo ideals in expressing their own beliefs.

The first group includes Roberto Morales and Pepe Delgado. They represent how the adoption of the Anglo dream of California by Mexicans and Mexican Americans leads them to act as implementers of the owner's exploitative activities. The second group is the documented Mexican laborer, specifically Lupe and Manuel Gutiérrez. They reject the Anglo dream of California but seem trapped in it nonetheless. As foreigners with little claim to the land,

they seem unable to dream of their own success within it and are therefore portrayed as tiny cogs in the Californian agricultural juggernaut. The third group includes Margarita Gutiérrez and Ramiro Sanchez, Mexican Americans who, instead of assimilating the American ideal into their vision of California or capitulating under its oppressive force, ultimately reimagine the California Dream in the image of their own cultural heritage.

The contrast between the groups is evident in the representations of Mexicans and Mexican Americans who attempt to assimilate into the Anglo version of the California Dream. Pepe Delgado's and Roberto Morales' dreams of California are depicted as a sort of industry standard of the California situation; they are portrayed as exploiters of their own people, and they measure their own personal success in Western concepts of wealth and consumerism. The novel opens with Pepe actually sympathizing with Mr. Quill, the Anglo manager of the Western Grande, and his misfortune at being awakened by a dissatisfied resident:

> A bonging garbage can lid, if that's what it was, came sailing out of California's blackest sky, and smashed a garage door to splinters. . . . Now that didn't

belong in the dream. [Quill goes outside to assess damage, finds a note, and discovers Pepe.] . . .

> Pepe whistled phew. "Eh what, amigo? Again? Like last time?" Crossing himself. "Madre de Dios. The devil you say." . . .
>
> [Quill says,] "It's signed 'Juaquín M.' this time. Stupid."
>
> "You got to be kidding." Pepe whistled pheew softly again. "Juaquín Murrieta." Trilling the r hard rrrrrrrrr Spanish style. "The Metsican Robin Hood, eh. The terror of the gringos." He whistled pheeeeeew once more, long, low, fey, and mournful. (31-32)

It is notable that although Pepe's response "ooz[es] unctuousness" (31), Quill is grateful for the sympathy. Pepe is ultimately recognized by Quill as a compatriot of sorts. With this exchange, which Barrio uses to begin the novel, he sets two precedents. First, Spanish will be included in the novel, which welcomes the bilingual audience and implies a certain alienation of non-Spanish-speaking readers (which Pratt would view as evidence of a different ethnography in play). Second, Anglo dreams are going to be interrupted.

As the narrative progresses it becomes clear that

Pepe, a stereotypical Latino, from an Anglo perspective, is the antithesis of the ideal from the narrator's perspective. Pepe is described in turns as lazy (47), corpulent (45), drunk, and irrational (216-17), reminiscent of Steinbeck's representation of the Mexican in California:

> Once California belonged to Mexico and its land to Mexicans; and a horde of tattered feverish Americans poured in. . . . The Mexicans were weak and fed. They could not resist because they wanted nothing in the world as frantically as the Americans wanted land. (Steinbeck 297)

Steinbeck's comments stand in stark contrast to the otherwise benevolent tone he uses to describe other manual laborers in California. This exemplifies yet another reason why Barrio objects to Steinbeck's style in The Grapes of Wrath, for despite the obvious relationship between the Joads and the pickers in The Plum Plum Pickers in terms of civil rights and working conditions, there is a distinct difference—race. Racial issues manifest themselves in many different fashions in The Plum Plum Pickers, whether it be Lupe's envy of the dolls at the flea market, described as angels with "blood blond tresses" (109); Danny's anger against the "guëros so set against them [in their efforts

to participate in California society]" (141); or the narrator's description of the "four superjawed blond tyrants" (142) who assault the Chicano youth. Barrio's constant reiteration of racial conflict is in distinct contrast to Steinbeck's portrayal of prejudice established along primarily economic considerations. In this way, the racial element is used to illustrate the difference in the Chicano laborers' perspective of social inequality from that of the earlier novel. Amid one discussion between Barrio's plum pickers, Steinbeck's narrator is obliquely criticized as representing a radical Anglo political position: "Comunistas are like flies. The more misery, the more flies. Therefore, the more comunistas. Bah, what do gringos know about misery?" (Barrio 74). In this quotation, progressive political reform is equated to a "gringo" solution and subsequently rejected. By extension, the statement above implies that from the Mexican laborer perspective, The Grapes of Wrath's proposal for California labor reform is merely an Anglo response to labor injustice and, because it does not redress many other factors that contribute to social inequality, is similarly inadequate.[3]

Because of this categorical rejection of the Anglo solution, one can see throughout Barrio's work that Mexican

Americans such as Pepe, who reflect the Anglo stereotype, or other characters who otherwise propagate the Anglo perspective of the California Dream, are derided. Like Pepe, who is accused by Ramiro of skimming earnings from his crew and is ostracized by his cultural peers throughout the work (47), Roberto Morales, another crew chief, is similarly described as "the fat man, the shrewd contratista" (88-89). The play on the word "contratista" (a term often used to refer to populist rebel soldiers in Central and South America but here means "contractor" or "middleman," with derogatory implications) is significant because, instead of acting as a rebel for social reform, he is rebelling against his own culture, for the Anglos' cause. Serafina Delgado, Pepe's wife, doesn't care that

> [Turner's] bank vaults were probably spilling over . . . for that meant more work for her and hers. She didn't care how much richer the rich got. She didn't like all that radical talk among her compañeros about how the rich ought to be stripped of every dollar . . . . Without them, where would she and all other poor families be? (103)

Here, Serafina equates Turner's success with the Delgados' success. Of course, Serafina and Pepe represent the

wealthier of the farm labor characters and are portrayed as having bought fully into the exploitative system imported by the Anglos. Morales also expresses his own contentment with buying into the dominant culture's vision of the California Dream: "All he cared about, like a Latin Turner, was money. He had laughter built in to spare. Why shouldn't he? In league with the devil. And why not? He didn't have to stoop to pick" (179). Morales himself believes that he has exchanged his cultural vision for that of the landowners. He is actually pleased that he is now in league with the devil, for his assessment of his own success is measured in Anglo terms. Essentially, he identifies Turner, not the other Mexican Americans, as kin.

In contrast, Lupe and Manuel Gutiérrez do not subscribe to the Anglo version of the California Dream, yet they do not seem able to re-envision California in their own terms either. Lupe recognizes the irony of her situation:

> The sun beamed proudly down with its incredibly potent rays, fully meriting worship as man's most powerful god . . . stirring the seeds, pulling up the sap, energizing the green chlorophyll of countless billions of leaves. . . . The springtime cornucopia of plenty

> was bursting and aching once again once again right on schedule, to turn anything out, anything anyone wanted or could ever want. Delightful riches everywhere in stores were for everybody, for ordinary orchard growers, for simple farm folk, for common growers, for truck drivers, for pleasant professors, for sincere citizens, for efficient processors, for supermarketeers, charge checkers, inspectors, generals . . . not to mention forty million thrifty American housewives. For everybody, fortunately, forever, thanks be to God, except—for the fruit pickers. . . .
>
> Her strange inner mirages had a nasty tendency of twisting, changing shapes, and finally disappearing.
>
> She couldn't have a clean dream. (42)

Lupe presumably cannot have a "clean dream" because, ultimately, the California she imagines is that of the gringo, not of the Mexican from California. She sees it as a classic Edenic utopia, constructed by U.S. industry, available only to those who can claim it as their own. She perceives California as diseased by the "gringo güeros chingados sponging off humanity" (43) and sees herself hamstrung by her immigrant status to dream of a better life, "for if you wanted to stay here on this side of the

border in these glorious United States of America you kept your mouth shut" (64).

Her dissociation with the land, although dissimilar to the other characters discussed so far, is oddly complementary to the relationship between landownership and the California Dream I have previously described. The Joads' disbelief at being turned off the land that generations of their forefathers tended reflects the innate hubris of the American Dream: the Anglo "Why do we think we own it? Because we live on it" attitude is lacking in Steinbeck's depiction of the Mexican and in Barrio's depiction of the documented Mexican laborer. Unlike the Anglos, whose California residency is relatively brief compared with many residents of Mexican heritage, Lupe feels no sense of ownership simply because of her residence on the land. Her tending of the avocado plant that sits in water on the windowsill because she has no land to plant it in is analogous to how she sees herself. She certainly does not consider herself American or Californian and wants to return to Mexico, but she wants to "go back properly. Like any tourist. Like any visitor" (64), almost as if she doesn't consider herself native to that land, either.

This rootlessness seems to extend to her relationship with the California Dream itself: she obviously resents the role she plays within the Anglo dream of California, but the perceived lack of her own claim to the region restricts her from imagining a California more suitable to her desires. Lupe does not conceive a plan for how the California Dream can be achieved, a phenomenon reminiscent of Grampa Joad's and Rose of Sharon's dreams in the earlier work. However, the Joads can overlook this problem because of their faith in the California Dream; Lupe ignores the problem because she has no dream at all.

Though Lupe is unable to truly imagine a better future for herself and her family, she exhibits a rich imagination elsewhere in the novel. Ironically, Lupe, the character in the novel with seemingly the least love for the region, views it in the most Edenic terms. She tends to view California as if Grampa Joad's dream had actually been realized, benefiting everyone but those from her culture. Along with the above excerpt, elsewhere she notes that "into all those thrice-blessed crops poured the intense rays of God's own California golden sun, which should have pleased her some, and the fine sugary fragrances, which should have given her some small delight" (41). Instead,

"little creases of strain worried and pinched her, registering their annoyance" (41). The reference to "thrice-blessed" is obviously biblical in nature, referring to the holy trinity; the "God" who has created the sun over the California crops is Christian. However, in the novel's context, it may also be interpreted if not as an Anglo God at least as a European God—the God of American expansionism.

Margerita Delgado and Ramiro Sanchez, Americans of Mexican descent, see something very different in California's sun. Margerita, upon awakening, reflects on how

> the sun came up faithfully every morning, lighting everything up so beautifully. . . . She liked the peacefulness of the countryside under its cool misty cover and, as the sun got ready to lift itself above the mountain humps, its rays lit the undersides of some long, low slivers of clouds, setting them aglow with a wedge of silvery orange fire against the gradually lightening, brightening gray sky. She liked it just the way it was. (98)

Unlike Lupe, Margerita is comfortable with her physical surroundings. The sun in the above excerpt is not

necessarily the Anglo Christian sun, it is the simple, faithful, California sun. And since Margerita is a native Californian, the sun is therefore hers.

The narrator depicts dawn in California in non-Anglo, non-biblical terms as well, stating,

> The sun lit the plains. It glimmered upon broad clumps of awakening green orchards. Leaves started shimmering expectantly in dawn's early mist. The sun steamed the soil humid to create still more priceless humus, adding still another morning's richness to the world's wealth. The sun was the power. The sun was the source. The Aztec Sun. (178)

The California dawn experienced by Margerita is different from Lupe's in that it is void of religious imagery and implies a sense of Margerita's belonging; the dawn described by the narrator reimagines California in a perspective distinctly different from that imagined in The Grapes of Wrath: in The Grapes of Wrath, the sun is American, not Aztecan. The cumulative effect of the dawn imagery in The Plum Plum Pickers is that Cassuto's amalgam of myths—distinctly American or Western—informing the Joad perspective of the California Dream is not applicable in Margerita's cultural environment. According to the

narrator's logic, Margerita holds a claim on California not because she is a U.S. citizen but because she is, simply, a Californian. Anglo dreams of constructing an Eden in California are rendered moot because the land is envisioned not from a European perspective but from a Native American one. And so when the narrator describes the meeting between Margerita and Ramiro as "looking at each other. Reaching across the centuries. Aztec to Mayan" (212), he is chronicling the appropriation of the California Dream. By this time in the novel, the Anglo claim on the land described by Steinbeck has been reclaimed through both narrative style and imagery. The Barrio narrative implies that the Joad documentary is a fiction and tells only an Anglo version of the story; the Steinbeck narrator's radical political reforms are Anglo as well; and the vision of a California as an Anglo Eden is replaced by a California as a Mexican-South American El Dorado. As such, the California dream is reimagined and presented through a marginalized culture's perspective.

Like Steinbeck, Barrio gives a blueprint for how the region will eventually be returned to its rightful owner. However, unlike Steinbeck, it will not be through economic reform. Instead, it will be through education and

propagation. Ramiro imagines how

> He would make California his own. . . . The dream was now his: the thing was to proceed, to make the best of it, to make the American system a human system, to grow, to save, to plan, to plant, to buy, to invest. Invest in futures. Send their kids through school. And keep them going to school. Ramiro wanted to have at least a dozen kids with Margarita, all Sánchezes, and soon all California was going to be swamped with Mexican lawyers, Mexican teachers, Mexican jigsaw puzzle makers, Mexican judges, and even a Mexican County Supervisor here and there. And there would still be enough dump [sic] plum pickers left over to keep the rich sober and happy—provided they gave honest pay for honest work honestly offered. (218-19)

Through Ramiro's dream, Barrio is even reenvisioning Steinbeck's concept of family. Both see the family as a collective of sorts, but Steinbeck depicts the family as defined by class; Barrio defines the family collective in terms of ethnicity. Where Steinbeck's narrator claims that the collective family (people evolving from the concept of "I lost my land" to "we lost *our* land") would provide the impetus for socioeconomic reform, Ramiro suggests that the

mere presence of so many of his kin, combined with providing them educational opportunities, will generate sufficient sociopolitical power to return California to its rightful owners. The Grapes of Wrath envisions the social reorganization of family units in economic terms; The Plum Plum Pickers envisions the return of *la familia*.

It is an ironic characteristic of autoethnographic texts that, despite the fundamental differences one finds between them and their predecessors, they, necessarily, owe significant debt to the preceding texts. By definition, the autoethnographic text is revisionist, a response by a subordinated culture to the dominant culture's perspective of an event or situation. In order for Barrio to lampoon the apparent realism of the documentary style, to reinvent the California Dream, and to reenvision the type of reform needed in the state in the fashion that he did, a book like The Grapes of Wrath had to already exist. Yet, it is curious that two books with so much seemingly in common—particularly a deep-seated empathy for the migrant laborer—could come to such different conclusions. Steinbeck's narrator seems to propose a rebellion for California, one based on economic redistribution of California's great wealth from the privileged few to the common masses.

Essentially, however, it is a rebellion of inclusion. Barrio's narrator also implies that a rebellion is necessary, but it is a rebellion over an unjust occupation. It is not necessarily a novel about exclusion of the Anglo, but it is one about the reascendancy of the Mexican Californian. Likewise, the earlier novel argues that the economic inequalities in California unnecessarily delay the actualization of the California Dream for many Americans, implying that this is not the proper way for Americans to treat their California. The Plum Plum Pickers, on the other hand, issues the warning that from a major subculture's perspective, rightful California Dreams *are not* American. And it serves notice that a different cultural constituency can conceptualize its own dreams for the region, dreams significantly different than those of the exploitative Anglos.

Notes

[1]Some critics have complained that this narrative strategy is self-indulgent and reflective of a shoddy prose style (Antonio Marquez, qtd. in LaPresto 186). However, that value judgment is of little use when trying to discern the purpose behind this particular strategy. Indeed, the

idea that this text represents a cultural appropriation of another's perspective implies arguments that such proclamations as the above may not be valid—particularly if they stem from the dominant culture's value systems.

[2]The flyer advertising work in California is actually an example of how Steinbeck uses the fictional environment to manipulate historical evidence in an attempt to promote his own agenda for labor reform in California. According to Starr, there were flyers sent out by farmers—from Arizona. At the time of Starr's publication of Endangered Dreams, there had yet to be discovered a single piece of evidence that California farmers advertised for labor using this method. In fact, there is evidence that California farmers discouraged the dissemination of flyers advertising work; they were (rightfully) concerned that migrants, once they arrived in Arizona and found little work there, would continue on to California, further impacting the depressed economic situation.

[3]In one sense, Steinbeck's emphasis in his novel on Anglo immigration into California to the apparent exclusion of other cultures and ethnicities during the thirties is historically correct. The huge influx of Anglos to California actually drove Mexican Californian pickers out

of the area. Ironically, this collateral phenomenon was quite appreciated by the corporate farmers because the Mexican Californian farm laborers were quite active in the unionization movement at that time. Conversely, Steinbeck himself seemed to believe that the Mexican Californian was an individual appropriate for parody (see Tortilla Flats, for example).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CALIFORNIA DREAM DILUTED:

BOYLE'S THE TORTILLA CURTAIN

Defining the relationship between The Tortilla Curtain and the earlier California labor novels has been a somewhat perplexing task for scholars. Barbara Kingsolver notes,

> I can't criticize The Tortilla Curtain for failing to include a Marxist analysis of U.S.-Mexican border economics, or refusing to suggest mechanisms for redistributing a rich nation's wealth. I can only say it does not set the terms for any genuine debate. (3)

There seem to be some basic differences in the purpose of this most recent installment in the California labor novel genre. First, as Kingsolver notes, Boyle does not propose any sort of agenda for labor reform. In addition, he provides few clues to trigger reader sympathy for the exploited workers' plights, at least when compared with the earlier works. A clear delineation between right and wrong is discarded for relationships more complex than the earlier landowner-laborer relationships. The protagonists, Cándido and América Rincón, are not agricultural workers. They are urban laborers and, being undocumented, are

"illegal" ones at that. Unlike characters in The Grapes of Wrath and The Plum Plum Pickers, these individuals are not portrayed as representative of a larger family, whether it be in terms of the socioeconomic collective or by blood. If anything, each family in the novel is depicted as distinctly dysfunctional, whether Anglo or Mexican or Mexican American. The owner-laborer dialectic, endemic to Steinbeck's novel and modified in Barrio's novel, is summarily dismissed in Boyle's work; both sides are portrayed as stratified and at odds internally as well as with one another. Ultimately, the overall tone of The Tortilla Curtain is not of moral indignation—it is of amoral observation.

In short, Kingsolver implies that The Tortilla Curtain does not behave like it belongs to the California labor novel tradition. Indeed, it might be argued that, unlike the earlier works, Boyle may not even consider the migrant laborers to be the primary focus of his work; the novel can just as easily be seen as a discussion of moral conflict among the privileged California upper-middle class. So the question remains: why include this novel in the California labor discussion at all?

First of all, Boyle demands it to be included. His

epigraph for The Tortilla Curtain is from The Grapes of Wrath: "They ain't human. A human being wouldn't live like they do. A human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable." A number of other relationships link this novel to the other two as well. As did Barrio, Boyle finds it necessary to retain many of the themes and narrative structures used in the earlier works. Where Steinbeck used intercalary chapters to interpose story line with documentary narrative, and Barrio modified this structure to juxtapose the perspectives of specific landowners with those of specific laborers, Boyle uses this alternating structure to represent segments of the same period of story time. The parallel narratives recount specific events from the opposing perspectives of affluent Anglos and undocumented Mexicans.

The similarities do not end there. Both later novels unabashedly reference Steinbeck. As mentioned above, Barrio's Quill equates the migrant laborers with the Joads. Boyle, in addition to opening his work with the above epigraph, borrows significant features from Steinbeck's work, incorporating floods and outside texts (in this case newsletter articles) to describe the contemporary social environment, representing technology as an oppressive tool

of the dominant culture, and including natural imagery as reflective of the human condition.

It is through careful reiteration of these elements, now inherent to the genre, that Boyle diffuses, then paradoxically reaffirms, the central idea linking his novel to the earlier works: despite the constant hardship faced by Cándido and América, some version of the California Dream remains. As was seen in the earlier works, the region is not ultimately portrayed as a cruel running joke played on the exploited worker but as an ideal that remains to be achieved. The primary shift between Boyle's work and the earlier representations is that in Barrio's and Steinbeck's novels there is an assumption that the California Dream has been realized—at least by the landowners—and the remaining issue is how to give the exploited workers their share of the dream as well. In Boyle's work, no one is portrayed as having realized the California Dream.

The story itself is primarily about two upwardly mobile Anglos and two destitute Mexican nationals whose lives continually collide despite their best efforts otherwise. Delany and Kyra Mossbacher live in Arroyo Blanco Estates, a well-to-do community, and are portrayed as having stereotypical, superficial Anglo California Dreams:

Kyra wants to "win" at real estate by selling homes and accruing wealth; Delany wants to be a liberal desktop-publishing naturalist, expressing the harsh truth of California's environmental ecosystems to his devoted readership—all the while being supported by his wife in the comfort of a planned-community home. The reader can assume that all has been going well for this family until, in chapter 1, Delany has the misfortune of smacking Cándido with his Acura. In the ensuing chapters, Cándido's attempts to provide a better life for himself and his wife, América, are constantly thwarted by his own actions and by the intentional and unintentional efforts of the Mossbachers and their neighbors.

Boyle's invocation of Steinbeck in the epigraph insists that the reader make comparisons between the two works. What may be most notable about The Tortilla Curtain is that it begins with the dominant culture's perspective, an important feature of the ambivalent tone pervading the novel. Actually, The Tortilla Curtain's chapter organization and its depiction of the dominant culture as having human qualities (although very different viewpoints) similar to those of the marginalized culture might be seen as a natural progression from the earlier works. As

mentioned before, in The Grapes of Wrath the exploitative forces are not individuals, they are corporations; in The Plum Plum Pickers, the oppressive landowners are caricaturized—"Howlin' Mad Nolan" is governor of California, and Turner's first name is alternatively Frederick, I.C.B.M., Fraud, and Turpitude. Therefore, introducing the novel from the Anglo perspective, and introducing Delany as a man entangled in the labor issue not by his own choice but by accident, is an important shift in Boyle's narrative organization. Its effect is emphatically different from the earlier novels': Steinbeck used alternating chapters in a way that implied a factual hierarchy, deliberately confusing the lines between reality and imagination; Barrio appropriated the format to satirize and invert that reality; Boyle's alternating chapters imply two equally weighted, and therefore equally legitimate, oppositional realities. Strangely enough, this inherent objectivity in the narrative supports the argument Stott makes about the function of the documentary work in the 1930s: the reader tends to engage in this novel mainly from an intellectual perspective and not from an emotional one.

Boyle augments this ambivalence of perspective by the type of migrant status he gives the Mexicans and the names

he gives them. América and Cándido are undocumented aliens, making their claim to the California Dream particularly tenuous. Although Barrio's Lupe Gutiérrez seems unable to construct a California Dream because she does not seem to have a "legal" claim on the region, she is at least a documented alien. América and Cándido are not afforded even this comfort; some readers may see the Rincóns' illegality as reason enough to dismiss any sympathetic response to their plight. Just in case this portrayal of the undocumented workers is not enough to diminish the reader's tendency to sympathize with the migrant worker, Boyle attributes qualities to some Mexican and Mexican American characters that have not been incorporated into the genre thus far: they rape, sexually harass, set catastrophic fires, steal, and occasionally, they do live like animals. In part, this novel cannot forward an argument for reform because, with the possible exception of the last paragraph of the work, it does not even clearly side with the cultural group that is being wronged.

Because of the novel's apparent ambivalence and therefore the possibility of interpreting the novel from an intellectual, rather than emotional, perspective, one may assume that Boyle's naming of one Mexican migrant "América"

and the other "Cándido" is a bid for allegorical interpretation. Subsequently, an analysis of the names reveals yet another facet of how Boyle achieves this ambivalence of tone. América is a rather unusual name for a Mexican. It might be argued that she is named to reference the polyglot nature of the Americas; after all, the name can as easily refer to two continents as to one nation. Also, Boyle may have chosen the name so he could incorporate puns on the name América itself. For instance, he writes that Cándido "looked first in the parking lot at the Chinese store, but América wasn't there" (91).

More likely, however, is that she may be a representation of the American Dream. Her expression of modest hopes for the new land certainly coincides with the dreams characters in the earlier novels imagine for California. For instance, early in The Tortilla Curtain, she demands of Cándido:

> I want one of those houses. . . . A clean white one made out of lumber that smells like the mountains, with a gas range and a refrigerator, and maybe a little yard so you can plant a garden and make a place for the chickens. (28-29)

Her comments echo Rose of Sharon's imagining seventy years

earlier of what California will afford her, namely, "a place, little bit of a place . . . nothin' fancy, but we want it nice for the baby" replete with "all new [white] stuff" (Steinbeck 212). América's comments also reverberate with those made by Barrio's Lupe, as she ponders, "What would it feel like to own her own home? Or just a little square plot of earth just to plant her tiny avocado tree in?" (Barrio 44) and later reminisces, "And then last spring. A good stove. A small apartment model. Four burners. No space for resting pots and pans, no block, no clock, no fringes, nothing extra. But it worked" (127).

Collectively, these are hardly extravagant visions of the California Dream. On the other hand, just as we have seen in several dreams expressed in the earlier works, América's dream is again lacking in development of the plan she will use to achieve these goals. Similar to Rose of Sharon, whose vision is not tempered by any of the "real" events she experiences, and to Lupe's, whose own dream is stymied because of her inability to imagine how she can translate her dream into reality, América only has a faith that California—or at least, Cándido—will provide.

The narrator further undermines the idea of owning a home and several appliances as translating into a

California brand of lasting happiness by noting that Kyra and Delany have already achieved this. He describes the Mossbachers as living in

> a private community, comprising a golf course, ten tennis courts, a community center and some two hundred and fifty homes, each set on one-point-five acres and strictly conforming to the covenants, conditions and restrictions set forth in the 1973 articles of incorporation. The houses were all of the Spanish Mission style, painted in one of three prescribed shades of white, with orange tile roofs. (30)

Kyra and Delany already have more of the physical accoutrements of the aggregate California Dream than América and the earlier characters have ever even expressed. And yet, not only are Kyra and Delany depicted as somehow unsatisfied, but the way in which the narrator describes these physical manifestations themselves clearly mocks this interpretation of utopia. The white house and electrical appliances have become markers of consumerism and ownership—not of achieving a dream. Whereas in the earlier novels narrators depicted a white house as an aesthetic feature of the California Dream, a manifestation of the more noble aspect of bettering one's self through

industry and investment in the social system, now it is white by decree (30). The white house image is ironic, of course, resonating with some of the physical elements of Rose of Sharon's dream recounted almost seventy years earlier. Indeed, the narrator mocks this dream icon in nearly the same way Barrio satirizes some of the other accoutrements of the California Dream. In this case, however, the issue of autoethnographic text does not apply. Being that Boyle's narrator does not lampoon physical aspects of the California Dream, because he plans to reissue a dream from different cultural perspectives, he might be implying instead that the California Dream seemingly has been stripped of substance and only its outer vestiges remain.

When interpreting América as an allegorical entity there are other features of the character that may keep readers from aligning themselves with the plight of the exploited worker. The exploited workers themselves are often horrid individuals. Cándido is robbed by Californian Chicanos, and América is raped by Mexican nationals—while pregnant. Furthermore, from the rape she contracts a disease that blinds her daughter (a "real" American) and seems to foreshadow her daughter's doom. It is as if Boyle

toys with The Grapes of Wrath narrator's concept that having a dream and retaining that dream is the underlying reason why California's exploitation of the manual laborer will ultimately fail, for América is paradoxical. She notes toward the end of the novel that "it was time to give it up, time to go back to Tepoztlán and beg her father to take her back" (324). Ironically, her dream is now of leaving herself. Simultaneously, the narrator does collateral damage to Ramiro's dream of justice for the Mexican Californian as being served through propagation and education of *la familia*: in the process of simply trying to put a roof over their heads, América is raped, plundered, and pillaged not only by an oppressive Anglo culture but by those of her own ethnicity as well. Subsequently, her offspring, both literally and allegorically, are born with substantial physical disabilities.

Cándido's persona is rife with similar ambivalent messages, further frustrating the reader's desire to identify with the couple. As América's husband, Cándido's name begs allegorical treatment as well, possibly as a Mexican reincarnation of Voltaire's Candide. It is mentioned in the text that América's family believes Cándido unworthy of their daughter, and he is

unsophisticated to the point that he makes tragic errors that lead to his accident, several beatings, an enormous fire, and the loss of all their money—twice. Yet, he continues to work hard and remains optimistic—much in the same way Barrio's character Manuel continues to pick plums and dream of his family's future, despite the insurmountable odds that he faces. Voltaire's Candide experiences related phenomena: he loves above his rank; is eyewitness to constant horrors and misfortune; and, curiously, visits El Dorado. Ironically, when compared with Boyle's text, Candide eventually discovers that manual labor is the primary way to gain meaning from life, for "work keeps at bay three great evils: boredom, vice and need" (Voltaire 113). Voltaire ridicules contemporary foibles such as political intolerance and complacent optimism, which suggests that Boyle is posing the question: which is more foolish, California's greedy and intolerant dominant culture or Cándido's unextinguished dream?

It would seem that the narrator's ambivalent representation of América and Cándido (both as characters and allegorical figures) and other Mexican characters in The Tortilla Curtain would be sufficient to sway reader sympathy permanently toward the Anglo perspective. However,

Boyle treats the Anglo families of Arroyo Blanco Estates even more harshly. Though Cándido may dismay the reader with his misadventures, whether they be setting the canyon on fire while roasting a turkey or following unknown men down dark alleys to be robbed, Boyle represents these misfortunes as caused by ignorance, not intent. In contrast, Arroyo Blanco is essentially portrayed as a breeding ground of bigotry. Anglo activities against Mexicans are almost always portrayed as intentional and often as stupid as well. Arroyo Blanco homeowners submit and pass a resolution to build walls and gates to keep the illegals out and then hire Lupe's rapist—an undocumented alien—to go door-to-door to promote passage of the resolution. They are determined to punish the person who set the fire that threatened their homes—then accuse and capture the wrong men. Delany, determined to catch the true firebug and graffitist, sets up elaborate photography equipment—then photographs the neighbor's son tagging the Estates walls—and *still* pockets a gun and runs off into the canyon looking for Cándido.

Actually, the ambivalent environment within which Boyle tells his tale may be most in evidence in the Delany character. Delany is the apparent personification of the

"liberal-humanist ideals" (313) that Barrio railed against thirty years earlier; he is an individual who has the theory of racial integration down but cannot seem to integrate it into his everyday life. When discussing the issue of building a gate for Arroyo Blanco with his neighbor Jack Jardine, who argues that the gate is necessary to protect the community "until we get control of the borders," Delany shares with us a bit of his tortured, contorted logic:

> The borders. Delany took an involuntary step backwards, all those dark disordered faces rising up from the streetcorners and freeway onramps to mob his brain, all of them crying out their human wants through mouths full of rotten teeth. "That's racist, Jack, and you know it." (101)

This exchange takes place only a day after Delany hit Cándido and explained to his wife that he paid the man off to hush up the accident:

> "No listen Kyra: the guy's okay. I mean, he was just . . . bruised, that was all. He's gone, he went away. I gave him twenty bucks."
>
> "Twenty—?"
>
> And then, before the words could turn to ash in

his mouth, it was out: "I told you—he was *Mexican*."
(15)

Delany's struggle with his hypocrisy, the ongoing conflict between his internal dialogue and what he understands to be politically correct language, runs throughout the novel and is strangely parallel to Starr's hypothesis of the dialectic defining California culture: Delany's perception of the Mexican immigrant culture seems to be shaped and reshaped within a dialectic between his imagined ideals and his imagined Mexicans.

On the other hand, when the discussion about what is fact and what is imagination does not betray Delany's own internal conflict between humanitarianism and bigotry, he is remarkably clearheaded. Boyle uses Delany to poke holes in the agricultural aspects that pervade the Edenic nature of California Dream itself. He goes to great lengths to separate fact from fiction regarding what in California is native and what is not. He writes in one of his columns that "*the mustard is an interloper here, by the way, an annual introduced by the Franciscan padres*" (77), when describing what is assumed to be an inherent part of the California landscape. What may be more telling is his long treatise on the coyote. He writes that the coyote "*has been*

much on [his] *mind,"* that it is "*ideally suited to its environment,"* and he declares that it is "*above all, adaptable"* (211-12). He adds that

> *in our blindness, our species-specific arrogance, we create a niche, and animals like the raccoon, the opossum, the starling and a host of other indigenous and introduced species will rush in to fill it."* (213)

The effects are that the coyote is "*less afraid of the humans who coddle and encourage him, who are so blissfully unaware of the workings of nature that they actually donate their kitchen scraps to his well-being"* (213). He adds that his discussion is not "*to control the uncontrollable, the unknowable and the hidden. Who can say what revolutionary purpose the coyote has in mind? . . . And yet something must be done"* (213-14). He finishes, "*The coyotes keep coming, breeding up to fill in the gaps, moving in where the living is easy. They are cunning, versatile, hungry and unstoppable"* (215).

Of course, Delany's social sensibilities would keep him from replacing the word "coyote" with that of "Mexican" and submitting the same piece, but the reader can easily wonder if this is truly what he believes. First of all, "coyotes" can refer derogatorily to the often unsavory

Mexican businessmen who act as intermediaries between employers and employees or ship laborers across the U.S.-Mexico border. Second, in the piece, Delany refers to a specific coyote who "*chew*[s] *his way through the plastic irrigation pipes whenever he wants a drink*" (212). Later in the novel, Cándido taps into an irrigation system to bring running water to his family's small hovel (395). One must also assume that Delany has more on his mind than merely the animal "coyote" when he writes the piece, for what "revolution" might the animal itself have in mind?

It may be Delany's hypocritical attitude toward the migrant laborer that is most disconcerting to the contemporary reader. The typical reader of Boyle's work most likely grew up in a different world than that of the Rincóns. A reader of Boyle's work who recognizes its ambivalent nature and discerns allegorical implications of the characters América and Cándido, who defines himself or herself as a "liberal humanist" as Jack Jardine defines Delany, and who experiences empathy for a marginalized culture but does not specifically relate to that experience could easily be a well-educated, middle- to upper-class Anglo. For the reader who possesses several of the above characteristics, Boyle's narrative has embedded in it a

disconcerting implication: "you may be one of these bigots."

Fortunately, the narrator gives ample opportunity for readers to dissociate themselves from the likes of the Mossbachers. Delany lives a life that many would consider a true manifestation of the California Dream: he lives in a nice home, has a son, is partially supported by his wife so that he can pursue his intellectual endeavors, and is often free to take long walks in the California wilderness, pursuing his avocation as a naturalist. Though his choice of career is different, he is living what Starr describes as the California Dream at the turn of the twentieth century, a life of the "gentleman farmer," an existence in which an individual is able to pursue a number of leisurely endeavors because California's inherent riches allow him to do so. But instead of using this free time to do good works or fight against the building of the wall around Arroyo Blanco Estates, he does nothing. In fact, once his wife Kyra simply buys him a footstool so he can climb the wall, his concerns are mollified. A reader sympathetic to the Mexicans' plight realizes that Delany's issue with the wall is not due to his concern about human rights but is actually due to concerns about personal comfort. Unlike

other significant characters in earlier novels whose outward actions signify deeply rooted concepts of what their California Dreams are, he betrays the level of his own convictions: they are merely skin deep.

In such a great moral void as is portrayed in Boyle's work, it may be surprising to find any sort of noble dream for California's future, and when one does find an inkling of spiritual relationship to the California Dream, it is often diminished by its superficiality. One such instance can be found in Kyra's character. Kyra is as a single-minded career woman whose sole definition of herself is based on her success at selling real estate. However, since a quality of the California Dream is that it is defined by the character who envisions it, her dream too must have some validity in this context. After Kyra has endured several difficult weeks and is going to pick up her son, she gets lost, and during her effort to get back on track she has this experience:

> She left the window open to enjoy the wet fecund ever-so-faintly-mentholated smell of the eucalyptus buttons crushed on the pavement and let her eyes record the details: trees and more trees, a whole deep brooding forest of eucalyptus, and birds calling from every

> branch. Half a mile in she crossed a fieldstone bridge over a brook swollen with runoff from the storm, came round a long sweeping bend and caught sight of the house. She was so surprised she stopped right there, a hundred yards from the place, and just gaped at it. All the way out here, on what must have been ten acres, minimum, stood a three-story stone-and-plaster mansion that could have been lifted right out of Beverly Hills, or better yet, a village in the South of France. (338)

Boyle captures the essence of Starr's binary equation, that the California of fact and the California of fancy continue to inform and reshape one another. Kyra is driving along and taking in the sights and sounds of California. Of course, the eucalyptus trees are native to Australia, the fieldstone fence may represent a New Englander's ideal, and the forest, for that matter, is not native as well. Certainly the home, which belongs in the South of France, may seem out of place in California. But to Kyra, it isn't. No, she has no personal interest in living in the house; she only wants to sell it—yet another example of the narrator's ambivalence to his subjects, but no matter. It is a beautiful home for sale by the owner (which means in

part that she can consider not reporting it and keep the entire commission). Since Kyra defines herself as a real estate agent, this is her California Dream—the perfect sale:

> She was thinking two mil, easy, maybe more, depending on the acreage, and even as she was totting up her commission on that—sixty thousand—and wondering why she should have to share it . . . she was thinking about the adjoining properties and who owned them and whether this place couldn't be the anchor for a very select private community of high-end houses, and that's where the money was. (339)

The narrator reiterates a basic tenet that Steinbeck's narrator proposes while at the same time distancing the reader from its potential validity. Kyra's dream is superficial, maybe even somewhat offensive, but it is a dream—a concept, nonetheless. Both earlier novels portrayed an individual's ability to have a dream at all as a key element on which the dream is based. But, through the superficiality of Kyra's dream, the narrator seems to pose the question, Is simply being able to conceptualize a dream really enough?

A second scene, one less attributable to the

narrator's insouciance, is the one that closes the novel. As Cándido, América, their child, and Delany are all swept away by a landslide, and the Mexicans find themselves perched atop a U.S. post office, less their child, the narrator records Cándido's response:

> "Where's the baby?"
>
> She didn't answer, and he felt a cold seep into his veins, a coldness and a weariness like he'd never known. The dark water was all around him, water as far as he could see, and he wondered if he would ever get warm again. He was beyond cursing, beyond grieving, numbed right through to the core of him. All that, yes. But when he saw the white face surge up out of the black swirl of the current and the white hand grasping at the tiles, he reached down and took hold of it. (355)

In a novel that conscientiously understates such empathetic human response, Cándido's act is almost shocking. Note that before he rescues Delany, Cándido seems to summarize the existential nature of the narrative thus far: The Tortilla Curtain deliberately undercuts the consistency of the narrative perspective that the earlier works provide. In contrast to the earlier works, The Tortilla Curtain is told

from the perspective of the individual—not a particular collective of laborers—and the individual perspectives contradict one another not only along racial lines but class and political lines as well. Therefore, readers do not build the same kind of empathy for the laborers as in Barrio's and Steinbeck's works; instead, they are numbed and weary from the entire experience.

An expected conclusion of a narrative of this nature would be to close with Cándido as this entropic figure—alienated, exhausted, defeated—his California Dream extinguished. In this light, what is the relationship between Cándido's subsequent heroic, humanistic gesture and the general ambivalence of the rest of the narrative? It may be symbolic that the hunted Mexican laborer is the one who saves his white middle-class hunter, but symbolic of what? It may be that Cándido, as an allegorical figure, is representing the same type of hope elicited by The Grapes of Wrath's narrator's statement that "the people . . . go on," but in the hollow shell that is The Tortilla Curtain's environment, go on for what?

One answer may be found in the ambivalent endings of the earlier California labor novels. Steinbeck endured a firestorm of criticism for ending his work with the image

of Rose of Sharon breastfeeding a starving farmer. Some critics argued that it was a symbol of hope, for it showed the determination of the migrant workers. Some argued that it was a symbol of the bleak future of the migrant worker, because that was milk that would otherwise have been fed to her child, who was stillborn, depicting the end of the Joad family line. Still others argued that it was simply inappropriate.

Likewise, the ending of The Plum Plum Pickers is equally amorphous. Quill gets hung from the enormous oak that towers over the Western Grande, but there is no clear indication of who hung him or why. Several residents of the camp have reason to dislike him, yet those who are physically capable of the act, like Ramiro, seem to have a brighter future than would warrant such an act. Also, it is important to note that some of the other inhabitants of the compound who also did not like Quill were not ethnically Mexican, so one cannot be sure that his murder is even related to the re-envisioning of California from a Mexican perspective. Even if it is, Quill represents a tiny facet in California's agricultural juggernaut. So, is his murder an act of spirited rebellion or simply an act of unethical, random violence?

Within the context of literary precedent, it seems as if one can interpret the ending of The Tortilla Curtain in two fashions, both of which tend to support, rather than stifle, the perpetuation of the California Dream. The first is simply that Boyle is tipping his hat to tradition—one simply cannot have a California labor novel without an ambivalent ending. In this case, Cándido's act is a partial reaffirmation of the California Dream in that The Tortilla Curtain is recalling an earlier work in which the concept of the California Dream is a basic building block of the novel's rhetorical strategy. In this particular case, it may reflect that, although the represented dreams are devoid of the noble underpinnings of those dreams of earlier works, when one is in a situation where the California Dream revolves around a basic faith in human nature, the core of the dream, humanitarianism, is revealed.

As for the second case, it is relevant to note that Boyle's choice of ending is ambivalent only in terms of agency. It is extremely difficult to interpret the ending in any way other than as a positive act; it is difficult, however, to understand the motivation behind the act. In this sense, it is much more closely related to Steinbeck's

conclusion than to Barrio's. If Boyle chose to include this ending because of its positive note, then it is even more distinctly humanitarian in nature, for Steinbeck's other primary tenet is reaffirmed: the people will go on. And as Steinbeck's narrator states, the ability to risk one's life for a concept, a dream, is the fundamental aspect of defining one as human.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Just as the concept of the California Dream is interpreted differently by the many characters in the three novels, so does the word itself connote a myriad of different images in contemporary society. Depending on one's perspective, it can invoke images of beaches, Half Dome, urban centers, rural farms, film industry, alternative lifestyles, the Golden Gate, high technology, flooding, drought, multicultural society, race riots, golf courses, drugs, presidential libraries, vast industry, and power outages, just to name a few. These examples share another thing besides simply being representative of California: the iconic images they conjure are all amalgams based on Starr's binary—the California of fact and the California of imagination shape and reshape each other.

Why I decided upon studying aspects of California immigration and its relationship to the California Dream itself, however, is because I am a product of it. My own ancestors were part of the mass migration into California in the thirties; one grandparent became a shopkeeper in Fresno, another, ironically, a crop duster. Though their

own versions of the California Dream were informed by radically different cultural backgrounds, their faith in the dream's existence has been embedded within their descendents. So my foray into the study of its portrayal in these works seems to be, in some way, a study of self.

The three authors I have discussed had to grapple with this phenomenon, and in a way, their task may have even been more difficult than sorting out what is fact, what is fancy, and what is inextricably a combination of the two and representing aspects of this in the literary work. Starr's formulation implies that these forces are all in constant flux, continually metamorphosing, and incorporating them in a novel necessarily requires the author to capture this essence in a static environment, somewhat like a snapshot.

As has been seen, all of these novels were products of their times. Steinbeck chose to meld documentary narrative style, its hierarchical fictional elements, with a radical political perspective, and he created The Grapes of Wrath, a fundamental work of the California labor novel genre. This novel played (and continues to play) a significant role in both that fact and the imagination sides of Starr's dialectic for understanding California's cultural identity.

As to how the imagination portion of Starr's binary is satisfied, the evidence is obvious: The Grapes of Wrath is a work of fiction, and though certainly not portraying California as a utopia, it argues for actions to be taken that, according to Steinbeck, would move California incrementally toward this goal. As for reality: it created a firestorm when it was published; engaged a nation in debate on the topic; reinvigorated the unionization movement and energized groups promoting labor reform; entered the Joad name into the American lexicon; and inspired several generations of later works addressing the plight of the California laborer, both "fictional" and "factual."

In Starr's terms, The Plum Plum Pickers also has a continuing impact on both the fact and imagination of California's cultural makeup. The inspiration for this novel was, in part, undoubtedly, the United Farm Worker strikes taking place during the time the work was written; the work itself is written directly in response to Steinbeck's vision of California. Although the novel did not receive the same literary scrutiny as did the former work, it certainly should hold a significant place in the

California literary tradition—if for no other reason than for is historical accuracy.

It could be easily argued that "Ramiro's plan" has been effectively implemented thus far. Anglos now represent less than 50 percent of the total population of Southern California, and it is estimated that in the next decade or two they will become a true minority, partially because of the vast increase of Californians from Latino backgrounds. Also, numerous inroads have been made to provide increased access to education for a number of ethnic minorities, and evidence that Mexican Americans have utilized these opportunities can be seen in many professional fields. And although racial injustice certainly remains evident in the state, Chicanos have significantly increased their physical, political, and economic influence in the thirty years since Barrio's novel was written.

As for Boyle's work, it is rather soon to tell. But there is a certain irony that his book, which at times seems to read as a dogged attempt to dispel the fiction of the California mythos—describing it often in a way that makes it hollow, superficial, and fictional—is a work of fiction itself.

Needless to say, the California Dream both as a

concept and a literary subject has not ended with Boyle's effort. Recent articles in the Los Angeles Times show that even reportage on state activities continually incorporates factual events in mythical terms. In September 2000, an article by Terry McDermott, describing a real estate agent of the Kyra Mossbacher mold was featured in "Success from the Ground Up: In a business that's both a belief system and a key to the state's culture, Realtor stakes out her piece of paradise," proving that it is possible to incorporate at least two of Cassuto's tenets (American dream and myth of the garden) relevantly into an article title. More recently, an article by Fred Alvarez discussed the huge increase in Latino farm ownership in California and how, despite the financial hardships many face, the farmers "wouldn't have it any other way."

Maybe most enticing, however, is a piece run in September 2000 by Joseph Menn about the computer technology industry. Titled "High Tech Passport to Nowhere," it describes how California technology interests lure immigrants from the Pacific Rim with special visas to work in factories. Once the immigrants arrive, however, they find that they are placed in positions with substandard pay, that their job security is tenuous, and that their

immigration status is in doubt. Some might say that this is what dreams are made of.

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