Agricultural Insights: Care Ethics in American Proletarian Literature

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Abstract

This dissertation examines proletarian fiction's multifaceted engagements with care ethics and socio-material relationships in response to the Great Depression. Through analysis of literary texts which focus on agricultural contexts, labour strikes, and reproductive labour on the West Coast, this project challenges ideas of proletarian literature as primarily being narratives of a masculine, revolutionary battle for the control of production in urban factory and mill settings. The labour struggles in these texts take place in grand forests, Edenic orchards, and lush fields. I argue that the authors' proximities to and concerns for these non-urban ecological settings influence their perceptions of the complex set of social, economic, political, and environmental issues meaningfully entangled in the working-class labour disputes. Moreover, this project complicates conceptions of collective marching as the labour movement's primary form in practice and symbol by showing how these texts do not focus only on masculine struggles against corporate exploitation but also suggest solutions that anticipate a feminist ethics of care. The exploration of various forms of care, as ethical concern and material practice, extends and complicates proletarian literature's concern with collectivity and collective action. I further argue that these authors experiment with care in relation to the more-than-human world, sometimes proposing the natural world as guide for human modes of care and suggesting the need to extend better care to the world's more-than-human inhabitants.

Over four chapters, I read texts by John Steinbeck, Clara Weatherwax, Langston Hughes, and Carlos Bulosan that offer a range of perspectives on California's and Washington's agricultural and lumber strikes in the 1930s. I argue that Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and Weatherwax's *Marching! Marching!* (1935) present opposing conceptions of working-class collectivity. While Steinbeck portrays marching as the activity of mobs who risk uncontrolled violence and a dangerous erasure of individuality, Weatherwax affirms marching as a pathway to heightened, embodied consciousness that understands the world as a harmonious, reciprocally beneficial collective. At the same time, both novels anticipate feminist care ethics in attending to care work as essential to economic work and labour activism. In contrast, Hughes and Bulosan do not emphasize the collective march as the most important expression of collectivity. Chapter Three shows how Hughes's 1934 play *Harvest*, co-authored with Ella Winter, demonstrates collectivity as forged by communication across perceived differences, while Hughes's poetry anticipates Weatherwax's concern with embodied selfhood. In Chapter Four, I show how Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* (1946) emphasizes that the building of collectives must be done through acts of care and that his poetry explores the relationships between care, humanity, and the more-than-human world. By reading these proletarian texts through feminist care ethics and new materialism, my dissertation shows how all four authors not only challenge competitive individualism and capitalist exploitation of nature but also consider positive solutions based in the prioritization of ethical care practices.

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Introduction

Proletarian Literature, Agriculture, and Care

> "Strikes were something most people knew very little about, something connected with railroads, steel mills, coal mines—damp, dark, dreary factories or places underground—not with sun and scented trees and bright fields."
>
> - Ella Winter, *And Not to Yield* (1963)

American Proletarian literature, like many of the strikes which it depicts, is often thought of as taking place in industrial locations like sweatshops, meat-packing plants, and mines. Developing in tandem with the resurgence of the working-class labour movement, proletarian literature has appeared not only primarily anthropocentric but also as tending to even narrower focuses in the figure of the white male worker as the ideal proletarian hero and in the image of workers marching into battle against exploitative factory owners. As journalist and activist Ella Winter expresses in her autobiography, the strike symbolizing the workers' movement simply did note evoke scenes of "sun and scented trees and bright fields" for most people. But Carey McWilliams's history of migratory labour and California farming, *Factories in the Fields* (1939), was revelatory in using the bleak symbolism of urban manufactories to expose the exploitation of workers in the agricultural landscape of the state touted as an American garden of Eden. McWilliams not only reveals generational, systemic abuse of migratory farm workers but also explains the industry's attendant racist exploitations. Released the same year as McWilliams's history, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), one of the era's most famous fictional representations of migrant farm workers, focuses not just on the masculinized fight between worker and employer but also on the feminized work of family relationships and questions of human relationships to the land. Similarly, other West Coast novels like Clara Weatherwax's *Marching! Marching!* (1935) and Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* (1946) also

challenged the popular image of the labour movement with more complex renderings of the people, material environments, and forms of collective action included in the labour movement. In this dissertation, I read Steinbeck's earlier novel *In Dubious Battle* (1936) along with three other lesser-known works of proletarian fiction set on the West Coast: Weatherwax's *Marching! Marching!*, Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*, and Langston Hughes's, Ella Winter's, and Anne Hawkins's play *Harvest* (1934). I argue that these texts challenge the view of proletarian literature as centrally concerned with urban settings and a white masculine struggle against corporate oppression and instead suggest solutions that anticipate a feminist ethics of care. I will demonstrate that a feminist ethics of care is a central feature of agricultural proletarian literature. In contrast to the typical picture of proletarian literature as representing urban factory and mill workers or miners in claustrophobic and dangerous settings, the labour struggle in these texts takes place in the often-beautiful settings of forests and fields, and these writers' proximity to and concern for these more natural ecological settings influence their perceptions of the complex set of social, economic, political, and environmental issues meaningfully entangled in the working-class struggle. I further argue that these authors experiment with care in relation to the more-than-human world, sometimes proposing the natural world as a guide for human modes of care as well as suggesting the need to extend better care to the world's more-than-human inhabitants.

These texts' exploration of various forms of care extends and complicates proletarian literature's concern with collectivity and collective action. Politically, the labour movement and proletarian literature encompass a range of positions collected in leftism, and integral to the left is a commitment to working for the well-being of the masses rather than the wealth of a small group of individuals. In both the actual labour movement and proletarian fiction, scenes of

collective action and marching are accordingly central symbols of this commitment to the well-being of the masses. As the authors in my study demonstrate, however, the preoccupation with marching as collective action overshadows that the collective action is rooted in quotidian practices of care. I argue that Steinbeck's and Weatherwax's novels offer opposing popular conceptions of collectivity. While Steinbeck portrays marching in *In Dubious Battle* as the activity of mobs who risk uncontrolled violence and a dangerous erasure of individuality, in *Marching! Marching!* (hereafter *Marching!*), Weatherwax affirms the collective action of marching as a pathway to a heightened consciousness that understands the world as a harmonious and reciprocally beneficial collective. In contrast, Hughes and Bulosan do not emphasize the collective march as the most important expression of collectivity. In *Harvest*, Hughes focuses on how collectivity is forged not only through marching but also through communication across perceived differences, and in *America is in the Heart* (hereafter *America*), Bulosan emphasizes that the building of collectives must be done through acts of care.

In arguing that concern for the restoring, maintaining, and fostering of care is a defining feature of these texts, I draw on feminist theorists of care such as Fabienne Brugère and material feminist theorists like Stacy Alaimo. A feminist ethics of care has three foundational components that help us understand how care functions in social relations: care as affective state, care as relational practice, and care as labour or work. For theorist like Brugère and Joan Tronto, care for ourselves, framed as "caring about," is an affective state necessary for ethical action, or "caring for" (Brugère 96). In contrast to a model of ethical decision-making guided by a fixed definition of moral rights and wrongs applied uniformly to discrete contexts, care as a relational practice prioritizes "caring about and thinking through relationality in decision making, entailing "attention to all the lives and beings which inhabit the world" (Brugère 51). Brugère's

philosophy intersects with material feminism as it considers "individual being[s]" (including nonhuman life), "natural element[s]," "object[s]," and "nature" (51) as parts of the more-than-human web of care "as ethics related to feelings and situations grounded in others" (81). Material feminists like Stacy Alaimo, Jane Bennett, and Marìa Puig de la Bellacasa focus more deeply on the material and nonhuman constituents within any given context. In their introduction to *Material Feminisms*, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman explain how "material ethics entails . . . compar[ing] the very real material consequences of ethical positions and draw[ing] conclusions from those comparisons" (7) and the necessity for "thinking through the co-constitutive materiality of human corporeality and nonhuman natures" (9). Accordingly, material feminism has concern not only for material-discursive interplay but also for the understanding and consideration of all physical bodies within a situation. For both a feminist ethics of care and material feminism, the affective state of caring for others cannot be a peripheral or minor consideration but instead becomes a necessary precondition for ethical action.

Finally, the physical, emotional, and intellectual work used in social reproductive labour comprise the active category of care work. These activities complement "caring about" with "caring for," and they include unpaid care work, paid domestic labour, and work within institutions whose primary functions are providing care such as schools, hospitals, and disability services. While labour activism and proletarian fiction often focus on economically productive labour, that is, labour which produces economic profit, and the struggle for better conditions in industrial workplaces, the agricultural proletarian texts in my study show how the labour movement must also include concern for the maintaining and fostering of care, and draw attention to the myriad ways in which ethical care—as affect, action, and labour—is fundamental to the vital functions of social, political, economic, and environmental systems.

Masculinist Origins and Evolving Definitions of Proletarian Literature

My intervention builds on scholarship from the late twentieth century that showed proletarian literature to be more complex than common conceptions which simplified the genre as involving a primarily masculinist aesthetic and a focus on war-like encounters between workers and oppressors. In her crucial early intervention *Labor and Desire* (1991), Paula Rabinowitz asserts that "The prevailing verbal and visual imagery reveled in an excessively masculine and virile proletariat poised to struggle against the effeminate and decadent bourgeoisie" (8), explaining that this dominant imagery overshadowed women's proletarian fiction and its critique of the subjugation of gender to class in political discourse. As Rabinowitz states, American proletarian literature traditionally featured masculine working-class heroes and workers uniting—often in strikes—to march into battle against exploitation. Yet, as Barbara Foley explains in *Radical Representations* (1993), although the "old left" was "inadequate in formulating theory and practice to address women's oppression," the 1930s leftist movement made gender equality a "live issue" (215). Foley's early and substantial contributions not only provide analysis of women writers and conceptions of gender in proletarian fiction but also encourage more complex readings of gender in proletarian literature in ways which avoid dichotomous, quantitative readings of gender and instead "understand the pros and cons in a way that permits a coherent qualitative judgement to emerge" (216). My project contributes to the development of this body of scholarship, building qualitative understandings that move beyond prevalent aesthetics of masculine struggle to argue that feminist approaches to problem solving are equally integral to defining proletarian literature. In returning to these works with a material feminist lens, this project shows that the proletarian literary field was not only diverse in gender but also draws on core tenets that have since been defined as care ethics and trans-corporeality.

Since the 1990s, scholars have continued to expand understandings of proletarian literature, often rebutting the common misconception of proletarian fiction as social realism and the persistent idea that leftist writings of the 1930s were primarily aesthetically challenged vessels for communism. Most notably, Alan Wald in *Exiles from a Future Time* explicates the shift away from communism by leftist writers in the mid-1930s. In a similar vein, Simon Cooper argues for the relationality of modernism and proletarian literature, asserting the avant-garde nature of proletarian literature. Proletarian literature has also been revisited more recently to better define the canon. Robert Noemi argues for the inclusion of slave narratives while Benoît Tadié contends that "politicized popular narratives . . . the hard-boiled/outlaw fiction" of the 1940s and 50s deserves to be called proletarian literature (99). While I do investigate some of the modernist technique in proletarian literature, rather than expanding the chronological definition of proletarian literature, my project returns to a core body of proletarian literature to complicate the symbol of marching, to consider the contributions of agriculture-based narratives, and to develop an understanding of care ethics.

My dissertation considers the complex interplay of masculinist and feminist ideas and aesthetics, in the work of both male and female proletarian writers, as strategic choices and socio-political interventions in this socially motivated literature. The appeal to masculinity can be seen in the genre's apex decades of the 1920s and 30s when writers and critics like *New Masses'* Mike Gold and *Partisan Review's* Mary McCarthy, who were both editors and contributors to their respective journals, attempted to shape proletarian literature and its writers. Gold wrote extensively on the subject, defining the proletarian writer as a "wild youth, the son of working-class parents, who works in lumber camps, coal mines, steel mills, harvest fields" ("Go Left" 4). Gold describes this young man as "sensitive and impatient" and "violent and

sentimental," and as more recent critics have noted, Gold uses phallic symbolism to describe the young man who "writes in exasperated jets" (4). Despite her own opposition to gender inequality and male dominance, McCarthy similarly promoted masculinist aesthetics and themes in proletarian fiction. For example, she calls Clara Weatherwax's writing "neurotic" while praising male authors who "have been taking man-size vigorous strides toward the creation of a proletarian hero and proletarian epic" (82). McCarthy's support for an aesthetic of masculinity in the genre also indicates a perplexing dissonance, since women were influential and important across the left, as McCarthy herself represents, yet sexism was persistent. In fact, critics like Andrew C. Yerkes have shown how the left and proletarian writers appealed to the preservation of conventional masculinity and heteronormative family models to offset fears that challenging structures of class and race would too radically change life in America. As Yerkes explains in his study of Depression Era literature, "writers and critics often articulated their arguments against the false divisions of race and class by relying upon a normative discourse of heterosexual domesticity" (66). In using the popular image of a working-class heteronormative man to offset fears that the labour movement might be too radical for the American public, proletarian literature created a masculinist image and promoted a conception of the labour struggle as a battle for supremacy between the worker and the boss. Yet, as I will demonstrate, though these masculine motifs were dominant, proletarian literature, and particularly the agricultural proletarian literature in this study, challenged these masculinist themes with interventions that anticipate new materialism and feminist care ethics.

Although questions of gender are central to my dissertation, my project argues that the agricultural proletarian texts on which it focuses comprise a unique site of engagement with multiple fronts of oppression. These texts radically reconsider solutions to the oppressive

structures of racial and gender hierarchy embedded in the economic systems to which the labour movement was responding. Like Rabinowitz and Foley, Michael Denning argues against narrow understandings of proletarian literature in his landmark study, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1997). Denning describes the 1930s as "a second American Renaissance" wherein the political left had tremendous and unprecedented influence on culture (xvii). My dissertation engages with his historical analysis of aesthetic ideologies like "revolutionary symbolisms, ethnic Americanisms, . . . labor feminisms" and "cultural formations" of Californian migrant narratives as my close readings demonstrate the dynamic interplay of aesthetics, politics, and identities that proletarian authors deployed with determination to influence real-world change (Denning xx). The agricultural texts in my study participate in the delicate balancing of multiple fronts that Denning details. They attempt to find unifying solutions while attending to different experiences of socio-economic problems, problems which a multitude of oppressive structures helped create and maintain but which are generalized under the broad concepts of labour and class struggle. Like Denning, I argue that these texts, in fact, question the prevailing tendency to subordinate other forms of oppression to class oppression. I further suggest that these texts demonstrate how class oppression dynamically intersects with a wide set of oppressive structures which rely on devaluing care-based approaches to thought and action.

Broad definitions of proletarian literature clarify its unifying features. According to Bill Mullen and the *Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Literature*, proletarian literature, simply put, is "strongly anti-capitalist literature by or about working-class people" that really came into being as a recognized genre with the Russian Revolution of 1917. Laura Hapke describes the genre's themes as "revolutionary awareness of class struggle; opposition to capitalism and competitive

individualism; and the value of collective action in combatting oppression and reshaping government" (583-84). Illustrating the genre's formal breadth, Foley identifies the four major genres of proletarian fiction as the fictional autobiography, the bildungsroman, the social novel, and the collective novel. More recently, scholars such as Robert Neomi and Sylvia Cook assert that proletarian literature also includes earlier eighteenth- and nineteenth- century genres such as the slave narratives of Harriet Jacobs (1861), Frederick Douglas (1845), and Oulaudah Equiano (1789), as well as depictions of the "industrial proletariat" by nineteenth century authors like Herman Melville and Rebecca Harding Davis. Summing up this trend toward broadening the definition of proletarian literature, Neomi concludes that proletarian literature is "writing in all literary genres, by, about, and primarily for working-class people, describing their experiences and often featuring anti-capitalist, pro-socialist, or revolutionary themes" (np). This current critical expansion of proletarian literature helps establish the genre's continuity as an activist genre against oppression and a genre that includes texts written by or representing the experiences of a diverse variety of people from various exploited populations and communities.

As these definitions show, proletarian literature encompasses a variety of genres and perspectives but is most frequently defined by its revolutionary opposition to capitalism, competitive individualism, and exploitation. In this dissertation, I complement these definitions by showing that the genre is also defined by its positive interest in questions of care. Rather than recuperating proletarian texts from other genres or eras, I focus on proletarian literature from the genre's most famous and productive era during the Great Depression; however, in working with a selection of less celebrated texts that focus on agricultural rather than industrial settings, I show that the genre always included a variety of approaches and was centrally concerned with questions of care. My dissertation makes a new contribution not only in defining care ethics as a

crucial feature of proletarian literature, but also in showing that proletarian literature's attention to the work of caring for material bodies includes more-than-human entities, showing a nascent understanding of material feminist thought in "understanding the substance of one's self as interconnected with the wider environment" and recognizing that this "profound shift in subjectivity" requires new ethical approaches which recognize both the imbrication of the cultural and the material and the reality of humans as parts of living networks of care (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 20). By showing that care ethics and concern for the connection between human and more-than-human life have always been central to proletarian literature, my project demonstrates how the texts may offer inspiration in our current struggles to respond to what Nancy Fraser calls the "crisis of care," a strand of today's larger "'general crisis' that also encompasses economic [and] ecological strands, all of which intersect with and exacerbate on another" (99). These texts offer insights into the crisis of care, the devaluing and exploitation of care workers and nonhuman nature, and the increasing subordination of care to economic production.

Care Work and the More-Than-Human World

In arguing that proletarian literature prioritizes care as both an affective state and an ethical starting position for social, political, and economic systems, I build on the important work of literary scholars, but I also draw on theories and methods of feminist care ethics and new materialism. These fields emphasize that care and care work are not only critical to reproducing the productive labour force, but are also essential practices outside of economic production, crucial to the survival and flourishing of all life. For this project, I draw on philosopher Fabienne Brugère's text *Care Ethics: The Introduction of Care as Political Category* (2019) to support my analysis of the nuanced ways in which these proletarian texts engage with facets of

care. I use Brugère's theorizing of care, which builds on a rich history of feminist theorists, to articulate how these texts look to socio-political contexts to critique damaged modes of care and absences of care as well as to suggest positive reforms. Additionally, I use Alaimo's work on trans-corporeality and material selfhood to show how the texts also anticipate new materialist theories of human selfhood as inseparably interwoven with larger material world.

The meaning of care can be difficult to capture in a single definition, but understanding its layered meanings is crucial to my analysis of the ways agricultural proletarian fiction deploys care as critical to the socio-political reform for which it advocates. Brugère defines care as

> A kind of practice. We care for the sick, for the young, for the elderly, for poor and excluded people, but also for each and every individual, for the environment, and for institutions: care affects both living and inanimate beings, as well as objects. In the human realm, it refers to activity of support that seeks to maintain, continue, or restore one's capacity to be, speak or act. (67)

Care, then, is an affective state and a consideration, but it must also be understood as action, for "understanding care as something we do materializes it as an ethically and politically charged practice . . . [T]o care joins together an affective state, a material vital doing, and ethico-political obligation" (Puig de la Bellacasa 42). Care work is synonymous with social and reproductive labour, as opposed to economically productive labour, which directly contributes to the production of economic value. Care includes the reproductive labours of maintaining homes and communities, preparing food, physical and emotional attention to children, elders, and others in need; in short, care encompasses everything done to sustain and encourage the flourishing of human life. Care work further breaks down into two categories of unpaid and paid reproductive labour. Most forms of paid and unpaid reproductive labour have been historically assigned to

women, marginalized peoples, and the working class in exploitative and oppressive ways, which adds a dimension of negative aspects of care. While we may think of caring about and caring for as positive, feminist scholars of care have also been wary of the societal pressure on women to freely give care. This not only obliges women to provide tremendous amounts of care work, but it also undervalues this work and historically has often confined women to a domestic sphere, traditionally without political or economic power.

Developing from feminist theory, a major concern of care ethics is care work, or the "caring for" component mentioned above that includes the conventionally unpaid labour most often socially assigned to and often a part of oppressing women, such as child and elder care, maintaining homes, preparing food, fostering community relations, and emotional care.[1] This set of care activities is now synonymous with the term social reproduction, which Karl Marx introduced in relation to economics in volume 1 of *Das Kapital* (1867) where he argues that the human body must have the physical capacity to perform economic labour, that this capacity is expended through economic labour, and that this capacity must therefore be continually replenished outside of the economic realm for workers to continue to perform economic labour. Marx argued that the capitalist economic model ignores or denies the importance of this social reproduction of the functioning worker. Nevertheless, as Tithi Bhattacharya attests, Marx did not develop the theory of social reproduction much beyond identifying its necessity to economic labour, provoking but not answering many questions about social reproduction (72-73). Bhattacharya argues that Marx's account of how labourers' capacity to produce economic value is restored is inadequate since "labor power . . . is not simply replenished at home" (73); if we

[1] Feminist care ethics evolved from feminist thinking and intervention, and therefore, our current field of care ethics is generally acknowledged as feminist care ethics even when simplified to just care ethics.

look further, “we begin to see emerge myriad capillaries of social relations extending between workplace, home, schools, hospitals—a wider social whole sustained and coproduced by human labor” (74). In capitalist economics, economic production and social reproduction seem to happen respectively in the divided realms of work and home lives, but feminist theorists of social reproduction and care work argue that this division is a false construct supported by dichotomous discourse of public and private, work and home, and that these realms are “actually united in the theoretical and operational sense” (Bhattacharya 74). Throughout modern history and the rise of capitalist economics, employers have benefited from denying and downplaying the simple fact that human ability to work relies on the human efforts of social reproduction—care work—which capitalist economics considers a private matter outside of economic labour. Feminist scholars such as Lisa Vogel, Silvia Federici, Leopoldina Fortunati, and Angela Davis first located this tendency in patriarchal societal structures, which benefitted from framing social reproduction as feminine labour which women were obliged to perform, largely without monetary compensation. Patriarchal societal structures therefore locate care work in the private realm of the home. This foundational analysis extends to economic structures where a capitalist class deploys a similar disavowal of social reproduction to profit from care work without having to recognize its critical role or to compensate those who perform it. A socio-political discourse which locates care work in a private, feminized realm enables employers in a capitalist class to deny care work’s direct relation to economic production and its crucial function in maintaining and advancing life.

While care ethics considers the activities and conditions of bodies, it is still primarily a human-focused philosophical mode of analysis. To better address proletarian literature’s attention to physical realities, my project also draws on material feminism, which brings “the materiality of the human body and the natural world into the forefront of feminist theory and practice”

(Alaimo and Hekman 1). Earlier forms of feminism focused on the discursive production of "woman" as category and how this discursive production enables oppression of women; moreover, analysis of language and power structures helps feminists to understand "how gender has been articulated with other volatile marking, such as class, race, and sexuality, within cultural systems of difference that function like a language" (1-2). As Alaimo and Hekman explain, however, material feminism must accompany these foundational forms of feminism through returning bodies and materiality to the largely theoretical feminist practice and crucially prioritizes understanding of "the very real material consequences of ethical positions" (7). Therefore, ethical positions may be assessed through material consequences as being more or less beneficial than other ethical positions to the survival and flourishing of material bodies, human and nonhuman. I draw on theorists such as Alaimo and Jane Bennett, who extend this consideration of material consequences beyond the human body to the more-than-human world. In *Bodily Natures* (2010), Alaimo demonstrates new materialist techniques in part through her analysis of representations of the damaged working person's body in early twentieth century literature like Muriel Rukeyser's *Book of the Dead* (1938). In her analysis of Rukeyser's documentary long poem sequence about workers who were exposed to deadly silica dust in the Hawk's Nest Tunnel, Alaimo argues that the poem "documents the environment" and that it portrays "a network of interrelationships, or social/material environments, in which human subjects are immersed" (*Bodily Natures* 47), allowing us to see how the poem helps us to think about the effects of capitalist exploitation on both human bodies and natural environments. Relatedly, in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), Jane Bennett argues that an ethical politics must consider events as always occurring through a distributed agency that includes the participation of nonhumans. Bennett writes, "bodies enhance their power *in* or *as a*

heterogeneous assemblage" (23, emphasis in original). This means that agency "becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts" (23). Bennett shows how a variety of participants propels every action, and while each participant may vary in levels of cognition and intention, the recognition and consideration of their involvement is necessary for a responsive and responsible political theory. Bennett asserts, "An understanding of agency as distributed and confederate . . . reinvokes the need to detach ethics from moralism and to produce guides to action appropriate to a world of vital, crosscutting forces" (38). These new materialist frameworks facilitate care ethics through careful attention to the material consequences of the absence of care and various modes of care, providing the substance on which an ethics of care must be based.

In addition to showing the crucial roles that care plays in economic production, then, Steinbeck, Weatherwax, Hughes, and Bulosan also critique employers' lack of care for workers and their families, revealing ways in which economic structures disrupt networks of care. Puig de la Bellacasa explains, "neglect, the biocidal absence of care, reveals [care] as inescapable; when care is removed, we can perceive the effects of carelessness" (79). This logic underpins a major concern of proletarian literature, as proletarian writers focus on physical and mental harms to critique socio-economic systems that devalue care to increase profit. Because the economic strain of the Depression prompted employers to pay less and provide even fewer and less adequate benefits, working-class people particularly felt the absence of care, both in what employers contributed and in their reduced capacities to care for themselves. Steinbeck, Weatherwax, Hughes, and Bulosan all use, but also go beyond, what Michael Denning calls the proletarian grotesque—the attempt to shock readers into understanding the conditions of the

proletariat. Proletarian grotesques, like Weatherwax's scene of a decapitated lumberjack or Bulosan's portrayal of a character's mangled genitals are meant to "wrench us out of the repose and distance" of removed readership, while the authors' concentrated attention to how these shocking situations arise illustrates the connected decisions, conditions, and lack of care that cause horrific workplaces injuries or deaths as well as related deadly incidents outside of workplaces, like vigilante violence, starvation, and disease (Denning 123). I argue that the agricultural proletarian writers use such shocking scenes not simply to force readers from an "aesthetic repose" but rather as the most engaging entry points into the failures of care in the social, economic, and political systems and compelling examples the need to develop systems that extend and support care.

Strike Response

As a social activist literary genre, proletarian literature steeps itself in real-world contexts, and Steinbeck, Weatherwax, Hughes, and Bulosan all respond to one of the most precarious and volatile periods for workers in West Coast agricultural industries. As William Cronon explores in his foundational text *Nature's Metropolis* (1991), cities like Chicago were built environments that, although still profoundly connected to and reliant upon the natural world, perpetuated an understanding of human production as apart from and even antithetical to nature—the illusion "[t]hat city and country are separate and opposing worlds, that their divisions far outweigh their connections" (17). Workers on the West Coast, however, were immersed in landscapes of abundant nature, and consequently, idealized conceptions proliferated of workers in Edenic environments were dichotomously paired with overworked city labourers in dark, dangerous factories. Yet, these seemingly natural environments were part of the same capitalist economy. In addition to fishing and shipping industries along the Pacific coast, the vast

expanse of fertile California valleys, then as now, supported a massive agricultural economy. The abundant forests spanning from Northern California to British Columbia supported a similarly booming lumber economy. These industries boomed with technological and transportational advances throughout the twentieth century. Advances and investments in irrigation enabled greater production, while technologies such as refrigerated rail cars and steam-powered logging "donkeys," coupled with a depletion of eastern forests, propelled these West Coast industries into expanded markets.[2] Moreover, like the urban factories, these industries relied heavily on migrant, poor, and racialized workers whose relative powerlessness contributed to the industries' growth and prosperity (Daniel 62). These changes, however, pushed workplaces further toward "asocial, mechanistic tenets of capitalism" (Daniel 34) that would devastate conditions of care and the material lives of workers.

The primary texts I examine in this dissertation were inspired or heavily influenced by real strikes that took place on the West Coast in the 1920s and early 1930s. From 1929 to 1935, Carey McWilliams writes, California saw "a series of spectacular strikes" that were "without precedent in the history of labor in the United States" (211). Similarly, Gray's Harbor County in Washington State, where Clara Weatherwax's hometown of Aberdeen is located and *Marching!* is assumed to take place, was a particularly active location for labour union action, with the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) and the American Federation of Labour (A.F.L.) organizing the area's lumber industry workers in the early twentieth century. These strikes had profound impacts and made headline news, and they became the focus of many literary texts, including the ones in my dissertation. Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* and the play *Harvest* that

[2] Logging donkeys are portable steam (and later diesel) winches used to drag and move logs, especially in rough terrain that had previously hampered West Coast logging.

Hughes wrote with Ella Winter both fictionalize the 1933 cotton strikes of California's Central Valley while Clara Weatherwax draws on the strike history of Aberdeen, Washington in *Marching!, Marching!*. Robert Cantwell, whose own novel *Land of Plenty* (1934) fictionalizes the same area's strike history, notes that even though Weatherwax never identifies the town, the novel is "packed with local allusions" ("A Town"). While the setting of *Marching!* is Aberdeen, Weatherwax lived in Oakland, California during the massive San Francisco General Strike of 1934 as well the 1933 Cotton Strike, and so, material from the California strikes inflects *Marching!* as well.[3] Further exemplifying the connectedness of coastal workers in different industries, Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* also references the Washington lumber industry and its long history of labour conflict through the pivotal character of Old Dan, a former top faller forced to turn to migrant work harvesting produce when he grows too old for the dangerous work of felling the tops of the tallest trees. Finally, Carlos Bulosan's semi-autobiographical proletarian novel portrays its protagonist traveling throughout California, Oregon, Washington, and even Alaska, working in canneries and kitchens as well as produce fields. Bulosan's character is immersed in the contexts and communities of workers and strikers in these various industries, merging real people and events that Bulosan encountered.

In portraying the conditions that led to the real-life agricultural workers' strikes, the agricultural proletarian texts of Steinbeck, Weatherwax, Hughes, and Bulosan show that the Great Depression increasingly damaged the already difficult relationship between social reproduction/care and economic labour. As labour historians such as Carey McWilliams, Cletus

[3] The San Francisco General Strike of 1934 was a marine strike in the Bay Area initiated by teamsters, longshoreman, and seaman, who were joined by laundry workers, butchers, and other workers. Starting on July 16, the strike involved more than 150,000 workers and was catalyzed by the police killing two strikers on July 5, 1934, colloquially known as "Bloody Thursday."

Daniel, and Devra Weber make clear, the severe economic decline during this era led to employers "passing as large a share of their losses as possible on to farmworkers" (Daniel 179). This occurred in agricultural regions of the West Coast which had long fostered a body of cheap labour through the creation of a permanent subclass [of worker] outside the mainstream of rural society" marked by "constant movement, low wages, squalid working and living conditions, social isolation, emotional deprivation, and individual powerlessness" (Daniel 64). What Daniel describes is not only a neglect of care but a near total denial of care's very role in social reproduction of the worker's capacity to work as well as to have a basically decent quality of life. I will argue that proletarian authors responded to this acute devaluing of care by thematizing and centering forms of care in their writing, demonstrating the necessity of care work, employers' dangerous failures to provide care, and the overall need for human life to be structure by a basic level of caring for all people. Moreover, in many cases, this call for care extends beyond the human, and while it does not completely move away from anthropocentrism, proletarian literature often gestures toward the way human practices of care depend on their connections in more-than-human networks, at times asking what forms of care humans need to extend to nonhuman beings and living environments.

This dissertation, then, asserts that agricultural proletarian texts of Steinbeck, Weatherwax, Hughes, and Bulosan complement their critiques of absent or damaged care with positive illustration of care as affective state, motivator of action, and action. While feminist ethics of care and new materialism provide tools for understanding these proletarian texts' illustrations of harm, they equally offer ways of understanding these texts' positive iterations of care and human enmeshment in material networks. Steinbeck, Weatherwax, Hughes, and Bulosan all recognize care in multiple forms, including as essential labour, and accordingly make

care and its material reciprocity central to their texts. In doing so, the authors assert that care—both as concern for others and as action—must be central to social, economic, and political structures. The rich natural environments in which these authors lived and in which their texts take place uniquely positioned the authors to not only better understand the absence of care but to also see how networks of care, as exemplified in the natural world, are crucial to the survival and flourishing of all life.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One introduces the multiple threads of my argument through close examination of John Steinbeck's first, but least known, migrant farm-worker novel *In Dubious Battle* (1936). This novel, which Steinbeck began as a non-fiction study of California strike organizers, encapsulates several significant themes, including the complexities of collectivism, the functions of reproductive labour, and human relationships to the natural worl. Under the advice of his literary agent, Steinbeck changed the planned non-fiction piece into a novel project, and significantly, he also began fashioning *In Dubious Battle* as a vehicle for his "group man" or phalanx theory. Steinbeck's interests in labour conflicts and biological and social collectivity collide in this novel to form a complex meditation on the inextricability of social, political, economic, and biological issues. Reflecting the novel's complexities, my argument draws heavily on Steinbeck's letters and historical context to make three major claims.

This chapter's first argument considers how the novel responds to the period's concern with collective action and the uncertainty regarding the possibility of mob violence. Undergirding this argument is an analysis of Steinbeck's phalanx theory, a theory he developed through observation of instances when biological entities join together to form a collective entity that is qualitatively different, and in Steinbeck's estimation, more advanced and powerful than

the individual component parts. While it is well known that Steinbeck experiments with presenting the collective of marching workers as a phalanx in *In Dubious Battle*, I argue that he actually presents a more fully realized vision the group entity through the book's portrayal of assemblages of strikers, sympathizers, and nonhuman agents. I employ Jane Bennett's extension of new materialist assemblage theories to consider the groups within the novel as "ontologically heterogeneous" assemblages "coalescing around a problem" (108). My second major argument for this chapter focuses on the work of social reproduction. I argue that Steinbeck carefully lays out the necessity of reproductive labour to show that it is inseparable from the realm of economic labour. The novel further reveals how many people in business and authoritative positions not only recognized the vital roles of reproductive labour in economic systems but also manipulated and engaged with reproductive labour to extort workers. Finally, my third argument asserts that Steinbeck heavily suggests the natural world and more-than-human assemblages are necessary components to socio-political remedies. Through its portrayal of more-than-human assemblages and care work, the novel shows how the labour movement could offer positive alternatives to battling for rights within the existing exploitative system.

In stark contrast to Steinbeck's ambivalence regarding the nature of collective action and the risks of mob violence and loss of individual agency, Clara Weatherwax's prize-winning proletarian strike novel *Marching! Marching!* uses the strikers' march at the book's end as a positive image of heightened consciousness and ethical collectivity. In this chapter, I closely read Weatherwax's *Marching!,* which won the *New Masses* 1934 contest for "the best novel on an American proletarian theme" ("Announcing" 7). By comparing Weatherwax's approach to collectivism with Steinbeck's, I demonstrate that both authors present collective action in the form of marching as the primary exemplification of collectivity. Moreover, both authors create

texts which significantly consider iterations of collectivity beyond marching. Both authors show how forms of collectivity created by the workers' movement go far beyond marching, including important networks of care among workers that provide essential physical and emotional supports.

Though it would be anachronistic to call Weatherwax's text ecofeminist, my analysis shows how *Marching!* works from many of the same core premises that are central to the theoretical work of ecofeminism. Weatherwax skillfully presents an intersectional understanding not just of different categories of humans but also of how humans are in social relations with the living forests and waters of the Washington State coast that houses a massive lumber industry. The novel strives to understand these natural and social environments as systems of overlapping, interacting life. Weatherwax considers the power relations between the diverse living inhabitants of the area even as she stages the horrific death of a logger due to poor equipment to show the material effects of capitalist exploitation on workers' bodies. While the novel focuses more fully on its human characters, a consistent exploration and critique of trans-corporeality emerges. Trans-corporeality, as theorized by new materialist Stacy Alaimo, is the porous interchange between physical bodies, human and nonhuman. Chapter Two shows how *Marching!* demonstrates the significant theme of proletarian literature in expressing and recording trans-corporeality in work-class bodies. Although Weatherwax faced criticism for her novel's more propagandistic moments, I argue that *Marching!* deserves positive consideration for its contributions to proletarian literature and its understanding of collectivity as intersectional practice based in care.

In Chapter Three, I examine the labour play *Harvest*, which Hughes wrote with Ella Winter and Ann Hawkins, along with short stories from *The Ways of White Folk*s (1934) and

several poems from the collection *A New Song* (1938). These texts were all written primarily in the early1930s while Hughes lived and worked in Carmel and San Francisco, California. In fact, *Harvest* and *In Dubious Battle* are based on many of the same strike events and related violent incidents. Together, this selection of Hughes's works provides an insightful cross-section of his most openly political period, showing how he experimented with a variety of literary forms to create art with considerable socio-political impact. By putting Hughes's 1930s work in dialogue with the project's other authors, this chapter illuminates both the texts' environmental concerns and the ways in which ethical care informs Hughes's socio-political vision.

I argue that Hughes not only critiques environmental degradation and inequality but also suggests that humanity must look to the natural world to answer injustice and inequality. Ecocritical work on *Harvest* and *A New Song* has begun with scholars such as Susan Duffy and Catherine Peckinpaugh Vrtis exploring the environmental justice aspects of water access in *Harvest.* Similarly, Julie Sze includes a brief reading of "Kids Who Die," a poignant poem appearing in *A New Son*g, in her recent book and encourages more environmental justice readings of Hughes's proletarian poetry. My argument takes up these threads, providing an extended and contextual analysis of the environmental justice concerns within Hughes's stories, poems, and co-authored play; however, my reading goes beyond the texts' environmental justice concerns to suggest that Hughes also turns to ideas of the natural world for corrective guidance to human injustice and exploitation. Drawing on theories of environmental justice and Black American environmental thought allows me to demonstrate how Hughes navigates related racial and environmental injustices to inject ecological hopes and concerns into these works, even when these concerns may be difficult to see.

While Hughes and Hughes and Winter engage with environmental justice in these texts, they primarily critique the socio-political order, and I argue that Hughes consistently proposes democratic methods that anticipate today's theories of feminist ethics of care. While my primary focus is on the labour play, the short stories and poems are integral pieces that demonstrate the undergirding principles of care ethics across Hughes's writing. I argue that reading these texts together helps clarify how *Harvest* depicts in the lives of the migrant agricultural workers the kind of "democratic culture, rooted in public debate and the possibility of dialogue" that Fabienne Brugère contends is necessary for a relational ethics of care (33-4).

Chapter Four shows how these concerns for care ethics and more-than-human relations are also central to Carlos Bulosan's poetry and his defining novel, *America Is in the Heart*. Bulosan, in *America*, focuses on the experiences of Filipino workers and presents their struggles as responses to a series of interwoven oppressions. By reading Bulosan's proletarian novel alongside his Bulosan's poems and essays, this chapter demonstrates that Bulosan, like Steinbeck, Weatherwax, and Hughes, turns to the natural world and concepts of care as antidotes to the complexity of socio-economic issues to which the labour struggle was responding.

In addition to considering the how Bulosan's text represents and reflects on the natural world, this chapter has three main arguments. First, I argue that Bulosan's *America* engages with and solves problems that 1930s critics had identified as weaknesses of proletarian literature, particularly addressing questions about the authenticity of the worker-writer, the reductiveness of proletarian conversion narratives, and uncertainty about forms of collectivity. Next, this chapter reads *America* as what Alaimo calls a materialist memoir, which prioritizes how "bodily immersion within power structures . . . have real material effects" (*Bodily Natures* 86). Here I show how the novel emphasizes both the necessity of care and the harmful effects of socio-

economic practices that neglect care. *America* takes on a complexity of intertwined socio-economic issues to deliver tremendous insight into the too high costs of commodifying life, while Bulosan's essays and poems implore us to base our socioeconomics in a recognition of the necessity of care and the value of the interdependence of human and nonhuman life. I use several of Bulosan's poems and essays to support my argument that the natural world in *America* is not simply symbolic, but is presented in its own actuality. By reading these texts together, I show that across Bulosan's writing, the living earth and ethical care are foundational to Bulosan's vision for a free and just world.

Chapter One:

Beyond the Mob: Collectivity and Care in John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*

> "There is a cycle in the life of a man but there is no ending the life of Man"
>
> John Steinbeck, Letter to George Albee

When, near the end of *In Dubious Battle*, the strike organizer Mac strolls in an apple orchard, he picks up and eats an apple, saying "I'd forgot about apples. Always forget what's so easy" (332). Ironically, Mac has forgotten the real, edible apple despite having spent the last week immersed in picking apples, organizing striking apple pickers, and living among the apple orchards. Yet, as Mac's protégé Jim begins to muse about the pair taking time to see things like how ants walk in lines or how apples grow on trees, Mac becomes annoyed and talks of his own need for "trouble" and the action of political organizing. Mac forgets once again the pleasure of the fruit and the beauty of the orchard for the thrill of battle. The dissonance Mac expresses in this moment lies at the heart of *In Dubious Battle*: humanity's preoccupation with fighting for power causes people to forget their interconnectedness and interdependency with each other and the larger living world. Accordingly, this chapter asserts that central to *In Dubious Battle* is the revelation that the socio-economic crisis manifested in the novel's labour strike makes visible the "great forces" in which all life is entangled (Steinbeck 285).

John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* takes the typical form of a proletarian strike novel, following workers and organizers in California's Central Valley who come together to fight labour exploitation. The novel builds to the crescendo of a massive strike, marked with violent skirmishes; however, *In Dubious Battle*, from the novel's title to the unresolved ending, exhibits ambivalence towards the terms of the larger social, economic, and political conflicts that the

strike represents. Published two years before *Of Mice and Men* and three years before *The Grapes of Wrath*, *In Dubious Battle* is Steinbeck's first of the three works dedicated to the experiences of migrant workers. As such, *In Dubious Battle* is more exploratory than the later, more celebrated texts. Steinbeck, in a letter to George Albee, explains that he had intended to write a "journalistic account of a strike," but in turning the project to fiction on the advice of his editor, he had "used a small strike in an orchard valley as the symbol of man's eternal, bitter warfare with himself" (99).[4] In another letter, Steinbeck assesses *In Dubious Battle* as a work of three levels: "surface, group-psychology, and philosophical through structure" (qtd. in French xv). Despite Steinbeck's nuanced intentions, typical readings of the novel tend to focus on it as a realistic portrayal of the migrant workers' fight for economic rights, on its psychological examinations of the strikers as mobs, and on its analysis of political currents of communism versus democracy. These critiques, while contributing valuable insights, often overlook the novel's central theme of care. In contrast, my reading shows that *In Dubious Battle* not only reflects on the politics of the strike itself but also critiques capitalism's erosion of networks of care and points to the importance of reproductive labour and care as antidotes to the failures of socio-economic systems.

This chapter examines several significant themes of *In Dubious Battle*, including the meanings of collectivity, the functions of reproductive labour and care in socio-economic structures, and humanity's relationships to the natural world. As a strike novel, *In Dubious Battle* engages with collectivity most obviously in the form of the strike march, which Steinbeck uses to explore his theory of the "phalanx" or a "group-man," a collective entity that is more powerful

[4] *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). These texts are often referred to informally as Steinbeck's Dust Bowl Trilogy, referencing the plains migrants fleeing ecological and economic devastation.

and fundamentally different from its single components. Using a new materialist lens, I will argue that Steinbeck's concept of the phalanx, which he presents as a "group-man" manifests not in the novel's mob scenes, as many critics assume, but rather in the more complex collectives which form in response to the cultural-material conditions. Steinbeck portrays the workers' movement not only through mobs of men, or a "group-man," marching into battle against opposing forces, but also through collective networks that are different from, and more powerful than, their individual constituents. In contrast to the marching mobs, however, these collective networks or assemblages do not focus on fighting, nor do they risk effacing individual identity as Steinbeck feared; instead, they work through care and promote the flourishing of the constituent components' lives. This reading shows that rather than only dwelling in uncertainty about marching and mobs, Steinbeck's novel reveals a positive vision for collectivity grounded in material and ethical concerns.

While many have argued that Steinbeck focuses on the flaws of the strike and camp organizers, I argue that the novel also portrays male characters engaging with and performing reproductive labour in ways which positively reframe care as essential to economics as well as to life. Unlike the other authors I will discuss in later chapters, Steinbeck departs from the historical reality and removes women and racialized people from many of the significant roles they played in the labour struggle. Although this replacement of female organizers ultimately goes against the intersectionality of the material and care ethics that I argue agricultural proletarian fiction anticipates, I argue that this is part of Steinbeck's strategy to elevate the status of reproductive labour by de-feminizing it and by casting female characters, like the story's young mother Lisa, as symbols of possible solutions to the socio-economic crisis that lie outside of the dubious and violent battle. Accordingly, the chapter shows that the novel's representation

of reproductive labour makes visible the connections between the exploitation of workers, gendered violence against women, and the abusive treatment of nonhuman animals. Though the primary level of conflict is the strike, the novel tacitly reveals this primary conflict is only one manifestation of capitalism's degradation of life-sustaining care. In looking to the novel's attention to care work and human relationships to the natural world, I assert that despite its ambiguity and its problematic downplaying of the active roles that female and racialized workers played in the labour movement, the novel provides the positive alternative vision based in care and material relationships that argue is a central feature are of agricultural proletarian literature.

Mobs Versus Care: Where Collective Power Resides

The landscape of California's fertile valleys and diverse coastal landscapes influenced Steinbeck's life as he lived and worked in these expansive natural environments. Steinbeck grew up in the small town of Salinas, only a short distance from the famous Monterey coast in central California. This geographical positioning put Steinbeck in a sparsely populated, village-like town, near the ocean and the central valley's ranches and farms, and he loved spending time walking, exploring, and doing outdoor activities. Additionally, Steinbeck worked jobs at local ranches and the Spreckles' sugar beet farm, which brought him into close contact with both the agricultural economy and migrant farm labourers. Along with this personal experience, Steinbeck, like anyone living in California at the time, would have been inundated with news of the farming strikes. The September cotton strike of 1933 was the thirty-seventh agricultural strike in California that year, and it is estimated that 65 percent of the state's crops were affected by strikes that year (Weber 79). Both the cotton strike and the coastal industry-led San Franciso

General strike[5] in the following year were marked with the murders of strikers. Armed farmers fired on unarmed strikers during the cotton strike while police officers killed two picketers in the lead up to the General strike. The disproportionate violence against strikers, the cotton strike, and the cotton strike leader Pat Chambers would all be key inspirations for Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*.

In fact, Steinbeck first conceived of the text that would become *In Dubious Battle* as a non-fiction "diary of a communist labor organizer," as told from the first-person perspective of Chambers (Benson 297-98). Although Steinbeck turned the project into a fictional novel, he drew on the events of real strikes and based many characters on real people, including Chambers,[6] who was a prolific strike organizer with the Cannery and Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union (CAWIU), and led many strikes, before the Cotton strike of 1933. Steinbeck bases *In Dubious Battle's* seasoned organizer, Mac, on Chambers, but the novel's protagonist is a young man, Jim, who becomes Mac's protégé. Disillusioned by his family's struggles to survive as working poor and catalyzed by the death of his last living family member, his mother, Jim goes to the local "Party" headquarters to join the labour struggle. After a short introductory period, Mac and Jim go to an apple orchard valley where there is news of labour exploitation and unrest where they hope to influence apple pickers into striking. While Steinbeck used Pat Chambers as his model for Mac, he drew on several different local strikes to form the details for *In Dubious Battle* and formed a fictional composite; however, the funeral march of the General

[5] This strike began with the longshoremen and other maritime professions, but other, non-maritime businesses such as local laundries joined the coastal industries in striking in solidarity, hence the "general strike" title.
[6] Journalist Ella Winter facilitated meetings with strikers for Steinbeck. Steinbeck also accompanied Winter and several others on a visit to the strike camps. Both Steinbeck and Langston Hughes knew Winter and reference visiting the strike camps with her, but oddly, there appears to be no record of Steinbeck and Hughes interacting despite the overlap in locations, acquaintances, research methods, and source materials.

Strike, the fruit pickers' (pear and peach) strikes, and the San Joaquin Cotton strikes of 1933 are particularly recognizable influences.

Although *In Dubious Battle* is partly social realism, the novel, as Steinbeck explains in the letter to Albee, was also an experimental medium for developing his psychological and philosophical ideas. Chief among these experimentations is Steinbeck's "group-man" theory, which he later renamed as the phalanx theory. In a letter to Carlton Sheffield in 1933, Steinbeck explains that he has been taking notes for years about biological group actions, citing the similarities between remarkable collective actions in nonhuman nature, such as the "strange and beautiful" architectural capabilities of coral insects who build coral reefs, and the achievements of human beings who created architectural forms like the Gothic spire. What these achievements share, Steinbeck posits, is a "mysterious" and "powerful" stimulus that compels large groups to create something individuals cannot. Steinbeck considers a range of examples and begins to theorize that he has uncovered some fundamental aspect of the nature of all living things. In this same letter, Steinbeck suggests not only that "the greatest group unit . . . has qualities which the individual lacks entirely" but that it also "remembers every step of its climb from the single cell to the human" ("Letters" 75). What scientists today theorize as genetic memory, Steinbeck essentially theorizes, too, but combined with the suggestion that the memory is only accessible when species' individual units come together to form a larger unit.

Soon after the letter to Sheffield, Steinbeck decided on the term phalanx for this "group unit."[7] In Steinbeck's view, the phalanx theory represented an opportunity to create literature that delivers significant understandings of human and nonhuman life to a larger public. He drew on

[7] Before settling on the *phalanx,* Steinbeck referred to his theory at various times as *the group, group-man, group unit*, and *group beast*. Characters in the novel use the term *group-man*.

the ancient Greeks to find a symbolic vehicle for his theme in the phalanx. Perhaps the most well-known definition of a phalanx is the historical Greek military maneuver in which several soldiers form a single, tight unit, standing shoulder to shoulder in deep rows, often with their shields joined in an overlapping manner and their pikes protruding in rows. The phalanx formation allowed several rows of pikes to attack at once, rather than just the first row, and it also created a wall effect to protect the group. Essentially, the soldiers within the phalanx formation moved and fought as one, creating both offensive and defensive advantages. The Greek word *phalanx* means "log" and refers to both the military formation and the likeness to a finger or toe. This definition provides another useful layer of meaning, for a phalanx is an entity composed of smaller entities, but it also represents an active, smaller piece, that is a digit, within a still larger body. Steinbeck's fascination lay in "the way the group has a soul, a drive, an intent, an end, a method, a reaction and a set of tropisms which in no way resembles the same things possessed by the men who make up the group. These groups have always been considered as individuals multiplied. And they are not so. They are beings in themselves, entities" ("Letters" 76). However, the militaristic and violent connotations of the phalanx also link Steinbeck's theory of collectivity with popular fears of mob violence. With its invocation of marching and war, the phalanx theory affirms on the surface the masculine conflict trope associated with proletarian literature and the labour movement and contributes to the novel's ambiguity since it suggests that Steinbeck shared these fears that strikes would lead to mob violence.

However, Steinbeck also uses his phalanx theory in *In Dubious Battle* to reframe the labour movement as not just a "dubious battle" between workers and employers over conditions of paid work, but also as a larger consideration of cultural-material conditions necessary for human lives, which led Steinbeck to question whether conflict and dominance are effective

means of change. In the novel, Mac's response to the strike situation is militaristic as he organizes the camp into something like a military base and creates squads of strikers. Steinbeck's critical portrayal of Mac's militaristic attitude is coupled with the novel's ambivalence about the battle between strikers and employers and its uncertainty over whether strikes inevitably turn into mobs in which people lose their identity and are pulled into the kind of violence that culminates in Jim's death. Consequently, although *In Dubious Battle* was well received upon its initial publication and was praised for its more literary intervention into the genre of proletarian literature, many have deemed the novel as not having a clear political message. In part, this is because *In Dubious Battle* reflects uncertainty in its deployment of the phalanx theory: even as it uses the phalanx or "group-man" theory to promote the necessity of collectivity, it fears that the marching phalanx will become a mob that is thoughtless and violent. Critics like Warren French assert that Steinbeck did not accomplish his own description of the phalanx because "no sense of amalgamation into the group supplants individual responses" (xviii), and this assessment is not completely incorrect, but it does show the hazards of distilling Steinbeck's observations and theories into the phalanx and the corresponding mobs within *In Dubious Battle*. In limiting our understanding of the phalanx theory to manifestations in which knowledge of the individual self is temporarily lost, critics like French fail to acknowledge other possibilities for interpreting the novel's representation of collectivity.

The public and early critics praised the novel for its literary artistry and its realistic and fair portrayal of an agricultural strike. Even the heavily communist-leaning *New Masses* praised the novel for not becoming "a disembodied course on Communism" or "mechanical" in its attempts to convey stories with heavily ideological components (Ralston 23). While many of the early readers of the novel lauded Steinbeck's refusal to wholly valorize either side in the strike

and felt *In Dubious Battle* to be a realistic portrayal of agricultural strikes, some on the left found this seeming impartiality flawed and unhelpful. Notably, leftist critic and author Mary McCarthy found the novel ineffective, comparing Steinbeck's writing to a man who talks through a play without ever saying anything of consequence (McCarthy, "Minority Report" 327). While McCarthy's critique of Steinbeck's refusal to clearly take the side of strikers is generally correct, the novel's message does not lie in taking one side over the other. Instead, its frame of analysis moves beyond the immediate battles of strikers versus farming conglomerates and communism versus capitalism.[8] The novel's message of "dubious battle" is that these endless battles will continue until humanity widens its understanding of the conflicts to recognize the deadly effects of undermining care and the need to foster socio-economic systems which prioritize care and ethical relationships with the material world.

While Steinbeck's phalanx theory most often is taken to refer to the mob actions in the novel, which suggests that collective power involves erasure of identity, caution, and responsibility, Steinbeck also recognizes the possibility of collectivity to increase the power of marginalized and exploited people and create a more ethical world. And his notes and letters on the biological aspects of the phalanx, as well as Doc Burton's discussion of the topic in the novel, suggest that the phalanx could also refer to powerful assemblages in other contexts. The group-man idea that became Steinbeck's phalanx theory arose from Steinbeck's observations of the natural world and comes from a fascination with the scalability of living units, from the smallest cells forming an organism to the core of his phalanx theory: multiple members of the

[8] The opposition to workers, as the literature and this analysis shows, often consisted of farm owners, plus bankers, county officials, sheriffs, vigilantes and other beneficiaries of the agricultural economies. Some of these alliances were official while others where covert, but when farm owners and conglomerates are referred to, it is helpful to recall a network on interested parties opposed the striking farm workers.

same species combining to form a larger entity comprised of, but different from, its individuals. This idea became the focal point for Steinbeck's exploration of collective connections in *In Dubious Battle* and is most readily seen in the novel's strike marches. However, the idea subtly permeates the entire text and includes representations of assemblages that do not necessarily involve battle and that include both human and nonhuman constituents.

Will Watson is one critic who finds Steinbeck's use of the phalanx theory problematic, arguing that the novel frames the strikes as an infection in the phalanx, and that portraying that the phalanx as a disease "dehistoricizes the masses of 1934." He notes that both Doc Burton and the third-person narrator define "mass action as pathology," highlighting their use of terms describing infection and poison (48). Watson argues, "by describing the mass movements of worker in pejorative terms and by invoking the language of surveillance and discipline . . . *In Dubious Battle* place[s] under erasure . . . the lesson of constituent power in the great strike" (50). Watson suggests Steinbeck was on the wrong side, the side that would extinguish mass action out of fear of mobs and would not recognize the "coming of consciousness" of mass action. Watson states that Steinbeck had a "vexed relation to constituent power," (57) and this certainly is seen through his portrayal of the phalanx as mob. However, alongside the novel's troubled view of mass action is a more positive understanding of constituent power. Expanding the frame of collectivity to the broader range of actions taken by the strikers allows us to see how the novel also shows the assemblage of constituents performing a variety of activities, many of which are care work, resulting in a more complex portrayal of mass action that suggests that the biological entity of the phalanx is not embodied only in the ambiguous mob but rather is happening continuously as the group of living entities comes together intentionally for a shared purpose.

The mob actions in the novel are frequently taken as the only expression of the phalanx, rather than as one of many possible iterations or an act of a phalanx. When the strikers form crowds within the text, Steinbeck deploys problematic metaphors that portray the phalanx as animalistic and violent. For example, when the strikers' camp gathers around Joy's coffin "the sound of their many voices blended into one voice, and the sound of their feet became a great restlessness . . . [T]here was a blindness in the eyes. The heads were tipped back as though they sniffed for something" (229). Here, the "blindness in the eyes" removes individualism, and the description of the people tipping their heads back and sniffing the air invokes an animal quality by emphasizing the olfactory sense. The animal senses suggest a sort of pack mentality with the removal of individual thought and the anticipation of attacking. The dead body becomes an impetus for violence and brings to life Mac's prediction that blood and death will activate something within the strikers and motivate them to keep fighting. Biological impulses drive this scene, and the references to blood, death, and animal behaviour suggest an uncontrolled violence linked to the biological. In this scene, the phalanx entity, though posited as an evolutionary advancement in many of Steinbeck's notes and letters, looks more like an evolutionary regression into primal and dangerous motivations.

But while Steinbeck uses negative connotation of animality to portray mobs as dangerous, he also suggests that the dangerous powers of the phalanx have the potential to help. When a crowd forms around a man who claims that the strike chairman London has canned peaches in his tent, London forcefully hits the man, and the crowd turns on him: "A heavy, sobbing gasp went up from the mob. The eyes flared. All the shoulders dropped and the arms bowed dangerously" (320). Seeing the crowd's anger with London, Mac intervenes and redirects their attention to the police barricade, and "a long, throaty animal howl went up" (321).

Steinbeck continually describes the mob moving in unison, making the same sounds and gestures: “The eyes of the men and women were entranced. The bodies weaved slowly, in unison. No more lone cries came from the men. They moved together, looked alike. The roar was one voice, coming from many throats” (321). As the mob moves to the barricade, the narrator describes them as a “silently and deadly efficient machine” and a “terrible mechanism” (321). Jim describes the mob to Mac as “one big—animal,” and Steinbeck uses Mac to voice again the idea of a phalanx:

> People think a mob is wasteful, but I’ve seen plenty; and I tell you, a mob with something it wants to do is just about as efficient as trained soldiers, but tricky . . . It *is* a big animal. It’s different from the men in it. And it’s stronger than all the men put together. It doesn’t want the same things men want . . . and we don’t know what it’ll do. (323)

Through this continued exchange, the idea of the phalanx becomes located in the mob and reinforces Mac’s frequent association of the mob’s potential for violence, blood, and unpredictability with ability to fight oppression. In this instance, the mob begins in negativity as it appears ready to kill London, but through Mac’s redirection, the mob makes a positive contribution to the strike as it breaks the police barrier. By the end of the novel, the ambiguous and negative interpretations of the marchers come mob dominate the text and vastly contribute to interpretations of the text as ambivalent in its support for either the farm owner or the workers. However, Steinbeck’s personal correspondence and Doc Burton’s introduction of the phalanx idea in the novel suggest that the phalanx idea may be interpreted in a broader, more positives way.

As Steinbeck’s interest in biological examples of the phalanx suggest, the phalanx theory need not be understood only in terms of battle formations but first may be thought of as a broader

assemblage of living entities that may include humans and nonhumans. As Jane Bennett theorizes, heterogeneous networks may form around a problem or struggle. These networks may be thought of as acting together for a common purpose, and their actions often take the form of reproductive labour. Steinbeck even applied the phalanx theory to himself as an artist conveying philosophical and scientific knowledge to the public. He wrote: "Art is the phalanx knowledge of the nature of matter and of life" and "the artist is simply the spokesman of the phalanx" ("Letters" 80-81). These examples reveal that Steinbeck did not confine the phalanx to marches and mobs. This human example, much like his example of how humans work together to create Gothic spires and microscopic sea creatures build great coral reefs, has no direct link to fighting or warfare and instead shows that great achievements of living beings, both human and nonhuman, are also iterations of the phalanx.

Recognizing the other forms of collectivity in the novel allows an understanding of the phalanx theory permeating *In Dubious Battle* as complex and occurring in numerous ways, and then the mob may be understood as one manifestation of the phalanx rather than its culmination. The representation of the imbrication of human, animal, and land within the novel implies the key to the power ascribed to the phalanx is an ethical consciousness of the connectivity of all living matter. Indeed, the original meaning of the phalanx as a finger bone gives a wider understanding of the collective unit, not as a homogenized entity acting in complete unison, but as a working piece or manifestation of a more powerful whole. In this way, we might understand the mob as an active piece or an event of the phalanx rather than the complete phalanx. In the next sections, I will explore how Steinbeck's novel expresses essential connectivity and collective care outside of the "mob" but in ways which still reflect the phalanx concept of powerful entity comprised of individuals. The novel points to this possibility when Jim tells Mac,

"It's something that grows out of a fight like this. Suddenly you feel great forces at work that create little troubles like this strike of ours. And the sight of those forces does something to you, picks you up and makes you act" (285). Through Jim, Steinbeck expresses the central premise of *In Dubious Battle*: that the socio-economic crisis does not only inspire a battle for workers' rights but also makes visible the "great forces" in which all life is entangled (285).

The novel rehearses possible meanings of the phalanx through Mac, Doc, and Jim's discussions. Doc says that he wants "to see the whole picture" and that people are flawed because they think once they "*establish* the thing," it will be done, but truly everything starts "changing right away" (149). As Mac tries to persuade Doc that Communism will cure social injustice, Doc likens the political situation to a human with a cut finger: when germs get into the cut, the cells must battle, and if the first cells lose the fight, "the fight goes up the arm" (150). He further explains, "these little strikes are like the infection. Something has gotten into the men" (150). Here, Steinbeck has Doc plainly define the phalanx:

> Group-men are always getting some kind of infection. This seems to be a bad one . . . I want to watch these group-men, for they seem to me to be a new individual, not at all like single men. A man in a group isn't himself at all; he's a cell in an organism that isn't like him any more than the cells in your body are like you . . . People have said, 'mobs are crazy, you can't tell what they'll do.' Why don't people look at mobs not as men, but as mobs? A mob nearly always seems to act reasonably for a mob. (150-51)

Doc's idea anticipates the new materialist concept of collective life as assemblages of bodies and materials emerging in collective action, or as Bennett puts it, "(ontologically heterogenous) 'publics' coalescing around a problem" (108). Drawing on John Dewey and Jacques Rancière, Bennett suggests that a form of political ecology emerges when a body of entities who have been

"harmed by the actions" of others, or even themselves, draw together to "restore their power, protect against future harm, or compensate for damage done" (101). While Steinbeck's application of this concept is primarily anthropocentric, he frames the situation through insights of biology, using cells and bacteria to explain the concept as not at all exclusive to humans, and as we will see later, the novel contains an undercurrent of an expanded consideration of nonhumans that further supports the proposal that nonhumans might be included in an expanded field of socio-political constituents. Importantly, Doc not only introduces the expanded possibilities of a "group-man" as being comprised of living entities other than humans but also identifies the "group-men" as formed when the workers come together to strike, rather than only when they are marching as a mob. Doc says *the striking workers* are the group-men. The striking workers do not become the group entity only in a mob; rather, the mob is a formation or action of the group-men, meaning there are multiple possibilities for the form of a phalanx.

Doc's configuration of the phalanx as the striking workers rather than the mob expands possible understandings of the text so that the phalanx need not refer only to the mob of marching strikers but also refer to the broader collectives which form to oppose worker exploitation may fill the definition of the phalanx. Certainly, Steinbeck's own examples of the coral reefs and the gothic spires are positive achievements of groups. Steinbeck further notes that a group "has a soul, a drive, an intent, an end, a method, a reaction, and a set of tropisms" which are unique to the group rather than its individuals ("To Sheffield" 76). These descriptions make clear that a phalanx is not simply an unthinking, violent, or dangerous mass—that it has potential for a range of qualitative actions. Moreover, the intentionality and reaction properties that Steinbeck attributes to the group entity aligns with Benner's account of the assemblages which form in response to a problem as Bennett explains. Viewed in this way, the positive outcome of

the actions of the group-man or assemblage of workers would have been the gains the real-life strikers won in both the cotton and the peach strikes. Despite Steinbeck's decision to end the novel with the individual tragedies of Mac and Jim, his portrayal of the phalanx in the novel as a whole is better understood not as the mob alone but as the larger entity that the strikers form as they struggle for justice. This entity is defined and sustained through its constituents caring about and for each other and the group, and this is what enables them to achieve things no individual member could alone.

Caring is Political

While the phalanx as mob is a significant part of *In Dubious Battle's* examination of collectivity, the novel also challenges masculinist framings of proletarian literature's focus on marching and battle through its attention to the importance of reproductive labour, or care work. Reflecting real-world conditions, the novel shows how the workers and their families' lives were utterly tied to the decisions of their employers. The novel reflects the reality that housing, food, water, and hygiene were largely dependent on the employers creating access for their employees because of the migratory nature of the work and the expansive tracts of farmed land. Consequently, this increased dependency brings to the fore the fact that "activities of care," which capitalist economies most often ignore or hide, are "sin qua non conditions of economic activity" (Brugère 6). As the workers in the novel move from survival mode in the make-shift worker camps to opposing their own oppression as group, they emphasize caring about each other and performing care work for the good of the group. The strike and the strikers' camp represent a broadening of the phalanx idea—biological units uniting into something greater than the sum of their parts—as the workers come together to ensure physical and emotional needs of the group are met and to advance the strike. The emphasis on the workers' biological or physical

needs in relation to their socio-economic objectives recalls the phalanx theory as a joining together of biological units to become something different and more powerful than the individual. Complementing the positive exposition of care activities and networks is the novel's meticulous depiction of the ways in which the socio-economic conditions of capitalism erode capacities for care.

Accordingly, while *In Dubious Battle* replicates the common framing of proletarian literature as a story of masculine workers struggling against wealthy, abusive bosses, the explicit narrative is accompanied by a broader exploration and critique of the erosion of networks of care. Jim's family history links men's mistreatment of women with capitalism's mistreatment of workers. The "interconnection and interdependency" which Puig de la Bellacasa explains as crucial to feminist ethics and foundational to networks of care are often associated with family care, and Steinbeck uses Jim's family to illustrate its degradation by capitalism. At the beginning of the novel, Steinbeck shows that Jim joins the workers' movement and possibly the Communist Party because his family is broken down and "everything in the past is gone" (15). On the one hand, Steinbeck creates a masculinist narrative, showing that Mac and the "Party" recruiter Harry know Jim's deceased father by his "reputation for being the toughest mug in the country" (14) and revel in toughness in fighting for workers' rights. On the other hand, Steinbeck builds a picture of a broken man, family, and society which emerges as a correlative to this masculinist narrative. Although Jim is telling the story of his father—a hard fighting working man—the novel also reveals the tragic lives of Jim's mother and sister, suggesting the family is a network of care eroded by the direct and indirect contexts of exploitative capitalism.

Jim's unnamed mother suffers continuously as she attempts to care for a family experiencing direct and direct consequences of worker abuse. As Brugère explains, care—both as

affective state and action—has been a "key concept in the partitions between the public and the private," with care assigned almost exclusively to the private and as women's work (74). Jim's mother cares for her husband, who is deeply traumatized and angry, in private. As a "sticker" in a slaughterhouse, Roy Nolan works a brutal job, killing animals all day long; moreover, Roy is constantly frighting for workers' rights and receiving regular beatings from the police. He is awash in blood and violence with no provisions made by employers for his well-being. Jim recalls how his mother would wash the blood from Roy and tend his wound, and no one would speak to Roy at these times because it would make him cry. Strangely, Roy also refuses to let his wife, a Catholic, attend church with only the explanation that "he hated churches" (14). In his anger, he removes a source of support for his wife, showing a chain of degradation. Roy finally dies while trying to blow up the slaughterhouse, and the mother eventually turns catatonic. She further suffers because Jim has been "vagged"—a term for jailing a vagrant. Jim is not a vagrant, though; he was swept up in a workers' protest where police commonly used charges of vagrancy as an excuse to jail protestors. Jim's mother dies alone while he is in jail, unable to do anything for her. The mother is not only overly burdened with her role as sole provider of care for her family but she is also undermined by the attacks on her capabilities due to the public realm .In the next chapter, Steinbeck reveal Jim's sister had disappeared earlier, adding to both the theme of male violence against women and the mother's collapse in the face of overwhelming challenges.

Jim begins his story by saying, "My whole family has been ruined by this system," yet the stories he tells do not focus on money problems, work-place injuries, or even unemployment. Instead, they show how the system attacks Jim's family through fostering violence and undermining their abilities to care for one another. Jim recalls that he "used to have a sister" and

fondly remembers how good she was at playing marbles" (19). Jim tells the story of May's disappearance when she was 14 years old. He explains that May was becoming a young woman and would spend time sitting on the stoop with other girls and "giggle when boys went by" (20). Throughout the explanation, the passage makes clear that May is going through puberty and that Jim genuinely cares for his sister. One day, May simply does not come home. The family is traumatized: Jim says, "I remember every bit of it, what everybody said, and how everybody looked." The father becomes angry, and the mother prays silently and starts out the window. Twice, Steinbeck describes the mother's staring eyes as "white stones" (21), invoking her catatonic stare described in the first chapter. The disappearance becomes increasingly disturbing as the family is certain May would not run away, and May's friends insist that she had no romantic interests that might have drawn her away. The text therefore implies May has been maliciously targeted and directly ties her disappearance to the sexual motives through stressing puberty and May's changing body. Moreover, the idea of a sinister abduction is reinforced when Jim finishes the story by stating the same thing happened to another girl two years later. The stories imply a system that turns men violent. Through the story of Jim's family and his parents' struggles to perform the most fundamental reproductive labour of raising children, Steinbeck illustrates the erosion of care networks and reproductive labour early in the novel and establishes the workers' movement as a visible point of a much more complex problem, a problem that shows how public and private lives are connected.

The novel develops this point through a structure in which the masculine surface narrative focusing on the strike conflict is intertwined with a shadow narrative of the unraveling of networks of care as Mac and Jim set out with hopes of propelling unrest among the apple pickers of Torgas valley into a strike. While critics typically read Mac as relentlessly masculine

and ruthlessly committed to the cause, the novel shows that he is also a primary caregiver to the strikers along with Doc Burton. Doc is not a member of the Party, and he is conflict weary, especially since serving as a doctor in WWI, but he agrees to oversee the camp's health through sanitation methods and medical services. Sick of the physical suffering he has seen, Doc is a gentle foil to Mac's aggressive agitation. Mac is assertive in directing Doc to make the camp's sanitation above reproach and in ensuring food and supplies for the strikers, but he appears to do this more for the sake of the labour fight than for the sake of the people. Accordingly, Mac's focus on health and sanitation in support of the labour conflict, along with the cultural romanticization of care work as a womanly pursuit done for love alone, obscures readers' ability to recognized Mac's efforts to care for the workers and their families as care work. The orientation of Mac's care work as part of an economic dispute frames his caring in terms of "justice, fairness, and rights" aligning him with masculine side of moral reasoning rather than the relational care ethics that feminist scholars have argued is more typical of women (qtd. in Tong and Botts 1183). Yet, as many care ethics scholars explain, although care work often attends to personal needs, it is not only done out of affection: it is often borne of obligation. Consequently, Mac's obligation and motivation to provide care make his care work less recognizable as care. When Mac and Jim arrive at the workers' makeshift "jungle camp," the men are complaining about decreased wages, but as in Jim's stories of his family in the previous chapters, the focus shifts from the economic fight to the breakdown of networks of care and of people's abilities to maintain basic necessary levels of care work.

In fact, Mac establishes authority and good will with the migrant workers through care work and simultaneously, the novel recasts the most iconic symbol of reproductive labour—a woman giving birth—as a moment of collective work done by men. Feminist ethics of care

crucially explains that caring is not synonymous with mothering or femininity. Mothers are often treated as symbols of care, however, and Steinbeck deploys this symbol in a complex way. When Mac and Jim arrive at the workers' makeshift camp, they find a young woman, Lisa, is giving birth. When Mac enters her tent, an "old woman" is overseeing the delivery, but London, a camp leader and Lisa's father, thinks "she's nuts" (60). Mac quickly usurps the woman's role in delivering the baby, and he speaks negatively about the woman being old and dirty and using poor supplies. The old woman says she has delivered babies before, but Mac pushes her aside and the others are happy because they believe Mac is a doctor who knows what he is doing. Although the baby is successfully born, Mac later tells Jim, "That old woman knew lots more than I did. I think she knew it, too" (66). Although his dismissal of the midwife is problematic, Mac encourages community through creating an opportunity for all the male strikers to perform an act of care when he asks the people to boil water and donate cloth for the baby's delivery. Mac frames the situation as work, telling Jim, "Men always like to work together . . . Every man who gave part of his clothes felt that the work was his own. They all feel responsible for that baby. It's theirs because something from them went to it" (67). To establish the positive conception of work as something collective and caring, Steinbeck blends male, collective work with the symbol of Mother, invoking the associated ideology of selfless caring. Ironically, however, the old woman and Lisa are disregarded and used to make this point.

Critics often point to this scene as proof of Mac's ruthless Communism because he risks Lisa's and the infant's lives to build his own authority and create collective care among the men. Mac appears shockingly callous when he explains to Jim why he pretended to be a doctor: "Course it was nice to help the girl, but hell, even if it killed her—we've got to use anything" (66; ch.4). He explains the necessity of using the event to gain the confidence of the people and

bring them together. Here again, is a contrast of surface and shadow narratives, as Mac recognizes the importance of emotional and collective care for the workers but in a calculated way that furthers the strike but ignores female suffering and knowledge. However, through the contrast between Jim's broken family in the previous chapters and the most celebrated form of reproductive labour, childbirth, the novel emphasizes the central importance of reproductive labour and care to the "dubious battle" of the labour conflict. This suggests at least some of the conflict's dubiousness, in Steinbeck's view, comes from a narrow conception of the conflict as a struggle simply about working conditions and wages rather than a conflict over harmful divisions between economic work and care work, between competitive individualism and the reality of collective interdependence.

Focusing only on Mac's tough commitment to systemic change through strike action misses his role as caregiver. Conceptions of care as something always given freely and with love contribute to our difficulty recognizing care in its less sentimental forms. Mac's caring for the working class in the larger sense of wanting to make systemic changes to benefit the working and living conditions of everyone sustains him and his political cause, but in a more immediate sense, Mac provides or oversees the reproductive labour that sustains the strikers and their dependents. Moreover, Mac takes on an intimate care of Jim that resembles that of a parent or romantic partner. Steinbeck displays in Mac different facets of caring. Through the more pragmatic and even bureaucratic acts, like ensuring that Doc Burton gives everyone physicals and creating effective work details, Mac shows the need for care that the employers have neglected. Steinbeck uses Mac's constant care work to emphasize that, as feminist theorists would later argue, "the capitalist economy relies on . . . activities of provisioning, caregiving and interaction that social bods, although it accords them no monetized value and treats them as if

they were free" (Fraser 101). Though Mac's calculated use of others to further the political cause, dogmatic commitment to masculinized confrontation, and objectification of women may obfuscate his role as care worker, Mac is the unrelenting emblem of the reproductive labour that the capitalist farmers refuse to provide or acknowledge.

While Mac's care work in service of the strikers and the camp could be seen as simply a mean to his primary goal of winning the battle against the farm owners, Steinbeck undercuts this pragmatism by portraying Mac's suffering and moments of affectionate caring, which demonstrates an affect of care, or the "caring about" component that Brugère argues is necessary for a true relational ethics of care. For example, when vigilantes burn down Mr. Anderson's barn where Anderson's entire apple crop is being stored, Mac puts "his arm around Anderson's waist" (267) as a gesture of comfort, but Anderson pushes him away. Mac looks "weak and sad" as he watches the barn burn (267). Similarly, Mac must beat a vigilante who tried to shoot the strikers so that the vigilante will warn away others, but he is just a crying high school kid. After beating the kid, Mac sits, his muscles shuddering and "his face pale and grey," and he tells Jim, "I couldn't of done it if you weren't here" (279). Steinbeck also includes touch in this moment as Jim holds Mac's wrist and comforts him. These incidents emphasize physical and psychological care as well as emotional connection in contrast with the disconnection which authorizes violence and brutality. Mac exists in a liminal space between what feminist theorists would later identify as masculinist ethical reasoning—one which permits brutality in the name of justice—and feminine ethical reasoning which values caring about and immediate contextual relationships. These incidents help reveal Mac's care as not simply instrumental, but as an expression of caring about as well as caring for.

The text acknowledges the cultural framing of specific types of reproductive labour as feminine but subverts this gendered framing by locating those traits in Mac, an assertively masculine character. Doc, for example, expresses Mac's range when he says, "you're the craziest mess of cruelty and hausfrau sentimentality, of clear vision and rose-colored glasses . . . I don't know how you manage to be all of them at once" (212). Doc frames Mac's organizing work in gendered terms, aligning reason (clear vision) with doing what is necessary (cruelty) as the masculine opposite of feminine affectionate care ("hausfrau sentimentality") and unrealistic idealism and stating that Mac embodies a mixture of both masculine and feminine traits. Indeed, Mac had just spoken with tenderness for his dead friend Joy and passion for stopping people's suffering—right after explaining that they need to use Joy's body to inspire the strikers. London sincerely compliments Mac on his "pretty speech," prompting Mac to look up "guiltily" and see if London is being sarcastic. Jim also describes Mac's attitude as feminine when Mac worries about the rain upsetting the strikers. Jim tells Mac, "You're getting just like an old woman," and Mac replies, "Well, it's my strike—I mean, I feel like it's mine" (193). The exchange implies Mac has a sense of caring possession for the political action of the strike and the people who comprise it, not unlike a mother caring for a child. These specific instances of irreverent gender questioning of Mac's masculinity allow Steinbeck to defy the idea that traits such as logical reasoning are particularly masculine, or traits of emotional concern are particularly feminine. Instead, these features all exist in one man who is attempting to reconcile the parts in a way that will help the labour cause. Mac essentially attempts to tend to all the parts of the labour conflict, including both the battle for justice and the care networks supporting the strike and its people. The idea that his care work is feminine and trivial is inconsequential and barely entertained. In this way, Steinbeck rehearses and dismisses the ridicule of care and care work as feminine.

Even Mac's tendency to use people in service of the cause is countered by his relationship with Jim. Throughout their journey, Jim regularly asks Mac to give him something to do, but Mac is reluctant to put Jim in danger and tells Jim he wants him near him. After Jim is shot in the shoulder, he is in pain but still wants to walk with the others in Joy's funeral march, but Mac insists he ride in the truck. Jim objects, saying the other men would not like him getting special treatment, but Mac has already thought of this and arranged for the pallbearers to also ride in the truck so that Jim does not appear to be getting special treatment. Mac not only cares for Jim here but knowingly hides his actions because they appear to go against the equality of the strikers. This instance is only one of many where Mac ensures Jim's safety and comfort. Mac brings Jim food, ensures he gets rest and medical care, and discusses his feelings with him. Mac's genuine care for Jim exceeds his pragmatic dedication to the strike in these moments, complicating the notion that he is ruthless in his pursuit of the political cause. In fact, the contrast of genuine care for Jim and pragmatic decision making suggests that caring is essential to Mac's human nature and that he is trying to atone for those he has previously sacrificed through now caring for Jim.

Although *In Dubious Battle* realistically portrays many of the historical conditions and actual strike events, it significantly departs from historical reality and reinforces the masculinist perception of strikes by placing white men in all the leadership roles and in most of the care work role, removing women from important roles in the labour movement. He also further perpetuates the subjugation of race to class when he removes nearly all people of colour and African Americans from his account of the strike. Some critics have pointed out the text's erasure of racialized workers, but critical discussion of the novel's portrayals of women is lacking. More than 75% of California's migrant workers were Mexican by the start of the Great Depression,

with a significant population of Filipinos (Daniel 180), and though exact data on gender are less available, large numbers of women worked in the fields and canneries and participated in strike actions. In fact, Pat Chamber's second-in-command for the cotton strike was a young woman name Caroline Decker. The daughter of Jewish immigrants, Decker was a member of the Young Communist League and had helped organize a coal miners' strike in Tennessee known as the Harlan County War. Decker, by many accounts, was an extremely knowledgeable and effective strike organizer and leader, but Steinbeck chose to replace her with a fictional and the new-to-the-cause male character, Jim. The significant numbers of women, African Americans, and people of colour working as migrant and domestic laborers reflects the complexity of the labour struggle as enmeshed with gendered and racial discrimination as well as class exploitation. Because of Steinbeck's commitment to extensive research and his relationships with activists and workers during this period, we know he was well acquainted with the diverse composition of the labour force and strikers. Although his decision to recast the novel's characters almost exclusively as white men is a troubling historical erasure, it contributes to the text's promotion of care and care work, since the alignment of white men with care work challenges the dominant culture's devaluing of care as the domain of women and racialized others.

Steinbeck's reasons for making the main characters white are more apparent than his reasons for excluding women from the strike. In the extensive study of California farm workers, *Bitter Harvest,* Cletus Daniel explains the decades of purposeful exploitation of racialized workers in California. Waves of Chinese and Japanese immigrants preceded the Mexican and Filipino workers, and with each group, the agribusiness owners justified their exploitation by promoting a demeaning belief that these racialized groups were inherently physically and culturally suited to seasonal agricultural work with its "irregular work, constant movement, low

wages, squalid working and living conditions, social isolation, emotional deprivation, and individual powerlessness" (Daniel 65). Employers capitalized on and promoted racial prejudices to make their own actions appear less predatory. The smaller groups of Black and white migrant workers in the years before the great Dust Bowl migration were similarly cast as socially degenerate and deserving of no better, despite their seeming advantage as American citizens. In his definitive biography of Steinbeck, Jackson Benson attributes Steinbeck's decision to focus on white workers to Steinbeck's concern that exploring racial issues might distract readers from his phalanx theory. Benson also suggests Steinbeck may have thought that making the workers white would boost middle-class white readers' sympathetic identification with the workers' struggles. When considering gender in the novel, however, Benson only puts in parenthesis, "in life, women and children also rode in the strike caravans" (308). In a collaborative article with Anne Loftis, Benson provides more information on the presence of women strikers as he and Loftis assert that Steinbeck excluded of both people of colour and women from *In Dubious Battle* to limit "distraction" (Benson and Loftis 214) from his themes of "man's bitter warfare with himself" and the phalanx or "group man" (qtd. in Benson and Loftis 222). According to Benson and Loftis, Steinbeck thought that portraying women participating in the strike organization and action would distract in the same ways that "racial differences . . . would complicate the picture and detract from [Steinbeck's] themes" (210) Most critics have followed a similar pattern of either ignoring the text's lack of portrayal of women in agricultural labour and labour organizing or assuming that this absence is because Steinbeck thought his other themes more important. The novel's relative lack of women characters, however counterintuitively, contributes to its socio-economic argument for the recognition of caring about and for workers. Wages and working conditions may be the focal points of the workers' movement, but care-based

ethics and life-sustaining networks of care are the endangered critical components of life which the workers' struggles make evident.

Steinbeck's examination of the care work that enables workers to perform their jobs makes visible the care economy and the argument that care work is not extra-economic. The novel illustrates how extremely low wages undermine people's abilities to fulfill basic needs, and it suggests that reproductive labour must be culturally valued and financially compensated. Consequently, the novel's minimization of female characters from active caregiving roles may be considered not as a misogynistic refusal of women's agency, but rather as an attempt to circumvent misogynistic arguments that care work and care-based ethics reside in a separate feminine sphere, unrelated to economic production. However, Steinbeck's tactics for elevating the status of care and care work nevertheless participate in the masculinization of the labour conflict and proletarian literature. The text still marginalizes women, treating them as symbolic rather than as active participants in political and care work.

The marginalization of women within the text intersects with popular concerns that proletarian literature maintain a masculine identity and aesthetic, and Steinbeck's contemporary reviewers reflect this. For instance, Edmund C. Richards derides American fiction for having a "feminine aura," exemplifying an even broader unease for femininity in any American literature; however, Richards praises Steinbeck for being "primarily a masculine writer" (409). Mary McCarthy, who had previously praised male authors like John Dos Passos for "taking *man-size* vigorous strides" in the creation of proletarian fiction, panned *In Dubious Battle* despite the largely positive response from the public ("Saint Francesca" 392). McCarthy posits that "a revolutionary general with a talent for prose," like Trotsky, could have made an exciting novel of class warfare, but Steinbeck's novel is "academic, wooden, inert" with a lack of dramatic action

and too much "tedious" monologuing ("Minority Report" 326-27). With negative allusions to academia and the theatre in the review, McCarthy subtly invokes the sexist rhetoric which associates academia, arts, and literature with femininity as an insult.[9] Indeed, as Paula Rabinowitz demonstrates in her pivotal study of women proletarian authors, proletarian writers of both fiction and nonfiction were vexed by the conception of literature and intellectualism as bourgeois and effeminate because this seemingly placed them at odds with the workers' movement because it was popularly configured as a movement by male workers. Because writing is primarily intellectual work, many writers felt awkward in their dedication to proletarian writing and its valorization of manual labour. For writers who wished to build their proletarian credibility, emphasizing and celebrating masculinity could better align them with the popular picture of the proletarian male worker. "By carefully defining a new type of (proletarian) writer" Rabinowitz explains, "literary radicals were distinguishing themselves from the feminized position of the traditional intellectual" (45). Steinbeck's reduction of female characters responds to the socio-historic moment, shaping his intervention into the workers' struggle. Steinbeck's concessions may or may not reflect his personal feelings, but they do testify to the influence of sexism and gender insecurity at the time. Steinbeck seems to emulate this tactic of emphasizing masculinity in *In Dubious Battle*, but his reasons appear complex. Not only does Steinbeck distance himself from the feminine scholar-writer trope, but he also distances care work from femininity and therefore reframes it as more credible labour.

[9] It would be disingenuous to present McCarthy as sexist even though she contributed to the rhetoric idealizing masculinity in labour and literature. Her legacy is more complex, and she contributed to women's advancement with stories like "The Man in the Brooks Brother's Shirt" which shows a liberated and complex engagement with female empowered sexuality.

Although women characters are scarce in *In Dubious* and removed from significant roles in the political struggle, women in the text do give privileged insights into care and support the novel's assertion that a struggle for socio-economic power is not enough if it is not accompanied by prioritizing care. The iconic female characters in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon, have fueled analysis of women characters in Steinbeck's later novel, but Abby H. P. Werlock provides perhaps the only dedicated analysis of Steinbeck's treatment of women characters in *In Dubious Battle.* Noting the absence of women strikers and organizers in the novel despite their real-life presence, Werlock argues Steinbeck was not simply overlooking women or avoiding overcomplicating themes, but rather using "the image of woman . . . to underscore and amplify mythical allusions (Werlock 48). This is particularly notable in the erasure of Decker, Pat Chambers's experienced and savvy co-organizer of the San Joaquin Cotton Strike whom Steinbeck replaces with Jim in the novel. Decker's gendered exclusion from the text leaves the novel's political realm to what Werlock describes as "plotting, violent, and fanatic men" and places women firmly in the symbolic realm. According to Werlock, Lisa, the young woman who gives birth at the beginning of the novel and to whom Jim is attracted, serves as a midwife to life, "a composite figure of mythical mother," representing the feminine, motherhood, and the earth (62). Steinbeck makes Lisa and the novel's other female characters a metaphysical antidote to his own assertion that "man hates something within himself." The novel expresses the violence, greed, and darkness of humanity through the socio-political struggles of the men, while the cooperation, intelligence, and love of mothers remain present in a handful of important female figures such as Lisa and Jim's mother.

However, considering Lisa and other women characters as only symbolic misses the subtle ways which the novel critiques the socio-economic treatment of women as secondary or

resources for rather than participants in the labour struggle and socio-political systems. Although Steinbeck replicates some of this dynamic through his exclusion of women from strike leadership roles, *In Dubious Battle* additionally shows nuance in critiquing men's superficial engagement with women. For example, when Doc is overcome by what he perceives as his existential loneliness as a dissenter in a world of unending conflict, Mac wishes he could send Doc to "some woman," adding that their supply scavenger probably has "twenty lined up by now" (262). Doc admonishes Mac, telling him that sometimes he knows nothing at all. Mac not only conflates sex and touch with a cure for the Doc's greatest human suffering but also imagines women as things to be used to further enable men in their battles. Just as he forgets the true physical reality of apples at the end of the novel, Mac fails to recognize women as full people. Mac configures women as objects rather than true participants in a network of life-giving care. Directly after their encounter, Doc leaves, and Mac turns to Lisa and Jim. Mac, seemingly unfazed by Doc's criticism, continues:

> Doc doesn't eat . . . Nobody's seen him sleep. I suppose he'll break, sooner or later, but he never has before. He needs a woman bad; someone that would like him for a night; you know, really like him. He needs to feel someone—with his skin. So do I. Lisa, you're a lucky little twirp, you just had a kid. You'd have me in your hair. (263)

Here, Mac recognizes the essential role of human connection, equating it with basic needs like sleep and food, but he clearly replicates the ideology that women are the obligated, natural providers of care for men. His objectification of women becomes even worse as he somewhat aggressively tells Lisa he wishes they could have sex. Lisa responds, "huh?", attempting to let Mac's words pass without having to engage with what he has just said. Mac takes the hint, replying, "I say: How's the baby?" After which, Mac looks to Jim and says, "I like a girl who

doesn't talk too much" (263). Similarly, Jim does not reply to Mac and instead announces he is sick of being inside the tent. Mac's cringe-worthy behaviour is borderline aggressive toward a new mother, and he states that he would be even worse in other circumstances, and that Lisa is "lucky" she is not physically available now. While Mac's words are certainly enough to condemn him, the sequence of Doc's admonishment of him, followed by Lisa's and Jim's refusals to acknowledge what he says, show that Steinbeck is emphasizing that Mac's understanding of women and women's contributions is deeply flawed and should be ignored. Consequently, Mac recognizes the need for care in multiple forms but still views psychological care entailed in emotional and physical connection as something women are obliged to supply to men. Steinbeck, however, portrays this attitude critically, anticipating later feminist critiques of the gendered politics of care work.

Lisa, the young woman who gives birth on the night Mac and Jim arrive in the camp, provides a steady sense of morality, and she represents the mythology of the Earth Mother with her vision of a simple resolution of harmonious living that includes humans, land, and animals. Although critic Laura Hapke explains that women are "so invisible in *In Dubious Battle* . . . that their redemptive power cannot be exercised," she also asserts that Steinbeck was the author of the period most occupied with the "mother myth" (35). Associating women with nature has a complicated history as this association has been used to authorize men's oppression of women and contributed to demeaning conceptions of women as being lesser than men; as Stacy Alaimo has argued, however, women sometimes flipped this discourse to their advantage, particularly in the early twentieth century, to help extend the authority of women outside of the perceived domestic sphere and into public discourse. The discourse of motherhood which raises the mother to mythical status requires a woman who is noble, nurturing, and self-sacrificing; she performs a

just distribution of care and love with instruction and fairness. This is linked to a view of the Earth as an abundant mother who fosters the survival and success of all her children, and it suggests that mothers have a natural understanding of these caring relationships. Lisa's story takes on mythical proportions as she ushers new life into being at the beginning of the novel and presides over old Dan's death at the end of the novel, establishing her authority and connection with life in a broader sense than the simple present. Further, as I will show in the next section, Lisa's harmonious vision for an ethical world anticipates today's ethical and material feminisms as she describes caring interconnectedness of humans, animals, and the living world.

While the reduction of important roles for women within *In Dubious Battle* does reinforce the conception that the labour movement was a masculine pursuit, it also ironically enables Steinbeck to draw attention to the feminized realms of reproductive labour and networks of care. In effect, the novel valorizes care work, which is normally feminized and performed by women in the separate home sphere, by having men discuss and perform care work in the strike camp. This not only counters the pejorative feminization of care work but also focuses attention on the ways capitalism devalues networks of care in part through promoting the idea of care work as pre- or extra- economic. Moreover, the novel's exposition of care work suggests that attention to care and building networks of care are needed components of activism and reform. Rather than focusing heavily on workplace abuse like much proletarian fiction, *In Dubious Battle* centralizes the living conditions of the workers-turned-strikers to show that providing the basics of food and bodily care is as essential to the workers' movement as mass demonstrations, fair pay, and safe working conditions are. Doc Burton, whom Mac appoints "Director of Public Health" (130), becomes the novel's most overt vehicle for the theme of care as he oversees sanitation and health care for everyone, but care work is also performed by groups of men in the

camp who prepare and serve meals, gather essential supplies, keep the camp clean, and help injured strikers. Over the course of a day, Doc and his men attend to numerous duties that fall under the category reproductive labour, while the rest of the men pick Mr. Anderson's entire crop of apples. The lone mention of women throughout all these activities occurs when Doc wants the tents scrubbed with soap and water, so "the women washed the tents with old brooms" (142). In contrast, the chapters describing the work of going into the camp setup, apple picking, and early strike organization are filled with specific references to boys and men performing a variety of activities. And though it may appear counterintuitive, having male characters perform care work contributes to the text's presentation of care not as feminized and therefore negligible, but as critical to economic production and life. The text shows how the human condition of "self-hate which goes so closely in hand with self-love," which Steinbeck describes as the novel's topic, is manifested through capitalism's dissolution of care networks and erosion of social norms and customs that acknowledge the necessity of care work and the ethical responsibility to care for others (qtd. in Steinbeck and Wallsten 98).

Steinbeck also uses Old Dan's story demonstrate the central importance of care work, including the preparing of food and caring for the elderly. Before the workers decide to strike, Old Dan does not feel well because he ate cold canned beans and slept without a fire. He was simply too tired to build a fire for cooking or warming himself. Undoubtedly, Dan's poor state is a precursor to the fall he is about to take from a rickety ladder—a fall which will render him immobile but mobilize the workers to strike. Dan tells Jim, "I was just too tired to build a fire. I'm getting on. I didn't want to get up this morning. It was cold" (102). Steinbeck, from the very beginning, shows that care and wages are linked, since the idea of care work as pre- or extra-economic is easily dispelled when wages and benefits are too low to support a single person's

basic needs and the work too demanding for the person to perform their own basic care work. Dan is a seventy-one-year-old man who should not be working to the point of exhaustion, eating cold beans for supper, and sleeping in a cold shack. Like a young woman giving birth, the old man is a person whom societies traditionally honour and care. The novel uses these archetypes of care relations rather than masculinist heroes to show how capitalism has disrupted these traditional networks of care. It is only when old Dan falls from a poorly maintained ladder and breaks his hip that the other workers become enraged enough to finally strike. Not only are the workers upset with Dan's fall, but they are also furious with the orchard owners who would not spend money on new equipment. The rickety ladder, like old Dan, is not cared for and must work until it is so old that it breaks from the strain. On the one hand, Steinbeck shows how the workers are treated no better than objects, but on the other hand, Steinbeck suggests the need for care extends even to human-made materials.

Through its emphasis of capitalism's failure to adequately care for the elderly, the novel also directs attention away from the masculine struggle and toward the importance of reproductive labour. Feminist care ethics recognizes that all beings are vulnerable, but within the specifics of caregiving and care-receiving, some beings experience more vulnerability than others. Yet, as Brugère explains, within modern discourse, people have been trained to "consider all human beings . . . as autonomous subjects who have always already been . . . themselves responsible for their present situation" (45). Such renderings of vulnerability allow government systems and employers to disavow responsibility. Within *In Dubious Battle*, "old Dan" represents the plight of the elderly. Steinbeck ensures readers understand Dan is old by having Jim call him "the old man" over a dozen times in the few pages of his introduction. Finally, Dan tells Jim he is seventy-one, and he used to be a "top-faller" in the Pacific Northwest lumber industry. Old Dan

is proud of his former physical abilities and bravery in performing such a dangerous job, and while Jim says, "You didn't get anything out of it . . . they just kicked you out when you got too old" (75), Dan emphasizes the personal satisfaction he got from the job. Dan feels degraded having to pack apples in his old age, and the text switches from calling him "old man" to "old Dan," so the spectre of his story and the uncomfortable notion of an elderly man still having to perform dangerous, physically demanding labour pervades the text.

Steinbeck also uses old Dan to emphasize the importance of food-related care work and to dispel the idea that men should rely on women to perform this kind of reproductive labour. When Jim and old Dan walk to the orchard store after work, Dan laments the price of canned beans: a one pound can cost 17 cents at the store owned and operated by their employers.[10] Jim, who has been trying all day to annoy old Dan and the other workers as a semi-covert strike agitator, says to Dan, "It wouldn't be so bad if you had a woman to cook for you" (77). Dan thinks he could get four pounds of dried beans for the price the orchard store charges for one pound of cooked beans, but he simply has not got the time or energy to go to town to buy the beans and then cook them back at the camp. Relentless in his needling of Dan, Jim says, "well, what time have others got? Women work all day, men work all day; and the owner charges three cents extra because the men are too damn tired to go into town for groceries" (77). Jim includes men by saying "others," acknowledging that procuring and preparing food is a domestic labour that requires time and effort, whether from a woman or a man. Jim reverses his previous appeal to the popular conception of women as food-preparing care givers, revealing his ironic approach. He highlights women's work in the labour force and mocks the lack of recognition for care work

[10] Company stores selling food and work clothes were a common tactic to keep workers poor and indebted to employers. These stores would have higher prices for their apparent convenience and would also frequently offer credit against work slips, so a worker may end up working just to clear store debt to the employer.

as real labour. Dan, being "old," suffers from a lack of care but also from an older, sexist view of care work that the younger man dispels.

The chapters featuring the reproductive labour necessary for the strikers' camp emphasize an irksome hypocrisy in California's agribusiness leadership: the farm owners who blatantly ignored health standards for living conditions and paid starvation wages would use health codes to get strikers' camps shut down by local government authorities. Doc's and Mac's attention to the importance of maintaining a healthy camp and meeting the strikers' basic needs is essential to showing the outrageous duplicity of the agribusiness owners. Mac points this out when he comments, "They let us live like pigs in the jungle, but just the minute we start a strike, they get awful concerned about public health" (130). Mac's statement reflects the real-world common practice of agribusiness owners collaborating with health inspectors and police to shut down strikers' camps. Moreover, this draws attention to the discrepancy in the application of health standards in employee provided living quarters versus in strikers' camps: no police or government agencies intervene when the large-scale farms provide migrant workers with poor quality housing and inadequate food despite rampant illness and injury. To tease out the unfairness of these common circumstances and to show the amount of work required to adequately perform reproductive care, the narrative must pay attention to what otherwise might appear as mundane details. Indeed, that people are not giving enough attention to the mundane, quotidian reproductive labour is a key point here. The farming industrialists have exploited workers by minimizing provisions for reproductive labour, pretending it is not labour at all, but rather inconsequential pre- and extra- economic work. Consequently, the workers and their families have lost essential life-sustaining supports. Steinbeck reveals both the critical

importance of reproductive labour and the callous absurdity of agribusiness owners using legal health codes to help them deny the workers' fight for healthy working and living conditions.

In showing both the degradation of care and the necessity of care, *In Dubious Battle* critiques an economic model that is dismissive of caring about and caring for. Puig de la Bellacasa explains, "thinking of practices of everyday care as necessary activity to the maintenance of every world makes them a collective affair. As such, when someone is in obligation to care for a child or an elderly person, or an animal, s/he is doing a job for a collective, not only her/his 'self 'perpetuation nor that of 'one' family" (160). Steinbeck's interrogation of collective care inadvertently extends his phalanx theory beyond ideas of marching and mobs to more realistic conceptions of a biological whole that can accomplish more than its individual components. Though Steinbeck may have hoped to discover an actual colossus or super-being, his foundational phalanx theory comes to life in the unification of the workers, and as we will see in the next section, the further unification of workers with nonhuman entities and environments.

Extending the Collective: More than Human

Mac's oscillation between caring empathy and calculated harshness exemplifies the false dichotomy driving the socio-economic conflict, but these dimensions of his character allow Steinbeck to present differing approaches to the struggle to end life-eroding economic exploitation. Steinbeck has Mac challenge anthropocentrism through his attention to the lives of animals and to how humans treat nonhuman animals, and this experimentation cautiously extends to consider the treatment of non-sentient material bodies, more specifically, dead bodies. Twice in the novel, Mac deploys the bodies of his dead friends to motivate the strikers. While critics frequently point to Mac's use of Joy's and Jim's dead bodies as evidence of Mac's

coldness, Mac's openness to the participation of material bodies may be seen as another experiment in expanding the political field of constituents. As Bennett explains, expanding the field of political constituents to nonhuman animals and material bodies does not need to imply agency or equality but instead should create "a polity with more channels of communication between members" (104). Bennett reminds us of the power of nonhumans to help humans see things in different ways, and draws attention to "how an animal, plant, mineral, or artifact can sometimes catalyze a public," which in turn may allow humans to develop new ways of answering specific challenges (107). While Bennett's proposal still favours humanity, it also calls for more consideration and empathy for the nonhuman bodies with which we coexist. Mac's openness to the contributions of his friends' bodies creates another pathway for broadening readers' conception of who or what is included in a public and challenging the economic attack on life-sustaining networks of care.

Steinbeck does not simply have Mac use dead bodies as rallying points. Instead, Steinbeck shapes the moments with consideration for both the unusualness of working with dead human bodies and the bodies' past inhabitants. When Mac wants to show Joy's body to the strikers, Doc cynically remarks, "Fun with dead bodies, huh?" while Jim is eager to use the body as weapon (209). Mac, once again, seems to embody multiple perspectives, wanting to use the body as a catalyst but also recognizing the body as more than what strike leader London calls "a lump of dirt" (209). Steinbeck has Mac make no clear distinction between Joy as alive or dead. He says, "If Joy can do some work after he's dead, then he's got to do it" (209-10). Mac becomes incensed as people challenge his enlistment of Joy's body soon after Joy is shot. He cries out "hysterically" that Joy always "wanted to work, and he didn't know how . . . and now he's got a chance to work and you don't want to let 'im" (170). He goes further, telling Jim not to feel sorry

for Joy because Joy would be happy at finally getting to lead people, "even if he's in a box" (173). Steinbeck does not allow Mac to land firmly on the sentimental or the utilitarian side, but through Mac, Steinbeck lends validity to something which initially appears insensitive and macabre.

In Dubious Battle reflects the real use of death and dead bodies in the real labour strikes. As Will Watson has shown, Joe Hill, famous bard of the Industrial Workers of the World, performed a similar uniting and inspiring function when his mugshot, taken moments before his execution, was duplicated and displayed in union halls. While Watson and most critics see Joy's and Jim's bodies as morbid weapons wielded by others and subsumed into the workers' cause, both bodies perform work through their presences that cannot simply be attributed to Mac's use of them. Joy's body repeatedly disrupts or compels action. The sheriff, who thinks Joy was a strike-breaker who was shot by strikers, twice exclaims, "I want that body." The strikers' funeral march for Joy invokes the power of the real-life San Francisco funeral march for strikers who were killed by police. Both sides—the sheriff working for the farmers and the striking migrant workers—want to leverage Joy's dead body, and consequently the novel shows the ways in which Joy's body demands attention and action within the socio-political field. Joy's body also creates a focal point of tension where rules of conduct for the strikers and authorities are negotiated in terms of decency and compassion rather than profit. In the presence of the dead, concessions must be made as the vulnerability of life and the emotion of human connections, which are usually denied in favour of profit, are forcibly manifested in the body's presence. Moreover, Joy's body forces the police and the Growers' Association to acknowledge the workers' humanity better than any of the verbal strike actions do. In these ways, Joy's body remains an important part of the strike collective, and like a person joining the phalanx, the body

joins the action and helps create a more powerful entity. Steinbeck uses Mac's relentlessness as a vehicle to explore networks and assemblages, and to suggest that an expanded conception of the socio-political ethical field—one that considers more seriously nonhuman animals, material bodies, and reproductive care—might be part of the solution to the dubious battle of "mankind's hatred for itself."

With a principal focus on the exploitation and abuse of the working-class, proletarian literature has an obviously anthropocentric primary narrative; however, in its intense scrutiny of exploitation, proletarian literature frequently uncovers the imbrication not only of various human groups but also that of humans with nonhumans. In Steinbeck's novel, the violent domination of nature is challenged through a critique of the treatment of animals, in part, because the domination of animals and of the natural world is fundamental to the hegemonic masculinity that authorizes the domination and exploitation of workers.

Steinbeck's personal love of animals can be seen across his entire oeuvre, and his appreciation and concern for animals add important layers to the socio-political meditations of *In Dubious Battle.* The novel deeply considers the industrialization of killing animals for food which also calcified in the early twentieth century. The brutality of the livestock industry was brought to light in Upton Sinclair's proletarian novel, *The Jungle*, in 1906, but the industry developed methods of obscuring the brutality, justifying the animals' deaths, and desensitizing the public with limited exposure. In addition to the widespread implementation of factory-style livestock farming, the implementation of government sponsored wildlife management arose during the Depression and is part of the context for Steinbeck's consideration of human-nonhuman relations in his fiction.

As many scholars have noted, Steinbeck extensively uses animal metaphors across his entire body of work. According to Jackson Benson, critics more contemporaneous with Steinbeck, like Edmund Wilson, tend to assess this technique negatively. Wilson laments Steinbeck's writing as lowering humanity to near animal levels and sees Steinbeck's "animalizing tendency" as a weakness in his representations of humans (48). Conversely, today's ecologically minded critics tend to praise Steinbeck's use of animal metaphors and inclusion of animals. Jada Ach's recent work, "Tracking "Injurious Species": Strays, Roadkill, and Highway Ecology in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*" explains the increase in speciesism particular to the American 1930s as she examines how the federal land and animal laws of this period "reflect mid-century desires (and anxieties) to safeguard private property, industrial food systems, and agricultural profits" (158). As Ach elucidates, animals faced another prolonged attack as government agencies and landowners framed them as nuisances and predators so they could harm and kill animals if they wanted the animals' habitats or bodies. Using terms like "removal" instead of "slaughter" or "kill" was significant to the cultural process of inurement through euphemisms, but Steinbeck reverses this tactic, using animal metaphors to collapse the perceived distance between human and nonhuman animals. *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ach contends, is a "power[ful] challenge" to the rhetorical attempts to dominate and contain animals as "injurious" or "dead matter" (161). While *In Dubious Battle* contains the same "animalizing" language and inclusion of wild and domesticated animals as *The Grapes of Wrath*, it also considers the ethical implications of animals as food for humans and the effects of human participation in the industrialized farming and slaughter of such animals.

One place where Steinbeck suggests a connection between workers' exploitation, the abuse of nonhuman animals, and male violence against women is in Jim's memories of his

father, whose masculine toughness and violence are directly tied to his work as a slaughterhouse executioner. Steinbeck's attention to Jim's father Roy at the beginning of the novel not only begins the examination of the human use of animals for food but also adds more to the picture of Jim's family as the extreme example of the effects of eroding networks of care. As shown earlier, Roy's emotional problems negatively influenced his relationship with his wife and kids, but the significant contributors to Roy's problems are repeatedly identified as related to his work in the slaughterhouse. When Jim tells his story in the first chapter, he says, "You know he was a sticker in the slaughter-house. Used to drink warm blood just to keep up his strength" (14). This simple explanation conveys the exhaustion of the work, but it also suggests a desensitization to violence and something that would turn most people's stomachs. Moreover, Roy so hated the slaughterhouse that his final act was an attempt to blow it up. Although Jim, Harry, and Mac fondly recall Roy's toughness, Steinbeck makes clear that the traumatic cause of Roy's toughness was hard, violent labour.

Steinbeck shows that the toughness which Roy developed to cope with brutal violence erodes Roy's abilities to maintain positive connections with his family. Between explanations of Roy's toughness, Jim tells how his father would come home from workers' protests also covered in blood, and the family "couldn't even speak to him or he'd cry" (14). Steinbeck softens the father's character as Jim explains, "When my mother washed him later, he'd whine like a dog" (14). Very efficiently, Steinbeck recasts masculinity: the man who fights, kills animals, and drinks blood also cries, needs care from his partner, and evokes sadness like an unhappy dog. The violence and killing in the slaughterhouse are tied to the violence inflicted on the protesting workers while the moment of tenderness and connection relies on the dog metaphor. Steinbeck then makes the connection to Roy's forbidding the Catholic mother to attend church and her

subsequent slip into despondency and death. Finally, the disappearance of Jim's sister May, while not attributed to any fault of the father, evokes more anger and violence from Roy. Jim's implying a serial sexual offender may have taken May perversely echoes Roy's own infliction of violence on his wife through denying her spiritual refuge in her religion. Steinbeck exhibits in Jim's family's problems a complex critique of capitalist exploitation and a revelation of the interconnectedness of trauma and violence, tracing the links to male violence against women and the mistreatment of animals.

Later in the novel, Steinbeck raises the spectre of Roy and once again links worker exploitation, violence against animals, and the mistreatment of women, showing that capitalist exploitation of male workers fosters forms of toxic masculinity. After Joy's funeral, Mac and Jim take a few men to kill three donated cows that will be fed to the strikers. Jim goes along because his father was a "sticker," and he can show the men how to kill the animals. After the killing, one man, Albert, insists he wants a "floozy," meaning a female whom he can pay for sex. Mac and Jim are surprised that Albert would rather use his money for sex than to fix his truck. Albert remains insistent and explains, "I guess it was stickin' them cows that done it. I felt alright before" (243). Albert, who had been complaining about his truck, appears as the lowliest, most hopeless kind of worker, declaring, "I got nothing . . . no idears, no money, no nothing" (243). The sight of blood and death appears to be an irresistible aphrodisiac for Albert. Earlier, Jim had told the men how his father had drunk the blood of cows he slaughtered and described how a tremendous amount of blood "will shoot out like a half-inch pipe" when they stick the cows. Mac wishes they could catch the blood to drink, but Jim says doing so makes him sick (241). Once again, Steinbeck distantly connects the killing of animals to male sexual desire. The references to drinking blood decidedly recall the tragedy of Jim's family and reinforce the

negative connection between killing animals for food and violence and erosion of healthy relationships.

Further animal allusions dot *In Dubious Battle* and create a sustained consideration of human and nonhuman animal relationships. For example, when Doc Burton laments Mr. Anderson losing his farm and way of life, Mac says, "somebody has to break if the whole bunch is going to get out of the slaughter-house" (207). Once again, Steinbeck raises the spectre of the slaughterhouse, this time as a metaphor for the plight of the migrant agricultural workers whom Mac sees as helpless animals being slaughtered in a factory fashion. Mac seems resigned to using the suffering of the few to help the many, but the death of animals will cause him to waiver later. When Mac asks about the Mr. Anderson's beautiful pointer dogs that he had admired earlier and implies that Mr. Anderson could recoup some money by selling puppies, Mr. Anderson replies, "The kennel was—against—the barn" (337). The dogs which everyone in the area had admired were inadvertently killed when the vigilantes burnt down Mr. Anderson's barn. Mac nearly turns and runs away when Mr. Anderson reveals the dogs' deaths, and he spontaneously tells Jim that seeing someone get hurt is demoralizing, but they must keep seeing the big picture. The dogs' deaths cause Mac to think of other upsetting things, like seeing "a cop ride down a Jew girl" or the "millions starving," and he tells Jim the cause is worth it, but "it keeps you jumping between the pictures" (337). Mac not only connects seemingly disparate points of the web of exploitation and violence, but he also espouses the necessity of remembering the larger scale to cope with the injustices suffered on the personal scale. Steinbeck weaves this sentiment together, and strengthens its emotional resonance, with metaphorical and real animals.

Although Steinbeck locates his conception of a human entity greater than the individual in the phalanx-as-mob, *In Dubious Battle* also contemplates other possibilities for larger, more

powerful entities through Lisa's visions of a human-nonhuman collective. Later in the strike, Doc Burton feels dejected, and he cannot see any solution, believing struggle and violence are endemic to humanity regardless of the outcomes of any particular fights. Doc says he cannot see any good ending to the strike, adding "it all seems . . . brutal and meaningless" (258). In a dark mood, Doc asks Lisa what would make her happy, to which she replies that she would like to have a cow for butter and cheese. Doc responds with uncharacteristic cruelty: "Want to exploit a cow?" (258). Lisa recalls a childhood when her father would milk their cow and give her warm milk. She imagines the milk would be good for her baby, and then she adds that not everyone can milk cows because the cows kick, implying that cows only give milk when they agree to do so. Lisa suggests a pastoral life where cows eat grass and hay—and are not eaten themselves, and the cows give milk in return to the people they like. This is a life with well-fed babies and a heterogenous mix of living beings working together to create a flourishing home. Where Mac recognizes the importance of reproductive labour but does not see its connection to ending brutality and exploitation, Lisa imagines a positive coexistence entails mutual care and respect for heterogeneous constituents.

The novel pushes Lisa's point further, directly connecting Lisa's vision to the socio-political fight when Doc replies, "I never thought of cows as counter-revolutionary animals" (209). This exchange is important in part because Doc most often is read as representing Steinbeck's own position, and indeed Doc expresses in this exchange Steinbeck's own thoughts that "mankind hates itself" (259). Though the term "counter-revolutionary" means against the revolutionary struggle, in this instance it does not mean a retreat to the exploitative status quo in this instance. For, if Lisa's vision of a mutually beneficial life were implemented, then the people would no longer be starving wage slaves, animals would no longer be exploited in factory farms

and industrial slaughterhouses, and the economic system would be fundamentally changed. "Counter-revolutionary" has an exceptional meaning here because Doc Burton is speaking about the endless fighting and exploitation to which the novel's title refers: the counter-revolution here steps outside of the conflict not simply to end the uprising but instead to end the need for uprising, to counter humankind's hatred for itself with relations of care. In the scene, no one understands Doc's comment about exploiting the cow, and the novel lets it go without further explanation, but the initial comment once again brings the treatment of animals for food to the fore. Next, with the cooperative idyll Lisa paints, Doc considers, however briefly, a mutually beneficial and caring relationship of human and nonhuman animals as a part of the solution. This discussion reinforces the novel's opposition of brutal factory farming and general violence, and it proposes a solution not based on fighting and dominating others. The cow in Lisa's chosen world is counter-revolutionary because it represents a just world—a balanced ecosystem based in care and recognition, not domination and exploitation. In Lisa's world, the cow is a participant whose feelings matter, and the healthy sustenance for both the cow and the family do not require anyone to die. Steinbeck for a moment suggests that cows could be participants in a genuine non-violent revolution that could transform society in a progressive way.

Jim also proposes refuge in pastoral or wild settings that include nonhuman constituents, reinforcing the idea that a solution to humankind's endless battle lies outside the perceived bounds of the conflict and within a more respectful and expanded human-nonhuman polity. Near the end of the novel, Jim and Mac walk around the orchard, and Mac enjoys a fallen apple, saying he'd forgotten how good a simple apple tastes. Jim speaks wistfully of watching the world, regretful that he's "never looked at the way things happen" (333). He wants to see how the leaves grow and what bugs do—he's afraid he won't know things, "even how an apple

grows" (333). Mac is dismissive of this turn away from the political fight, and he tells Jim how he went into the woods in Canada once but quickly came out wanting "trouble" and "hungry for a mess" (333). In this exchange, the delineation between a peaceful organic setting and a troublesome human setting emerges. Mac, who moments ago delighted in the delicious taste of an apple and the simplicity of food being readily available, is now blinded to a wider political ecology to which the novel draws readers' attention. He even worries Jim may be attacked by vigilantes, telling him he is "standing out like a cow on a hill-side" (333). Recalling Lisa's pastoral solution, in the moment that Jim embraces the same attitude, Mac compares Jim to a cow. Steinbeck uses the same imagery of abundance and peacefulness, and though Mac uses the comparison to a cow to imply Jim is vulnerable, the comparison to the cow while Jim is enjoying the natural world and thinking about enjoying a life apart from fighting recalls and strengthens the argument for Lisa's heterogenous, caring constituency of humans and nonhumans. Though Mac can see the beauty of the apple and the value of reproductive care, he cannot reconcile these moments with the socio-political struggle and in this moment embodies the endless dubious battle while Jim represents a possible path to the battle's end.

Chapter Two:

Proto-Ecofeminism and Class Consciousness in *Marching! Marching!*

> "I witnessed the emergence of a new writing. It was, however, a direct product of the form such as [Clara Weatherwax] had helped to shape, not a counterpart of it as some reactionary critics would have people believe."
>
> -Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart* p.240

Writing in the same period, Clara Weatherwax and John Steinbeck had several things in common. Both authors had experience with jobs in working-class labour despite not truly being proletarian, and both witnessed the extreme economic hardships, exploitative labour practices, and labour disputes in their home states. Weatherwax and Steinbeck deeply felt what they had witnessed and experienced was wrong, and they were inspired to address the labour movement and the suffering caused by unfair socio-economic practices. Like Steinbeck, Weatherwax attended Stanford University without graduating, and she also chose to write about the industries and labour unrest in and around her hometown. Although Weatherwax and her husband Gerald Strang lived in Oakland, California when she wrote *Marching! Marching!*, the novel takes place in the pacific northwest and draws on the Aberdeen, Washington area's extensive history of labour and class conflict. The coastal and lumber industries dominated the pacific northwest economies in the same ways coastal and agricultural industries did California's economy. Aberdeen and Washington's Gray Harbor have a long history of sharp class division and labour unrest which Weatherwax witnessed growing up in the area.

In responding to the socio-political crises embodied in the Great Depression, both Steinbeck and Weatherwax resist narratives of individual male heroes and instead look to the

possibilities of collective action and networks of care. But while Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* appears in many ways ambivalent in its political solutions and its fear of collective action in the form of mobs, Weatherwax's *Marching! Marching!* (hereafter *Marching!*) exemplifies socially motivated literature with a clear and collective socio-political agenda. Steinbeck's novels have received more popular and critical attention over the years than Weatherwax's novel; likewise, while Steinbeck has been largely celebrated, *Marching!* has been unfairly ignored or criticized as poorly written propaganda. Together, though, Steinbeck's and Weatherwax's novels show an often-overlooked depth to proletarian literary techniques, ranging from realisms to experimental modernism, and they also show the labour movement's larger concerns with the fate of humanity rather than just wages and workers' rights. Moreover, the two novels exemplify the Depression Era's literary attempts envision possible collective alternatives to exceptional individualism. Steinbeck attempts to theorize such an alternative with his phalanx but more successfully focuses attention on recognizing reproductive labour as inextricable from economic production and the connection of exploitative labour to violence. Weatherwax, on the other hand, emphasizes the intersectionality of labour exploitation and creates a feminist-materialist text, recognizing the concomitant exploitation and violence against the material world, women, and racialized people.[11] Each author illustrates ways in which essential collectivity and care are eroded by capitalist socio-economic practices and the overwhelmingly negative effects of this erosion; however, while Steinbeck's novel ultimately presents collective marches as dangerous erasures of individual consciousness, Weatherwax's novel declares collective marches as a pinnacle of heightened consciousness, a result of self and collective actualization.

[11] Material world and physical world are used interchangeably and in a new-materialist sense throughout this chapter as inclusive terms to avoid dichotomous divisions of nature/city, human/non-human, living/non-living materials, etc. Material world signifies both living and non-living physical materials, both human-made and naturally occurring.

Weatherwax's *Marching!* has received only a small fraction of the popular and critical attention in comparison to Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* and other novels, yet in this chapter, I will argue that *Marching!* deserves our attention for its proto-ecofeminist elements, including meaningful attention to the more-than-human world and the intersectional nature of human oppressions, as well as for the modernist literary innovations it introduces into its social realism. Furthermore, Weatherwax provides an important corrective to the popular fears of marchers being thoughtless mobs when she structures a collective bildungsroman wherein the workers' educations culminate with heightened consciousness and the knowledge that only the collective can succeed in overcoming systemic oppression and exploitation. The novel's eco-feminist content takes a new-materialist form as Weatherwax crafts a quiet triumph in a first chapter that moves through the imbrications of the exploited, creating a framework that understands the connections of the exploitative domination of women and nature and uses these insights to understand a full range of socio-economic exploitation. Rather than fearing the collective as an identity-consuming mob, as Steinbeck portrays in *In Dubious Battle*, Weatherwax proposes that the collective entity formed by the marching workers is achieved through heightened consciousness. Although the ecofeminist content of *Marching!* recedes as the novel progresses, my analysis will show how prescient materialist ecofeminist thinking undergirds the text's primary themes and the ways in which Weatherwax successfully balances incorporating these themes in a historical moment and a literary genre—proletarian literature—that placed more value on masculinity.

The Ongoing Necessity of Defining Proletarian Literature

Proletarian literature has a turbulent history as critics and authors alike have attempted to define the genre. Although American proletarian literature has been frequently framed as only a

brief, active period between the two World Wars, the genre can actually be seen in forms throughout American literature before and after its most active period. Weatherwax wrote *Marching!* in response to a proletarian literature contest run by leftist periodical *New Masses* and the John Day Publishing Company, but the definitions of proletarian literature and authors then, as now, were hazy and contested.[12] The novel contest, announced in June 1934, offered a prize of $750 "for the best novel on an American proletarian theme submitted before April 1, 1935" ("Announcing" 7). Declaring that the periodical wished to make its class bias "perfectly clear," the announcement lists fostering "the literature of the American working class" as its purpose and further clarifies that the literature of the working class is proletarian literature. Proletarian literature "must deal with the American proletariat. . . [, meaning] any section of the working class," and "it must actually be concerned with the proletariat" (Announcing" 7). The caveat clarifies that the novel entries must engage with and in the interest of issues of the proletariat as a class and not simply feature characters from the proletariat. This distinction was necessary because of the development of popular culture and literature in the preceding decades, like magazines and dime novels. These newer forms of accessible literature sometimes featured poetry and prose with working-class characters and situations, as well as dialects and vernaculars found in the working-class, but they did not necessarily engage with or critique class oppression. The contest's scant definitions of proletarian literature leaves open the questions of what makes a text a work of proletarian literature and who may be a proletarian author.

[12] The term Left is used throughout in the broad sense of those devoted to democratic social transformation, generally focusing on progressive ideals of equality, equity, rights, and freedom from oppressive and exploitive policies. The broad term includes a wide variety of political stances including anarchism, socialism, and communism.

People most often associate proletarian literature with the 1930s and Communism, but proletarian literature has a long history in the United States, and understanding its features helps us to see that proletarian literature continues into the present. As the study of proletarian literature progresses, many critics have formed a consensus of a period from 1900 to 1941 as the genre's main era with the Depression Era of 1929 to 1941 being its most active for American authors. Bill Mullens reminds us that Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, published in 1906, is often considered the first proletarian novel, but the label of proletarian literature was not particularly known at the time and certainly was not a school of literature. According to Laura Hapke, the term proletarian literature was used to describe pre-WWI fiction in leftist magazines, and naturalist author and social activist Jack London may have been among the first to use the term proletarian fiction, having used it in a 1901 article in a socialist journal. While some literary works have been retroactively classified as proletarian, the emergence of the genre as a known category of literature in the U.S. is widely accepted as following the "proletcult," or proletarian cultural movement, beginning in Bolshevik Russia in 1917. While Communist Russia encouraged a development of proletarian culture following the revolution, the U.S. had the social activism of the realist and naturalist eras around the turn of the century and throughout the Progressive Era; however, Communist International (Comintern) promoted proletarian culture and literature following the revolution, helping to galvanize the category as genre. The American socio-political concerns of the turn of the century did not disappear, but they receded, giving ground to the wealthy culture that defined the American 1920s and modernist art and literature. The long 1930s, spanning the stock market's decline and crash in 1929 to the United States' entry into World War II in 1941, brought a reinvigorated attention to socio-political literature because of the unprecedented levels of poverty. The issues of poverty, exploitation, and

dissolving networks of care, which realists like Stephen Crane first highlighted in the 1890s became immediate concerns for many Americans. Though the CPUSA encouraged and supported proletarian literature and Russia's proletcult provided inspiration, proletarian literature—though yet unnamed—had existed in America for about twenty years before the Russian revolution and should not be thought of as an exclusively Communist genre.

Declaring the pre-proletcult existence of proletarian literature in the United States adds to difficulty of defining proletarian literature and authors. Along with the complexities of timeframe, the technical definition of the genre's literary features as well as the legitimacy of its authors have been historically debated. Many wondered how or if middleclass or bourgeois authors could authentically write about the proletariat and working-class problems. Barbara Foley's extensive research shows that many leading literary voices on the American left like Granville Hicks, Mike Gold, and Jack Conroy envisioned proletarian literature as written by working-class people who were workers before writers. The historical association of literature with educated elites undercut the bourgeois author's authority to authentically write about proletarian experience. The expectation, however, for working-class people with little knowledge of writing to suddenly produce well-written literature expressing communist or socialist political ideas and authentic proletarian experiences proved naïve. The writer with or without formal training who produces timely, poignant, and politically effective writing is generally exceptional; to imagine an entire new school of such authors emerge borders on magical thinking. In fact, the *New Masses* contest so struggled to find suitable novels for its proletarian literature contest that the magazine extended the contest deadline to gain more suitable submission. While the worker-writer remained an elusive ideal, the definition of the proletarian author was flexible and often

led to middle-class authors like Weatherwax emphasizing any working-class credentials or ties that they might have.

Similar questions arose about the content of proletarian literature: could featuring proletarian characters make a text proletarian literature? Must the text engage with class exploitation or propose class revolution? Moreover, if a working-class author writes a text which disagrees with some or all of the left's political tenets, is the text still proletarian literature? While the exact definition has been contentious, I assert that both the question of what counts as proletarian literature and the question of who may authentically write proletarian literature are answered quite broadly: almost any person may write proletarian literature, and any literary techniques may be used because it is the socio-political content that defines the literature as proletarian. Mullen defines proletarian literature as "literature about the working class that is strongly anticapitalist" (2) while Hapke describes its themes as "revolutionary awareness of class struggle; opposition to capitalism and competitive individualism; and the value of collective action in combatting oppression and reshaping government" (583-84). The *New Masses* competition for which Weatherwax wrote *Marching! Marching!* defined proletarian literature much the same way, stating that the novel entries must be about and "actually be concerned with the [American] proletariat" ("Announcing" 7). Accordingly, aesthetic prescriptions and authorly requirements are limited in the announcement; they state, "the poorer farmers, the unemployed, and even the lower fringes of the petty bourgeoisie as well as industrial workers" may be included in their broad definition of the proletariat (7). Once again, socio-political content and a focus on working-class experiences take precedence over authors' class identification.

Proletarian Literature Collectivist Forms

The political shifts in leftist thinking associated with communism affected Weatherwax's identity as an author and the reception of her work. As both the *New Masses'* contest and Weatherwax's autobiography attest, the early 1930s were a transitional period marked by Comintern's movement away from the more militant policies of the Third Period and toward the conciliatory policies of the Popular Front. This movement translated into some general movement away from themes of revolutionary overthrow of oppressors by a single communist style group and toward a reform led by coalitions of like-minded thinkers who are not fully communist. Michael Denning explains that the Popular Front invited collaboration around "laborist social democracy, anti-fascism, and anit-lynching" and rather than being led by Communists was led by socialists and independent leftists" (4-5) Collectivity, while already a part of leftist thinking, began to represent even more inclusion and cooperation among groups who may have some differences in priorities and opinions but still oppose the socio-economic and political systems of capitalism. Weatherwax wrote *Marching!* during this political shift, and as such, the novel has suffered some backlash over its features which align more with revolutionary Third Period Communism than with the more collaborative Popular Front.

On the one hand, the *New Masses'* proletarian novel contest was meant to contribute to the Popular Front efforts to use cultural modes to exhibit the superiority of leftist politics, but on the other hand, the contest was part of an ongoing effort to perfect a genre of specifically American proletarian literature. Defining proletarian literature was a significant task for the literary left in the in the 1920s and 1930s. Granville Hicks, Mike Gold, and Alan Calmer wrote multiple articles. Calmer laments proletarian authors as "unconcerned with literary tradition" and even scornful of literary tradition as bourgeoise, and he advises that proletarian authors must

recalibrate and consider literary currents if their writing is to have cultural value. Calmer expounds on the content of proletarian literature, explaining perspective rather material makes a work proletarian. For example, authors do not need to confine themselves portraying militant class action or repeating slogans and party lines. Calmer presents a more refined vision for the genre in this 1935 article. Gold, over a period of more than 15 years, tried to define a proletarian literature. From his most "mystical" rendering in *the Liberator* to more tempered versions in the *New Masses*, Gold envisioned a young, masculine author who was a true member of the proletariat. Literary critics like Mary McCarthy used their reviews of literary works to help shape proletarian literature as well. McCarthy often employed the masculine rhetoric common to the labour movement to describe proletarian works of which she approved, reinforcing and androcentric approach to proletarian literature. While the editor-writer-critics shade their perspectives on proletarian literature, they coalesce in a conception of proletarian literature as more masculine than feminine, with young authors who reject established literary conventions, but most importantly they ask for an authentic sense of proletarian life in revolutionary struggle.

While Steinbeck expresses considerable doubt about Communist ideas of militant struggle and the dangers of collective action, Weatherwax's *Marching!* explicitly endorses Communist politics of collective struggle, but she attempts to place them in the U.S. context and frame them as a continuation of American Revolutionary ideals. The social project of the Popular Front was to reclaim American identity and history for people on the left, and this was particularly important to the proletarian literature genre and Weatherwax. Weatherwax is a part of the left that actively sought to show they were equally American (if not more so) that the jingoist nationalist who framed leftist descent as unpatriotic and threatening to society. Many leftist authors retold America's grand narratives in ways that were sympathetic to the collective

rather than the individual. While some literary historians, like Peter Conn, call this an "ideological crossdressing" (218), others, like Michael Denning, have shown that many on Left were legitimately engaging with the meaning of Americanism, not simply commandeering it for propaganda. Depression Era Leftists, including authors faced charges of not only being against American values but also of wanting to destroy the U.S. government, and attempts to legally persecute and deport radical leftists as dangerous or criminal immigrants were not uncommon. Consequently, authors of proletarian fiction like Weatherwax needed both proletarian credibility and to prove that they and their political positions were legitimately American.

Weatherwax's autobiography appears carefully crafted toward the remodeled leftist values of reclaiming American patriotist while identifying with the working class. A native of Aberdeen, Washington, Weatherwax was intimately familiar with the great class divide and worker exploitation in the area's lumber driven economy. Weatherwax's grandfather was among the first white settlers of the area, and he was a wealthy lumber mill owner; however, the family had lost their mill and most of their money long before Clara was born in 1905. Although Weatherwax and her husband Gerald Strang had relocated to Oakland, California by the time of the *New Masses* contest, she and her family had a long history in the U.S. and in Aberdeen, Washington. Weatherwax wrote a small personal biography at the request of the *New Masses* in which she traces her lineage to pre-Mayflower days, and perhaps more importantly, she mentions her grandfather who was an early settler and mill owner in Aberdeen.[13] Weatherwax's family had lost the mill long before her birth in 1905, but the hard work, pioneering spirit, and early arrival

[13] For ease and continuity, I will refer to the autobiographical piece Weatherwax wrote for *New Masses* as Weatherwax's autobiography, but the autobiography is only a small article written for the *New Masses*. A book-length biography of Weatherwax has never been written. The author's biographical information in the printings of *Marching! Marching!* is also taken from the same article.

of her family in the area create a connection to similar popular American ideals. Moreover, the family's loss of its wealth and property helps Weatherwax to emphasize her connections with the working class, citing her familiarity with different types of labour and even with going hungry. She appears to have primarily been lower-middle class with some experiences of poverty. Weatherwax checks many boxes in that she is not a new immigrant, has a revered American past, and knows working poverty. For Weatherwax, proving her Americanism to both the working class and any potential detractors meant providing an overview of her lineage in America as well as attesting to her ancestors' participation in nation-shaping wars like the American Revolution and the Civil War. In her novel, she repeats this tactic with some of her characters to stress that their criticism is not anti-American and their voices deserve to be heard.

The contested meaning of American identity was compounded in the literary world's attempt to shape an American proletarian literature that would challenge America's popular ideas of exceptional and competitive individualism. While some leftist authors who had the desired traits, like Weatherwax, could appeal to their lineages to help establish their perceived Americanness, a bigger challenge was how to legitimate the themes, messages, and methods of proletarian literature as embodying the truest American values presented a bigger challenge. Myths and legends of incredible individual bravery and success have permeated U.S. culture from the country's pre-Revolutionary days. Such individualist narratives served to justify American colonialist and capitalist goals of claiming, occupying, and extracting economic value from the land. Early American literature celebrated the stories of individuals like Benjamin Franklin, and fiction frequently featured intrepid frontiersmen like James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumpo in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Such stories of exceptional individualism overshadowed other components of the American nation building, like the great amounts of

cooperative work as well as the enslaved and exploited workers who worked under duress rather than as free, cooperating individuals.

Proletarian literature faced an interesting assignment to somehow make the collective story as inspiring and thrilling as the narrative of solitary hero who surmounts great odds with their bravery and smarts, or even the lone person who persists through steadfast belief in their own values and skills. As cultural historian Gail McDonald asserts, when we think of "the American hero, he is far more likely to be a cowboy than a coworker" (80). Moreover, McDonald reminds us that while social cooperation had been important throughout America's history, both democracy and capitalism place emphasis on the rights of individuals—and the celebration of individual success also influenced the established narrative form of novels. Even the realist and naturalist novels of the decades before the Depression that critiqued dominant narratives of exceptional individual ascension, like Stephen Crane's *Maggie* and Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth*, relied upon individualist rather than collectivist forms, simply inverting the formula to narrate a spectacular individual fall. Societal collectives may have been responsible for Maggie Johnson's and Lily Bart's sufferings and deaths, but each story is driven by the progression of an exceptional character. Proletarian literature, then, needed not only to dethrone the ideal of individual success permeating American culture, but also to reshape the structure of novels to acclaim collectivity in a satisfying narrative form. This experimentation appears in Steinbek's phalanx theory, which he also combines with trepidation about individual leaders in *In Dubious Battle*. While Steinbeck's novel ends with ambivalence about both the individual and the collective, Weatherwax's *Marching!* builds collectivity that culminates in higher, productive consciousness of the working masses.

Steinbeck's rendering of care work (reproductive labour) as collective activity and point of labour exploitation makes *In Dubious Battle* a significant example of proletarian literature's focus on shifting from exceptional-individual narrative to narratives demonstrating collective power, and his phalanx theory attempts to imagine humanity as a collective organism composed of multiple humans as a solution to socio-economic injustice. With *In Dubious Battle,* Steinbeck also contributes to the development of proletarian fiction as a more complex genre than social realism. For example, with its significant changes to real events and strong uses of symbolism, *In Dubious Battle* challenges perceptions of social realism as documentarian and mimetic. However, his trepidations in the novel about mob mentality and reluctance to acknowledge women and racialized people undercut the novel's effectiveness in espousing collectivity. He also takes up the collective imperative of proletarian literature as thematic in *In Dubious Battle* rather than as a narrative device. In contrast, Weatherwax not only emphasizes the theme of care work as collective activity, but also depicts women and racialized people as activate, crucial participants. Moreover, Weatherwax uses modernist and experimental techniques to develop, like stream-of-consciousness narration with unusual punctuation, an unobtrusive narrator, and multiple perspective, in addition to collective themes, a collectivist narrative form. The two novels together illustrate the thematic and technical experimentation of socially motivated literature during the Depression Era as well the difficulties the authors weathered in responding to literary expectations and immediate real-world crises.

Popular and Critical Receptions

Despite winning the *New Masses*' proletarian novel contest and being chosen as a book-of-the-month selection for the newly created Book Union book club (Suggs, "Introduction" xxxviii), *Marching!* did not receive many positive reviews and does not appear to have sold well.

Robert Cantwell, whose more critically and commercially successful *Land of Plenty* (1934) also focused on the lumber strikes in Aberdeen, praises Weatherwax's attention to the "minute details" of workers' jobs and affirms her knowledge of such work. Cantwell ultimately rejects Weatherwax's novel, though, as too full of "atomized" snapshots of workers without continuity and development and as committing the common proletarian author's error of "fearing the militant class . . . was marching, marching! smack against a stone wall" by ending the novel in defeat (11-12) Unlike Cantwell, Mary McCarthy did not temper her review of the novel with any praise. McCarthy implicitly upholds the masculinized ideal when she compares Weatherwax's "pinched, unhealthy, distorted, and . . . dull" novel to those by authors like Dos Passos and Cantwell, who, she writes, were "taking man-size vigorous strides toward the creation of a proletarian her and a proletarian epic" (82). Rather than appreciating Weatherwax's documentation of labour exploitation upon her characters, McCarthy is disgusted with her portrayal of the workers, calling them "thoroughly distasteful specimens" (82). The damning critiques of *Marching!* appear to have deeply impacted sales. As Suggs research shows, though no historical sales figures are available, Weatherwax complained in 1936 of not seeing any statements of sale and her husband Gerald mentioned in later years that he could not remember the book make any money other than the contest prize money ("Introduction" xii).

In academic and literary studies, *Marching!* did not spur much discussion for the next few decades until Walter Rideout's *the Radical Novel in The United States* (1965). Rideout notes Weatherwax's attention to detail and representation of the variety and depth in workers and the jobs they perform. Though not a particularly positive review, Rideout compliments Weatherwax's use of "technical but still comprehensible language" to describe labor and notes her intentional designing of a collective narrative (210). Where many other proletarian authors

simply fail "to breathe life into their creation," Rideout asserts, the minimal individuation of characters is deliberate for Weatherwax because of her commitment to the collective over the individual (216). Rideout's distinction importantly highlights the difference between writing badly and using new techniques to experiment with expression. In the foundational study, *Labor and Desire: Women's Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America* (1991), Paula Rabinowitz makes an extended analysis of *Marching!* Rabinowitz discusses the novel from a feminist perspective, concluding that Weatherwax, despite her "doctrinal" tendencies, disrupts the typical masculinity of proletarian realism through a cast of women characters whose desires "interrupt" the historical narrative. As such, Rabinowitz's analysis unpacks Weatherwax's efforts to bring women's experiences and perspective to a proletarian fiction dominated by men's perspectives and masculine coding. Jon-Christian Suggs also argues for the appreciation and further investigation of Weatherwax in his introduction to the 1990 reissue of *Marching!* Suggs applauds Weatherwax's innovations to the stream-of-consciousness technique and argues that Weatherwax uses this technique to help readers understand "how the historical moment is the product of the collective material consciousness of the people" (166).[14] My chapter builds on these positive reassessments to argue that *Marching!* shows collectivity needed for socio-political reform is built through affective and practical care that extends both to and beyond differing groups of humanity to the natural world.

I will argue that despite the narrative and aesthetic struggles critics have pointed to in *Marching!*, the novel's breadth of representation makes it a significant and unique piece of proletarian literature. Weatherwax's novel crosses an array of people, employment, material environments, and languages in an effort of collectivity that celebrates rather than erases

[14] See "Clara Weatherwax" in *The Encyclopedia of Literature and Politics*

difference. Moreover, the sheer number of moving parts Weatherwax balances in the novel not only deserves to be recognized but is integral to the novel's ethical project.

Despite their different representation of collective actions, Weatherwax, like Steinbeck, expands political consideration world of living matter. Jane Bennett's new materialist extension of John Dewey's conception of a public as (human) bodies affected by a common problem and drawn into action provides a useful way of reading *Marching!* Bennett's idea of a political ethics recognizing the participation of nonhuman life and considering the "vibrant bodies of animals, plants, metals, or machines" (102) particularly arises in Weatherwax's treatment of tree and plant life. While Weatherwax does not completely escape anthropocentricism or approach current critical ideas in ecofeminist plant studies, recouping Weatherwax's contributions to human-plant studies establishes her within the centuries-long practices of women working with plant life and human-plant life relations. The recuperation of such work, as Greta Gaard argues, rebukes the humanist and masculinist studies which have dominated "plant studies" and erased the methods and findings of womanist traditions of gardening, writing, illustrating, and studying plant life and human-plant relations.[15] Weatherwax's attention to plant life may be seen as both a nascent philosophical engagement with the ethics of human-plant relation and as an extension of late nineteenth-century literary regionalism of women authors like Sarah Orne Jewett, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Mary Wilkins-Freeman, who all paid particular attention to nuanced portrayals of plants and animals and human relationships with them.

[15] See "Plants and Animals" in *Critical Ecofeminism*. According to Gaard, in addition to the erasure of women's work and knowledge, Indigenous and non-Western perspectives are frequently omitted from current plant studies. As Weatherwax does not contribute to Indigenous or non-Western perspectives in *Marching! Marching!* this is beyond the scope of the chapter, but this is a significant clustering of oppressed or disregarded work essential to a full realization of the critical ecofeminist project.

Additionally, Weatherwax illustrates the ways in which some human-made materials resist complete objectification and therefore act upon their environments and political fields. Weatherwax's novel reflects Bennett theory of vibrant materialism in that it does not claim equality between human and nonhuman actants within a political ecology, but it does uncover moments of distributed agency and communication from nonhuman life.

Weatherwax's treatment of the trans-corporeal originates in a common technique of proletarian literature that Michael Denning terms the proletarian grotesque. The proletarian grotesque as technique, Denning explains, is an "attempt to wrench us out of the repose and distance of the 'aesthetic'" (123) within proletarian themed literature and arts. Showing the discordance and upsetting aspects of proletarian life in great detail while not alleviating the viewers' discomfort became a hallmark of the proletarian literature and can be seen in *Marching's* opening chapter's depiction of the logger Tim's head being severed by a cable breaking loose. The uncomfortable details of industrial accidents and work induced maiming's, deaths, and disfigurements are used in calculated ways to collapse the comfortable distance a reader may feel from the characters. This attention to physicality leads to intensified scrutiny of physical bodies and the ways in which they are changed through material influence and exchange, or to use Karen Barad's terms, material intra-action. Though fictional stories, the texts nonetheless become documentation of the real-world phenomenon of the co-constitution of material bodies.

Developments in eco and material feminism allow us to better understand *Marching!* as participating in a cultural movement to recognize what Stacy Alaimo calls --corporeality. The theory of transcorporeality focusses physical materiality and the "environmental traces within all texts" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 9). Moreover, trans-corporeality considers "material interchanges

between bodies" of all types: human, nonhuman, organic, and human made. As Alaimo explains in *Bodily Natures*, ordinary knowledge practices tend to uphold a distance between text and world and between human and environment, placing the human as the central subject. Weatherwax does not go so far as to displace humans as the central concern of her text, but she makes significant the material interchanges that working class bodies experience, and to a lesser but notable degree, the novel engages with material interchanges with nonhuman life. Examining the interchanges and interconnections between physical bodies ruptures the logic of bounded individualism and the ontological divides deployed to facilitate the exploitation of both human and nonhuman beings and materials. Much like Steinbeck uses *In Dubious Battle* to challenge or resist the distinction between reproductive labour and economic production, Weatherwax uses *Marching! Marching!* to detail the trans-corporeality of the human body especially in relation to labour.

Intersections of Oppression

The first chapter of *Marching!* creates an environmentally conscious, intersectional feminist foundation for the novel; in short, Weatherwax anticipates key ecofeminist insights, exposing the rhetoric of Nature used to dominate women and the physical world while demonstrating the pervasiveness of this logic in the socio-political exploitation undergirding the capitalist economy. The first chapter shows how the exploitation of the proletarian is inseparable from the oppression of nature, Indigenous peoples, women, and racialized peoples. The novel begins with the disillusioned Pete, who has recently learned that he is not, as he had previously thought, the illegitimate son of the lumber baron Bayliss; moreover, Pete has now realized Bayliss was using him to spy on the other workers and sabotage their attempts to organize. Sitting on the mountainside, Pete is the image of a "dead tired" worker, and the earth mirrors his

dejected state as “behind him the logged-off land humped into smaller hills, the stumps standing up bare and black, forests made voiceless, without leaves or life” (9). Pete sits on the hillside, and his thoughts mingle with an unobtrusive narrator’s observations to set the novel’s foundational concepts and concerns. Beginning with the forest, the novel’s first pages provide critical insights into the establishment of gender and nature as foundational categories in the hierarchical logic of domination and oppression. Weatherwax uses her first chapter to show, as Alaimo states, “at any given historical moment “nature” is not only a profoundly gendered realm but a site of many other struggles for power and meaning” (*Undomesticated* 13). As Pete’s mind wanders, the chapter considers the oppression of nature, women, Indigenous peoples, racialized peoples, and the working class, suggesting these oppressions are entangled parts of a hegemonic system of capital.

In the first pages, Weatherwax ties the harm and exploitation of workers to the lumber industry’s harming the environment. Here, not only are the forests rendered into mutilated corpses, but they are “made voiceless,” implying that the forests once had speech and language. This description defies the hierarchization of humans and plants that denies the existence of communication methods among plant life. Accordingly, Weatherwax announces the significance of language in the novel’s first paragraph and recognizes the language and life of forests. Language will not only be considered in more-than-human contexts, but also in human expressions of spoken, written, and even musical forms.

The novel quickly addresses Indigenous language and silence in relation to oppression. Pete, who had fled away from the lumber town when he realized the lumber baron Bayliss was only using him to spy on the Filipino labour organizer Mario, now thinks about the weeks he has spent with the local Indigenous peoples and their experiences. Pete thinks of Salish names,

"Quinault, Taholah, Humptulips" (9), reflecting on the smoothness with which the Indigenous people say the words which "pucker" the mouths of others.[16] The narrator then sets an ironic, angry tone, stating, "Sure they were having a fine time, sitting on their ass on the reservation . . . they knew it was nothing but a concentration camp, the Indian agent pulling God knows what" (10). The passage uses sarcasm to continue juxtaposing negative perceptions of the Indigenous people as lazy, silent, and uncomprehending with Pete's perception of them as people who are patient, working, and learning while guarding against being harmed further. "For strangers," the narrator explains, "their faces were solid as cliffs, brown, without a crack for words to come out" (10). The Indigenous people have been rendered voiceless in the larger society through years of violent subjugation, yet they are not defeated and still communicate, as Pete observes "speech made without the effort of speech, their eyes doing the talking" (10). Like the reference to the language of the forest, this draws attention to embodied communications as forms of knowledge and language that subvert the most obvious forms of recognition.

Weatherwax's experiences with Indigenous peoples, her respect for their ways of life, and concern for their oppression under settler colonialism are apparent in the author's limited body of published work. In a collaboration with her husband and brother, Weatherwax published a book of Indigenous animal stories in 1934, title *The Coming of the Animals.*[17] In the book's preface, the authors discuss the sharp decline in Indigenous people in California. The authors couch their language in uncertainty, but the suggestion of settler-colonial culpability is clear. They write,

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[16] Despite its similarity to English, "Humptulips" is a Salish word. Humptulips is the name of a small community and a river near Grays Harbor, Washington. For more: https://www.graysharbortalk.com/2015/01/04/humptulips-history/

[17] The book does not name any Indigenous peoples with specificity; instead, the information is presented as generally about "Indians of California." The brief acknowledgement at the beginning of *The Coming of the Animals*, thanks sources that all appear to be settler-colonial, academic sources. While I am praising Weatherwax's positive overtures to Indigenous peoples, I also want to acknowledge that revising and publishing Indigenous stories without permission or help from Indigenous peoples is a violation however well intentioned.

"Many reasons are given to explain why the number has become so small. Perhaps the Indians could not get well when they caught the sickness of white men. Perhaps they were very unhappy because they were made to leave their homes and live in the cities and towns" (3-4). Both the preface and the effort to preserve and disseminate the Indigenous stories reveal appreciation and concern for Indigenous knowledge. Similarly, in the brief autobiography used for both *Marching!* and the *New Masses* article, Weatherwax highlights her connections to the Quinault people in Washington State, stating she spent her "earliest days . . . in a papoose basket which her mother got from Indians at the Quinault Indian Reservation." The Indigenous people within *Marching!* disappear after the first chapters, Weatherwax's respect and concern for Indigenous peoples is revealed in the opening scenes complex portrayal them.

Marching! begins by conveying interconnectedness of forms of oppression and suggesting this oppression relies on the suppression of communication. In *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*, Robin Wall Kimmerer explains ways in which her Potawatomi culture and other Indigenous peoples originally from the Great Lake region consider plants and animals as teachers. Kimmerer further explores how language shapes human understanding and engagement with plants and animals, recognizing how Potawatomi language "reminds us . . . of our kinship with all of the animate world" while English tends away from "incorporating respect for animacy" (57). Although speaking of the Coast Salish rather than the Potawatomi people, Weatherwax alludes to similar differences between the Salish Language and English in the novel's first paragraph as Pete reflects on his time at the reservation: "the Salish names puckering the mouth like a taste of sea water, lips spitting them, strangling the sounds without patience; but the Indians said them smoothly the way gulls fly with risings and fallings" (9). Here, the white mouths are impatient and twisted

while the Indigenous mouths harmoniously reflect the natural world. If, as Kimmerer contends, language shapes and reflects our thinking about life, this moment in the novel suggests through language that the Indigenous peoples of the northwest have better relations with the more-than-human world than the white bosses and workers do.

Within the first pages' critiques of settler colonialist abuse of nature and Indigenous peoples, Weatherwax also recognizes what would become the foundational insight of ecofeminism: that the oppression of women and nature has frequently been facilitated through ontological overlap that amounts to tautology. Put simply, women have been defined as closer to nature and therefore subordinate to and possessions of civilized man, while nature has been coded as feminine and therefore an object of conquest and reproduction for man. Weatherwax links the domination of women and nature in the same paragraphs, revealing complexities as the narrator relates Pete's understanding of what the Quinault men think when he tells them some about the workers' movement: "It made the earth they turned over seem warm and heavy with promise like a woman soon to be owned" (10). The earth being turned and planted here is directly correlated to women as sexual and maternal objects, both valued for what they can produce, and both viewed in terms of ownership. The division of labour in the Quinault camp described next follows the same sexist patter as men hunt, fish, and collect oysters while women cook in "grey board houses" (10).What is not clear, however, is if Pete is projecting these sexist thoughts in a representation of the Quinault people of if the narrator is actually relating what the Quinault men think. This highlights some ambiguity in Weatherwax's narration that, while still conveying the theme of sexist oppression, leaves uncertainty in whose views are truly being expressed. In the next paragraph, the narrator describes Lumber Baron Bayliss as "taking the trees like young maidens" (11) and the rich as taking the best lands near the lake, showing an

interchangeability between woman and nature as subordinated others within the patriarchal and capitalist order. These two key examples signal ecofeminist logic underpinning the text and the novel's recognition of the prevalent discourse of gendered and sexualized conquest in the American capitalist expansion.

Weatherwax's choice to imply that both Indigenous and white men use the circular logic of nature and women signifying each other as justification for the objectification and domination of both signals some complexity in her understanding of overlapping forms of oppression and the colonial spreading of patriarchal thinking. Alaimo explains the interlocking subjugation of women, nature, and Indigenous people where "sexualizing conquest and colonialism naturalizes those processes while depicting women, the land, and indigenous peoples as mysterious zones [supposedly] invite their own violation" (*Undomesticated* 13). Weatherwax's portrayal of the Quinault men suggests that, despite suffering from colonialist oppression, Indigenous men are not immune from internalizing patriarchal values. Weatherwax, unfortunately, does not again take seriously the exploration of Indigenous experience within the novel, giving some authority to the critics who argue that she leaves too many characters and storylines unsatisfied; however, these first scenes still recognize the psychological complexity of Indigenous people's experiences and the complexity of both their language and their silence.

Weatherwax also names and describes several plants in *Marching!* in ways that draw attention to their material existence and importance. While Weatherwax is writing from her own settler-colonialist perspective and does not go as far as Kimmerer in recognizing nonhuman agency, her attention to plant life highlights the flora as interconnected life that humans need to consider. Recalling the proletarian and realist literary techniques of emphasizing importance through attention to detail helps us to understand Weatherwax choices of listing and naming as

signaling the importance of understanding the liveliness and heterogeneity of the forest ecologies. As Pete races down the hillside, he tumbles through, "blackberry vines . . . salal monkey-ferns . . . blossoms of fireweed . . .stiff huckleberry . . . and twisted root stumps" (14). The workers who are trying to free the body of their crushed colleague from under the tree must contend with "hands smeary and slippery with hemlock sliminess, feet desperate in ooze" (14). Later, as Pete lies recovering in the grass, the smells of trees and plants are strong, including the "bruised spicy cedar," "resinous" fir and spruce, "trampled fern" and musky skunk cabbage (18). Yet, over all these sharp and penetrating smells, "swam the smell of wood dust and live pitch and men working" (18). Weatherwax names and describes a great variety of trees and plants, giving them life and significance beyond their relation the workers who must harm and overshadow their lives. In this way, the novel suggests that forests might serve as models for human collectives: the collectivity of the forest does not erase the individual plants, but it exhibits a mode of being that may teach people the strength of living through more selfless and collective methods. Weatherwax stops short of making a direct statement that humans may and should learn from the plant and forest life, as Kimmerer suggests Indigenous cultures do, but the novel's early explorations of plant life and human-plant relations establish the kinship of human and plant life and the possibility for humans to learn from this. The text, if only for a few moments, makes a point of listening to plant life.

Intersections of Race

While the novel's focus on plant life recedes after the first chapter, *Marching!* does continue the opening chapter's anticipation of intersectional feminism in its attention race. Weatherwax depicts ways in which racism is deployed as a capitalist tactic to exploit racialized workers. In promoting racist discourses, employers might justify paying lower wages, providing

less benefits, and other exploitative tactics to increase profit at the expense of workers. Weatherwax devotes significant space to demystifying otherness to show human commonality across ethnic, regional, and linguistic differences. For example, when in the novel, a court bailiff makes a Filipino man leave to "give a white man some room," it is a woman worker who tells the Filipino man, "But listen—the workers are for the Filipinos. The workers are for them" (Weatherwax 223). Although many iterations of feminism have existed since the First Wave of the Progressive Era, they have often been fragmented in terms of inclusiveness and goals. Twenty-First century ecofeminism has actualized an intersectional feminism through the foundational understandings of how multiple forms of oppression are mobilized through essentializing discourses of nature and woman. Weatherwax's novel is an early attempt at articulating in meaningful way how discourses and ideologies authorizing the domination of women and nature are manipulated to justify other types of discrimination.

Marching! also addresses racialized people, and unlike Steinbeck's erasure of women and nonwhite labour activists in *In Dubious Battle,* Weatherwax refused to compromise the diverse composition of the workers because she understands the sowing of division and prejudice is a crucial tactic employers use to keep workers oppressed. Like the Quinault faces that are described as all the same to strangers, the mixed-race organizer Mario, the Chinese, Japanese, Hindus, Filipinos, and other immigrants are practically indistinguishable to their rich employers. Mario, who is part Filipino, and "the rest of his crowd" live on the other side of the river, squatting in shacks without toilets, using burlap bags and rags for blankets, and sharing a common water tap. In contrast, the workers recognize Mario, if not the other racialized workers, as a distinct and admirable individual: The narrator emphasizes Mario's skills as a top-faller and the way people just seem to "cotton" to him (11). Regardless of skill or congeniality, Mario and

the other racialized workers are discounted, underpaid, and segregated through the town's socio-economic system. The workers, however, begin to gain a stronger collective as they build recognition of common humanity and understanding across racial lines.

Weatherwax uses. Racist language to describe Filipino characters at times, but the novel is antiracist in its themes and recognizes racism as a tool of oppression and exploitation. For example, the narrator describes Mario's partner Rosa as "swarthy" several times. Like Weatherwax's use of the phrase "breeding like rabbits" to refer to the Filipino community, her use of "swarthy" to describe Rosa appears as an ignorant repetition of casual racism, but that is confounded by Rosa's competent and helpful character. Rosa always appears in a positive way, helping the frantic Silly when he is bitten by an insect, cradling Mario and bringing him back from the brink of death, and helping Tovio's grief-stricken wife, Hanna, to get to the workers' meeting. In fact, Weatherwax sustains antiracist analysis through most of the text, and while the majority of the content focuses on racialized workers who either immigrated or have Asian or Mexican heritage, the text also recognizes Indigenous people, Black Americans, and Jewish Americans as victims of oppression. Mario lies in the grass after being attacked and thinks, "All were simply present in him. Japanese, Filipinos, whites, Negroes, Mexicans" (113). Weatherwax recognizes how systematic oppression uses racism to facilitate exploitation and the ways in which this links everyone in the working class, but through moments like the description of the Filipinos' lives on the other side of the river and the bailiff forcing the Filipino man to "make room," she also reveals connections to environmental justice and intersectional feminism.

Reproductive Labours

Weatherwax, like Steinbeck emphasizes the importance of care work, but unlike Steinbeck, Weatherwax does not efface women's agency or reproduce the mother stereotype. Renderings of motherhood during the Depression Era, as Laura Hapke skillfully shows, frequently ignored the women who were farm workers, who were sole wage earners for their families, and who were "homemakers" as well as wage earners (30).[18][19] Dominant cultural images and conceptions "remove woman from the labor landscape and sanctify her as a maternal figure" (Hapke 31). Such portrayals distort both the workplaces and the experiences of women. Of course, this does not mean that men do not perform reproductive labour or that conceptions of men have not also at times been purposefully manipulated; however, within proletarian literature's marked celebration of the masculine working-class, women workers and the forms of care work associated with women suffer significant erasure, obfuscation, and manipulation. While Steinbeck's treatment of reproductive labour in *In Dubious Battle* appears as a more detailed and specifically structured argument for recognition and remuneration of reproductive labour, his reframing and removal of women's participation in political organizing misrepresents actual conditions of reproductive labour, but Weatherwax contextualizes reproductive labour in the lives of women and domestic labourers to give a more accurate assessment of working-class women's lives.

In *Marching!* the young women Mary and Annie perform the reproductive labour most associated with women and mothers. Though neither woman is a mother, both are care givers to

[18] Like the previous chapter, reproductive labour and care work are used interchangeably and are defined here in the broad sense of essential care and connectivity on which life depends. This includes caring for children, elderly, and sick relatives, maintaining homes, preparing food, and attending to community needs and connections.
[19] Hapke estimates that during the depression 2-3 million women were unemployed, 1/10 of women labourers worked in agriculture, 4 million women were homemakers and wage earners, 1 million women were deserted wives, and 2 million were divorcees or deserted wives.

family members. Annie has been dating Tim, but she is attracted to Joe. She works, presumably at the paper mill, and she takes care of father and brother "He drew on her arm and she came blindly, like a child and not like a child, maybe just like anyone worn out and crying" (45) Annie represents reproductive labour within the text, and her narrative subtly challenges the typical masculinist worker's narrative. Annie is introduced in relation to her role as care giver. She stops in at Mary's and mom's home, to talk about Tim, but she immediately announces she can't stay long because she must get home to make supper for "Silly and him," meaning her brother and father. As the pieces of Annie unfold, her hard life is revealed. Annie's brother Silly is intellectually challenged, and her father traumatized. In addition to working at the mill, Annie takes care of them both. Her boyfriend Tim has just died in the logging accident, and she has recently terminated a pregnancy, a procedure for which she is still paying in installments. Annie, who has romantic and sexual feelings for Joe, provides a significant portion of the text's feminist underpinnings. Rabinowitz convincingly argues that Annie's desires interrupt the masculine narrative, but I want to expand that argument to consider Annie not only in her desires but only in her representation of the unique struggles as someone performing reproductive labour and as a woman subject to the oppressive tactics of placing women in the unfavourable sides of dichotomous ontologies.

Through Annie, Weatherwax reveals the added burdens women and girls face as performers of both economic and reproductive labours. Annie is exhausted from the moment she enters the narrative. When her father points out that she has some gray hairs, Annie is horrified but not out of vanity. "I don't want to be a woman, look like a woman. Seems like I haven't lived like a girl yet" (49). Taking care of her brother and father, working at the mill, and terminating her pregnancy leave Annie exhausted and angry. The anger and resentment Annie feels subvert

the popular notion of the feminine figure who cares for other and gives endlessly of herself as if endless reproductive labour were the fulfillment of her deepest womanly desires. Annie claims the gray hairs are really hairs coated in paper dust from her job at the mill, complaining she can never get it out. Weatherwax never tells readers whether the hair is turning gray naturally or if it is paper dust, and in doing so creates a doubly negative effect: Annie is either aging quickly from hard labour, or she is physically marred by her job.

The novel presents women as crucial, equal members of the working class and labour movement, and it challenges cultural conceptions of women as selfless caregivers whose primary concerns are motherhood and family. In the novel, the young papermill worker Annie terminates a pregnancy after her boyfriend Tim dies in a logging accident caused by worn out equipment. Annie's abortion briefly draws attention to additional challenges women and particularly working women face as females. The Depression added more complexities to birth control and abortion debates in America as increasing numbers of children went underfed and without basic necessities. According to Linda Gordon, the economic worries of the Depression did not cause growth in the movement for birth control, and the labour movement and birth control movements had no discernable overlap. Gordon, however, speaks to the more overt political actions and platforms of the movements. In proletarian literature, some authors explored abortion and birth control in the lives of young working women. Notably, both Weatherwax's *Marching!* and Robert Cantwell's *Land of Plenty*—a novel based on the same Aberdeen area strikes—reveal reveal the difficulty of being an unexpectedly pregnant young worker, not from standpoints of moral judgements but rather as another economic and emotional strain upon working-class women as an exploited group.

Weatherwax weaves issues of pregnancy and birth in the text to deepen the analysis of the additional hardships women workers face. Annie is not physically harmed by her abortion like the young mill worker Marie in *Land of Plenty*; instead, she faces financial and emotional strains. While abortion was illegal in all U.S. states and territories well before the Depression Era, Annalies Winny explains that some doctors were increasingly performing abortions because the wide-spread economic hardships made the desire to not have children easier to understand. Still the unsanctioned abortions performed covertly increased the medical risks to women with 1 in 5 maternal deaths recorded in 1930 listed as a result of illegal abortion (Gold np.). Whether to have a child or terminate a pregnancy appears costly regardless of the choice made. The point is clarified when the narrator reveals Annie's brother Silly's birth circumstances: their mother Nora gave birth to Silly "prematurely, right on the bare floor of the laundry where she was working" (151). This moment in the text is brief and understated, as are the earlier allusions to Annie's own pregnancy, but both provide depth to the text's presentation of the unique challenges and additional pressures of being a female-bodied worker.

Domestic work, as forms of reproductive labour, is a common and historical site of worker exploitation. *Marching!* briefly, but meaningfully, asserts domestic work as true labour and as a field heavily structured through racism. At the workers' meeting, Pete brings to the front Donato from the "Down-and-Outers." Donato, as a down-and-outer from across the river, is marked as one of the racialized workers. That Donato is Filipino draws attention to the the specific link between racism and domestic labour. Donato talks first about the lumber workers, but he adds, "We got some here not lumber workers, but domestic workers . . . they do everything—housework, looking after the children, the dog, the cat, birds, anything they got. All from nothing to five dollars or ten, up to twenty dollars a month" (194). The brief section

highlights the issue of domestic labour employment, complementing the working-class reproductive labours in the text that are done by workers who also have paid employment. If people employ others to perform care work, then not only must this work count as real labour but it is also subject to the same exploitation that is associated with the labour of economic production. This exploitation is evident in the extremely low wages listed and especially highlighted in the payment of "nothing." Here Weatherwax alludes to the exploitative practices of exchanging room and board in return for domestic labour—care work. While the text does not go further into the plight of domestic labour employment, the earlier explorations of reproductive labour, like Annie's or the community work done to help Granny Whittle, are spectres in Donato's speech, giving weight to his words.

The novel creates a picture of the community through a mix of reproductive-care and economic labour. The narrator relates, "Whether it was Tovio bringing *Shopping News*, or the unemployed worker's wife down the block whom Granny took care of when a doctor cost too much, or swarthy Rosa washing dishes at the women's exchange when Granny brought bakings to the brassy missus—anyway word hummed along the workers' grapevine" (80). Tovio is the only man mentioned and the only example of economic labour. The rest of the grapevine here is women performing reproductive labours of health care, food production, and domestic maintenance without monetary wages. The Women's Exchange particularly represents a movement in this era of consignment stores generally owned and operated by women for the benefit of women. Weatherwax is deliberate in her inclusions as she crafts the town as community.

Weatherwax's brevity in her insertions of care work into the text may be somewhat unsatisfying in a contemporary context, but within the context of proletarian literature's

masculinist expectations and cultural temperaments on domestic labour and women's rights, the text actually includes a wide range of topics frequently ignored in other texts. Annie, Mary, and Rosa particularly show the strains of additional reproductive labours assigned to women who already work in direct economic production. Granny Whittle, in her care for the unemployed worker's wife, and Annie, Mary, and Nora express the burdens of health and family care for female-bodied people who not only have additional health needs but are frequently poorly served by the medical establishment. Finally, the financially exploited domestic workers who take care of reproductive labours for middle-class and wealthy families emphasize both the degraded perception of reproductive labour and the intensity of the work.

Stamped with the Signs of Labour: Documenting --corporeality

As many critics note, *Marching!* relentlessly displays unpleasant and even disgusting physicality, but while critics generally assign this technique to the logic of the proletarian grotesque, a lens of transcorporeality allows us to see the ways in which the novel belongs to subset of activist literature that purposefully displays the porosity and overlap of living bodies with matter. As Alaimo has shown, this trans-corporeal literature challenges popular dualistic conceptions of human life and inanimate matter as completely distinct from one another, usually to expose harmful labour practices' detrimental effects on workers' bodies or other industrial byproducts' effects on the public. Michael Denning's analysis of the proletarian grotesque as featuring "twisted figures," "strange beasts," and "moments of crisis and transition" displayed without aesthetic distance, and offering no relief or comfort, particularly fits proletarian literature's mandate to show the heroic struggles of the working-class. Denning contends that the proletarian literature and its proletarian grotesque technique is more of a "transitional modernism" than a social realism. If, however, we understand this technical, modernist

innovation as delivering realist subject matter, we can then see many of these proletarian grotesques as attempts to show harmful instances of tran-scorporeality resulting from worker exploitation and class injustice. Entailed in the proletarian grotesque's refusal of aesthetic distance and "hostility to 'art'" is social realism's commitment to portraying actual conditions with realist intent. The technique might be considered a significant fusion of modernism and realism which provides a unique opportunity for new materialist studies as each depiction, as asserts, reveals the absurdity of the Enlightenment project of mastering nature.

Marching! shows an understanding of the connectivity of socio-politico practices and bodily health. Alaimo explains these complications in more contemporary terms: "Civil rights, affirmative action, and identity politics models of social justice—all of which assume that individuals are bounded, coherent entities—become profoundly altered by the recognitions that human bodies, human health, and human rights are interconnected with the material, often toxic overflows of particular places" (*Bodily Natures* 62). While civil rights, affirmative action, and identity politics are anachronistic to the 1930s, the concepts they represent are not. Weatherwax begins to uncover the very connections of which Alaimo speaks. In the second chapter, as the reporter listens in to various conversations at Nick's bar, the narrator gives snippets of conversations, including one about poverty, illness, and what we call environmental justice today. The reporter hears someone say, "the whole kaboodle—twelve of them's got typhoid. Water cut off. Forced to drink from a bum well like that. I'd like t'know how they expect the unemployed" (Weatherwax 37). While the text does not include any commentary on this statement, the fragment of insight links the racialized workers' living conditions with those of the unemployed and extends the critique of water and utility access and its links to illness and social justice. Water is one of the most visible and earliest recognized points of physical intra-action,

and the text uses these facts not only to set a tone of awareness to physical intra-action, but also to express the ways socio-economic status affects the types of physical intra-actions a body will experience.

In addition to understanding water contamination and unequal human access to water utilities as linked to oppression, *Marching!* documents harmful trans-corporeality in workplaces. The later chapter's explicit connection of "wood dust sucked into their lungs with every breath" to tuberculous and pneumonia deaths in workers is previewed in Annie's struggle with paper dust in her hair. Annie's father mistakenly thinks Annie is going gray, but twenty-one-year-old Annie exclaims, "It's only paper dust. I can never get it out. It's paper dust" (49). The paper dust that Annie can never fully remove from her hair echoes in the later statement of wood dust's deadly inescapability. The Hawk's Nest or Gauley Bridge tragedy in West Virginia, about which Muriel Rukeyser wrote her long poem *The Book of the Dead*, was reported on throughout 1935 with several articles in *New Masses* detailing how the unprotected workers unknowingly, "with every breath. . . were inhaling a massive dose of microscopic silica dust" (Allen 18). Weatherwax inserts the same language into her novel, understanding the lumber and paper workers facing similar risks to the thousands dying from inhaling silica in a state across the country. The images of images of bodies coated and infiltrated with industrial byproducts specifically illustrate the porosity of living bodies.

Offensive olfactory descriptions, mutilated bodies, and harmed environments permeate Weatherwax's novel, working in much the way Denning describes the proletarian grotesque—refusing aesthetic distancing and offering no comfort. Weatherwax's use of the proletarian grotesque, however, goes beyond creating shocking discomfort toward a specific documenting of trans-corporeality influenced by social circumstances. That is, Weatherwax does not only horrify

with the hardened delivery of tableaus like the "reddish ooze still boiling crawling out" of Tim's cranium, "sliced neatly off" (15), but she also insists we look at prolonged effects like the paper deliverer Tovio's lopsided shoulders and "misshapen flatfooted walk that spoke mutely of varicose veins in swollen legs, and broken-down feet" (42). Tovio's injured feet speak "mutely," recalling the voiceless forests being physically cut down, connecting the injured human and injured forests through (revoked) language and embodiment. For each shocking human fatality among the exploited working class, the novel insists, many more suffer slowly debilitating consequences of a poor material existence largely dictated by social forces.

Weatherwax identifies two modes of proletarian grotesque: the immediate incidents or work catastrophes and the slower but equally harmful trans-corporeal effects of degraded or harmed environments on living beings. At the workers' meeting, Granny Whittle notices Harry the Boom man's "squashed ear," and her wonderings send the narrator on an exposition of the felled trees' journey from the water where the boom man works through the milling process of turning logged trees into lumber. At the end of the explanation, the narrator flatly states, "The day's run of risks included smashed feet, cuts, falls, sawed fingers, drowning ruptures, 'accidental death.' And exposure, poor food, wood dust sucked into their lungs with every breath, killed many whose death certificates read pneumonia—or tuberculosis, 'the workers' disease'" (Weatherwax 187). In this way, Weatherwax clarifies that work injuries are not the only deadly risk to the working class, stressing the way seemingly innocuous actions, as simple as eating and breathing, may have deadly effects because of the working conditions created in the capitalist system and its sacrificing safety for profit increase.

The novel has an undercurrent of concern for bodily intra-action, and unhealthy intra-actions are prevalent as Weatherwax weaves glimpse of them or their circumstances throughout

the text. In the first chapter, the narrator describes the racialized workers who live on the other side of the river as "visiting a common tap for water" and "carting slops to the river or using holes in the ground surrounded by crazy boards" (12). Weatherwax uses a racist trope to end what otherwise reads as a section making an argument for environmental justice: saying the racialized workers are "breeding and dying like rabbits." While the phrase "breeding like rabbits" is a generally well-known prejudicial charge used by racists and classists, Weatherwax adds "dying" to the phrase. Weatherwax does not negate the racist connotations of the saying, but she does complicate the phrase. The phrase "breeding like rabbits" alludes to white supremacist fears of being replaced as the ruling group, classist fears of economic reform and loss of personal wealth, and the denial of responsibility for pollution and climate change; thus, the addition of "dying" to the phrase appears to contradict the saying's logic that the problem du jour is an overpopulation of "others." Weatherwax's exact intentions in adapting the racist phrase are unknown, but the antiracist content of the book suggests her change to the phrase is an intentional intervention. The text's sympathy to the racialized workers combines with this small change to argue that the racialized workers' health and lives matter. This section's attention to water and sewage also foreshadows a waterborne illness in the following chapter.

Marching, the Pinnacle of Collective Action and Consciousness?

Weatherwax connects the novel's focus on physical embodiment and trans-corporeality to heightened consciousness that culminates in the workers' collective march at the end of the novel. Although the phrase "marching, marching" appears in the novel and the novel ends with the march, marching, like I argued of Steinbeck's phalanx, is only one important iteration of the collective these novels attempt to define. In fact, Weatherwax's original choice for the novel's title did not include a reference to marching. As the injured Mario lays in the dirt for hours after

Bayliss's stooges beat and rape him, he reflects on walking behind the bodies of Howard Sperry and Nick Bordoise—the two workers killed by San Francisco police on Bloody Thursday—in a mass demonstration that would become a famous symbol of labour struggle and worker solidarity. Mario recalls "the three mile long demonstration" where "all seemed to be on a kind of fighting front, sweeping sharp and steady, conscious of their living force, wide lines marching, marching. . . ." (122). Here, the consciousness of their living force, a type of affect, is the crucial point. The participants achieve a higher state of mental clarity rooted in their material existence as a collective. Even the elongated ellipses with which Weatherwax ends the chapter visually mirrors the perpetuity of the march and consciousness as though its essential essence is not confined to the march but goes on in the people.

The idea that heightened material consciousness exists in a sense of collective purpose that extends beyond the dramatic expression of marches exists in Weatherwax's original title for the novel, *Lumber Town*. Rather than focus on the catalytic events for the collective action that ends the story, the title *Lumber Town* recognizes community and the novel's collectivity centred around the people of the town. Weatherwax had chosen the title *Lumber Town*, but as the judges all disliked the title, they sent her a list of titles from which to choose (Suggs xxxvi). The title *Marching! Marching!* focuses attention on the culminating act of collective demonstration. Rather than invoking the town as a collective around the lumber industry, the repetitive gerund form of the chosen title, followed with exclamation marks gives the title a thrust of urgency and power that is more suggestive of conflict and battle. The march at the end of the novel epitomizes the collective, and like Steinbeck's use of the phalanx, Weatherwax embed militaristic conflict in the final scenes as opposing forces call out the "militia" who arrive with machine guns, bayonets, and gas masks (255-56). Unlike Steinbeck's marchers, however, these workers

individual identities are not erased as they achieve a heightened and connected consciousness, for even as the narration moves into a common "we," individuals are named and take separate actions to alert others or briefly engage the opposing force.

Still, the book as a whole shows how the lumber town coalesces into a public, a cluster of "harmed bodies" who "draw near to each other and seek to engage in new acts that will restore their power, protect against future harm, or compensate for damage done" (Bennet 101). Examples of these acts are found throughout the book as characters like Joe and Mary sneak through the night to deliver literature and "thirdhand clothes, carefully washed and repatched" that workers collected for workers and their families who are even worse off (Weatherwax 87). Frequent scenes in "Nick's Place," a cheap bar, show workers gathering to talk and share information. Similarly, scenes of neighbours helping with care acts like providing food and chopping firewood for those in need dot the narrative. Finally, the more formal versions are found in the workers' meetings and the women's exchange where the towns people gather in direct response to the labor struggle. These purposeful gatherings *are* political actions, according to Bennet, and the bodies are not limited to humans. The voiceless forest stumps, frayed cables which snapped and decapitated Tim, the cedar tree growing in the sidewalk, the bacteria and viruses in the water, the wood and paper dust in and on the people's bodies, the reservation on the Quinault, all these things contribute to the agential assemblage which culminates in the more anthropocentric march at the end of the novel. The novel shows the agential potential of human and nonhuman bodies. Bennett writes, "A political act not only disrupts, it disrupts in a way as to change radically what people can 'see': it repartitions the sensible; it overthrows the regime of the perceptible. Here again the political gate is opened enough for nonhumans . . . to slip through, for they also have the power to startle and provoke a gestalt shift in perception: what

was trash becomes things, what was an instrument becomes a participant, what was foodstuff becomes agent . . . we see how an animal, plant, mineral, or artifact can sometimes catalyze a public" (Bennett 107). Like the proletarian grotesque, the exposition of accidents involving faulty equipment, like the ladder breaking beneath Old Dan in *In Dubious Battle* and the frayed cable snapping and decapitating Tim in *Marching!*, the impetus to show deplorable working and living conditions often lends itself to exhibiting the agency of nonhuman matter, and, in this context, perhaps the possibility of hearing the voiceless forest.

While the original title emphasizes collectivity beyond marching, the novel does culminate in a collective strike march that is equally significant as a defining experience and symbol of collective transformation. The march at the end of Weatherwax's text transforms the strikers not into a bloodthirsty animalize mob like we saw in Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*, but rather into a Bennett-like public with heightened consciousness. Although the public included nonhumans in rest of the text, the march focuses only on humans. Heightened material consciousness, however, defines the marchers. The narrator, now speaking in first-person plural relates, "A feeling of live power ripples through us like electricity, feeding and renewing itself on the charged air around us, full as it is of the sounds we are making, of the sweaty smell of our own flesh in movement, and of the oil, fish, wood, pulp, gasoline, factory smells of our working clothes" (Weatherwax 254). The expanded public is symbolically present in the trace smells its members attach to the workers clothes, and the heightened material consciousness is materialized in the electric charge in the air. These moments of power in marching are concentrated moments of collectivity expressing the power of the collective public. It is not that the power is not present in the everyday expressions of the public forming in response to harm, but rather that the

marching collective pushes that power beyond a threshold to a concentration powerful enough to affect change on systemic levels.

Ambiguous Endings

Marching! Marching! will never be revived as a pinnacle of literary or political achievement; however, the gleefully malicious attacks on Weatherwax's novel have kept us from appreciating its insights and innovations. If, as Michael Denning argues, the "lineaments of those failures" of proletarian literature have value and provide insights into the progression of history and literature, *Marching!* demands our attention, for its overly programmatic messaging and patchy character development are the lineaments of theoretical and practical innovation. Weatherwax presents a complex set of answers to socio-economic problems that go unsolved today, presenting progressive insights into the complexities of systemic oppression across divisions of class, race, gender, ethnicity, and living matter. Moreover, experiments with form as she blends the subject matter of social realism and techniques of modernism to offer a proto-material feminist alternative to both liberal individualism and the fear of mindless collectivism that Steinbeck would later express in *In Dubious Battle.*

Weatherwax's technical innovations of combining realist subject and purpose with modernist technique are clearly in service of her desire to influence change. Though her attempts to embody collectivity within the *Marching!* led to some of the harshest critiques of the novel, the novel's insights into the intersections of exploitation across class, gender, ethnic and racial identities, and the material world are exceptional. In the final chapters, the concomitance of the exploitation of the natural world and the working-class returns through metaphor and imagery. Key moments describe the unified workers as the living land upon which the local industries are based. The workers become "a forest of fist raised" (208) when they perform the workers' salute

at the end of the strike meeting, and as the march begins in the final chapter, the people "flow smoothly forward with the force of a river" (254). The forests and the rivers are, of course, integral to the novel's central industry, lumber, as the forests provide the material for the product and the rivers, as the novel shows, provide vital pathways for moving the cut trees. Weatherwax's use of nature-based metaphors to describe worker-strikers in these pivotal moments subtly but undeniably allies worker and nature, reinforcing a core theme: the working-class is being overburdened, mutilated, and cut down in the same ways the living world of trees, plants, and animals are. In addition to making this link, Weatherwax simultaneously invokes common conceptions of the endurance and strength of Nature, imbuing the worker-strikers with those qualities while suggesting they are on the right side.[20]

In the previous chapter I assessed Steinbeck's competing conceptions of collective action. While characters like Doc and Mac hoped for the marching strikers to become something more powerful than individuals, a group entity capable of creating a solution to exploitation and oppression, the results were entranced mobs that in Steinbeck's view were unpredictable and dangerous. Yet, for many people in the Progressive and Depression Eras, the collective actions of striking and marching represented hope of significant change, and the collective march was an important symbol within leftist ideologies and proletarian literature. Like Weatherwax's *Marching! Marching!* many proletarian novels ended amid a strike action like collective demonstration and marching, but the attention given to marches could also be seen in the amount of newspaper and magazine articles devoted to collective marches. Marching captured imaginations on the left, and the cultural fixation influenced Weatherwax's novel.

[20] Nature with capital "N" denotes the popular definitions the term has gathered, establishing Nature as untouched by humans and imbued with special properties, often timeless and curative of human-made problems.

Like Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*, Weatherwax's *Marching!* ends ambiguously: the strikes are unresolved, and the workers appear vulnerable. At the end of *In Dubious Battle*, A distraught Mac appears nearly insane as he holds Jim's dead body, calling for workers to fight on while the people at the end of *Marching!* are marching into corralled streets lined with militia and police who wield guns, bayonets, and gas. The real west coast strikes which both Steinbeck and Weatherwax drew upon resulted in worker deaths but also in gains for the workers, and they are often referred to as successful strikes because of the increases in pay and recognition of bargaining rights that they yielded.

Chapter Three

Langston Hughes in California: The Politics of Care in Hughes's Proletarian Writing

> "Can we march together then? But perhaps the word *march* is the wrong word-suggesting soldiers and armies. Can we not put our heads together and think and plan—not merely dream—the future America? And then create it with our hands?" -Langston Hughes, "Democracy and Me" (1939)

> "The moon belongs to everybody, but not this American earth of ours." -Langston Hughes, "My Adventures as a Socialist Poet" (1947)

At the heart of Langston Hughes's writing is the desire to inspire people to care—care for one another and the world. His poetry and stories are known for the great emotional impacts they have had on generations of readers, and I assert in this chapter that Hughes's dedication to evoking powerful emotion is in service of inspiring his audiences to not only care more deeply about the lives of others and socio-political conditions, but to also use this care as the catalyst for action. In "Environmental Care Ethics: Notes Toward a New Materialist Critiques," Adeline Johns-Putra explains care as "a feeling of concern for the wellbeing, and needs of others" and care ethics as "an ethical position that takes this affective concern as its basis for action" (125). Johns-Putra's understanding of care as agential is particularly helpful for considering the role of care in Hughes's writings. For Hughes, proletarian literature is a means of inviting and prioritizing care in much the same way Johns-Putra describes—as an ethical position and as a basis for action. In this chapter, I will show how care as a foundation for socio-political action underpins Hughes's proletarian writing and unifying socio-political vision. The texts in this chapter reveal that "care is not the means by which agency occurs: it is itself agential" (126).

Just as John Steinbeck's writing has tied his legacy to the working-class and California's farming regions, Hughes has an enduring legacy as "the black Poet Laureate of race" and as perhaps the most well-known writer of the Harlem Renaissance or New Negro Movement (Berry and St. Claire 110). Few people realize, however, that for a period in the 1930s, Hughes lived and worked in Northern California. Hughes's time in California included a year of writing in Carmel-by-the-Sea (Carmel), then a small village popular with wealthy artists, and only minutes away from Monterey Bay and Cannery Row, to which Steinbeck would soon bring literary fame. When the Depression brought an end to the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes travelled in the U.S. and Caribbean before spending over a year in Russia and Asia. Noël Sullivan, a wealthy supporter of the arts from San Francisco, had previously offered Hughes the peace and financial security of a year in Sullivan's Carmel cottage to write. Weary from his travels and long periods of work but inspired by the social changes and artistry he saw in Russia, Hughes accepted Sullivan's offer upon returning to the U.S. Hughes, who was already advocating for social justice on several fronts, would soon become very familiar with the struggles of the agricultural working class in California. Hughes viewed the exploitation of agricultural workers in California as another manifestation of the oppressive systems fueling anti-Black racism. While in Carmel he focused his work on the social purposes of proletarian literature: the use of art to meaningfully convey the conditions of the proletariat and to help facilitate the end of systemic exploitation and oppression.

Hughes is well known for his engagement with racial justice and the experiences of Black Americans, but this chapter's focus on Hughes's distinctly proletarian period shows that his commitment to social justice and equity was complex and cannot be framed simply in terms of race or class alone. Hughes's lifetime of work is undeniably politically charged, but as scholar

Faith Berry first asserted, by viewing Hughes as a poet whose only focus is race, American literary studies has underrepresented Hughes's "dimensions . . . his complexity, his humanitarianism, [and] his diversity" (Berry and St. Clair 110). In a similar generalization, critics of his 1930s period, whether viewing the move positively like Mike Gold or negatively like Arnold Rampersad, have tended to interpret his proletarian work as subordinating racial justice concerns to those of class. However, I argue that Hughes was not subordinating one injustice to another but rather seeking to critique and ameliorate injustice across race, gender, class, identity, and perhaps even species. While teasing apart these themes to understand their relational significance is a legitimate critical endeavour, doing so tends to obfuscate vital commonalities across Hughes's proletarian writings. These texts' primary concerns are critiquing absences of, and attacks on, care. Crucially, they illustrate the vital roles of ethical care in socio-political relationships. It was in the 1930s—at the height of American proletarian literature's formation—that Hughes most ardently approached his writing as a tool for comprehensive socio-political change. During his time in Carmel, Hughes produced the short stories for *The Ways of White Folks* (1934), some of the poetry that would be collected in *A New Song* (1938), and the labour play *Harvest* (1934), which he co-authored with Ella Winter and later revised with Ann Hawkins.[21] The collaborative authorship of the play further reflects Hughes's concern for collective representation in this period while the three major texts together exemplify the diverse but collective concern of Hughes's proletarian period.

In this chapter, I examine *Harvest* in conversation with selections from the short story collection *The Ways of White Folks* and the small poem collection *A New Song*. I argue these

[21] Hughes and Winter began writing *Harvest* as a collaborative effort and completed a draft titled, *Blood on the Field*. Hawkins was consulted when the original version was rejected for production. Hughes, Winter, and Hawkins collaborated on the revised version of the play and titled it *Harvest*.

works create a constellation exemplifying the intersecting concerns of environmental justice and feminist ethics of care at the heart of Hughes's politically charged work of the 1930s. Further entailed in these loci are what I argue are also fundamental concerns of proletarian literature: the embodied, material self and relational ethical practices. These concerns challenge the conceptions of proletarian fiction as having a masculine and urban aesthetic, and they reject militaristic modes of marching in favour of creating socio-political relationship through prioritization of caring for and about people—as well as the living world. By reading *The Ways of White Folks, A New Song,* and *Harvest* together, I show in this chapter how Hughes not only experimented with proletarian literature techniques and representations of collective action but also explored the intersections of class, race, gender, and nature. Hughes, more than Steinbeck and Weatherwax, conveys the relationality entailed in America's socio-economic systems, yet reading these authors together exposes the complexity of the struggle for a just society. It further reveals the difficulties of literary representation of, and intervention into, socio-political conflicts. In this chapter, I argue that Hughes is an environmental justice writer who anticipates feminist ethics of care, and in subtler ways, suggests a new materialist extension of care and concern to the natural world.

This chapter begins with selected stories from *The Ways of White Folks* (hereafter *TWWF*) that provide insight into how Hughes's ambivalence about dominant nature tropes shaped his view of environmental justice and show how Hughes anticipates feminist care ethics by portraying the complexity of care—in affect and action—in the keenly insightful human stories. Earlier critics of proletarian literature such as Michael Denning and Cary Nelson argued in the 1980s and 90s for Hughes to be read as a proletarian author while more recent critics like Julie Sze and Catherin Peckinpaugh Vrtis suggest that Hughes was also a writer of environmental

justice. However, recognizing the ecological concerns in Hughes's works can be difficult as they are frequently subtle and often appear at the margins of race, class, and gender issues. These stories help me to illustrate how environmental justice and care ethics are important to Hughes's writing, and to also show that they are often presented in subtle ways because of Hughes's trepidation about racist nature discourses that frame Black people as inherently closer to nature and suited to servitude which justify their oppression and exploitation. With the help of scholarship on African American environmental discourse, such as that of Kimberley Smith and Carolyn Finney, I explain how Hughes resists primitivist essentialism and suggests that "neither black nor white Americans could look to their past to find a culture in harmony with nature" (Smith 154). "Rejuvenation Through Joy" particularly satirizes the American history of essentializing Black Americans as closer to nature for the benefit of white Americans. Meanwhile, stories like "Cora Unashamed" prioritize the morality and sheer strength of leading with care. This proletarian literature offers a more complex vision of the labour struggle by eschewing industrial settings for scenes of domestic labour, and doing so without recourse to marching and strikes, but instead portraying the care work done by Black women and men and emphasizing the morality and sheer strength of leading with care. Through a strong focus on personal intersections with labour, these stories further exemplify modes of care as crucial to socio-political relationships.

Next, this chapter examines the poems of *A New Song,* a pamphlet collection of Hughes's poems which the International Workers Union published in 1938. While some of the themes and forms—like the poem-chants—may appear programmatic or propagandistic, I show how these poems integrate themes of collective marching for justice, humanity's connection nature, and "the democratic culture rooted in public debate and the possibility of dialogue" that Brugère

explains is essential to feminist care ethics (33-34). In this way, Hughes's proletarian poetry adds dimension and depth to our understanding of this period of his writing by showing how Hughes's overarching vision of justice extends across social, political, economic, and environmental realms. Finally, I show how these interconnected themes are also central to *Harvest*, a labour play inspired by the same agricultural strikes that Steinbeck would draw on for *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Significantly, both Hughes and Steinbeck knew Ella Winter and visited strike camps with her. Like Steinbeck's novel, Hughes and Winter's play both represents the actual strikes and emphasizes the role of care in the labour movement and in socio-economic more generally. However, while Steinbeck sacrifices in-depth considerations of race and gender in his attempt to legitimize care work by portraying it as an activity done by white men, Hughes and his coauthors centralize the multi-racial make-up of the agricultural communities, the struggles of women, and women's active roles in the strikes. In addition, unlike Steinbeck's and Weatherwax's novels, *Harvest* does not feature scenes of strikes and mobs. While the play does reference collective strike actions, figures of marching and mobs are not significant to the political action and awareness of the play. Instead, Hughes and Winter replace the mass action of marching with interpersonal dialogue and mobs of angry strikers with characters who purposefully seek to understand other's perspectives and situations, suggesting that relational activities are equally important to the struggle for justice because they help foster relations of care.

Setting the Stage: *The Ways of White Folks*

A collection of fourteen stories featuring a variety of relationships between Black and white people, *The Ways of White Folks* is not often thought of as a proletarian text because it does not feature strikes or any of proletarian literature's commons tropes such as dangerous

factory settings or political conversions. However, it does portray the realities of proletarian characters' lives in other settings such domestic labour, child and health care, and food service, reflecting the fact that care workers in these settings made up a significant proportion of the Black working class. And although *TWWF* does not portray scenes of marching workers, it does promote a feminist ethics of care that I argue is central to the agricultural proletarian literature that Hughes was also writing at this time. Denning was one of the first to critics to recognize *TWWF* as a key proletarian text and represents "a central mode of proletarian writing" (218). More recently, Josep Armengol has argued that *TWWF* is proletarian in its exploration of the interdependence of race and class, showing the construction of Black and White as categories developed in tandem with class distinctions and hierarchies in American society. Armengol asserts *TWWF* illustrates "both the racist foundations of class inequality and the classist foundations of white racism" (118). Armengol's analysis is helpful in its understanding of how Hughes does not subordinate race to class in *TWWF and* instead understands the two as interconnected.

While the previous critical examples have considered *TWWF* as a mode of proletarian fiction focusing on race relationships and class, my analysis focuses on the importance of care ethics in these stories and how care, both as authentic concern for others' well-being and as forms of labour, structure personal and class relations. Race and economics, as those critics have argued, are still fundamental to the stories and their critiques, but my addition explicates the crucial current of care which runs through the stories. Within the story collection, paid domestic labour and unacknowledged emotional labour done by Black workers are key themes as Hughes layers the stories of race, love, and romance with both economics and care. Stories such as "Cora Unashamed," "Little Dog," and "Berry" show a complex relationship between experiences of

working class Black people and a greater awareness of how care, or its lack, defines all relationships. These stories complement my reading of *Harvest* as a play which challenges masculine battle, industrialism, and marching as the central figures of proletarian fiction. My reading reveals environmental justice and a feminist ethics of care as the primary features of agricultural proletarian literature, and I further posit that these features extend to an early new materialism which offers consideration and care to the more than human world. *TWWF* may not appear as stories of the era's labour conflicts, but with close reading, they show a complex understanding of intersecting structures which shape workers' lives and exploitation.

Environmental justice is a crucial, but sometimes subtle, form of care in Hughes's writing. Only recently have scholars such as Julie Sze suggested the need for more investigation of environmental justice in Hughes's poetry while theatre scholar Catherine Peckinpaugh Vrtis presents *Harvest* as an example of how Hughes included environmental justice in his attention to social justice. I will build on these scholar's interventions to argue that one of the reasons environmental concerns are more subtle in Hughes's writing is because Hughes rarely discussed nature directly, in part because he wanted to avoid the stereotypes of primitivist essentialism placed on Black peoples. This subtlety is also present in the concomitance of care and environmental justice: the intersections of the two concerns are central to Hughes's proletarian texts.

Although the components of environmental engagement in Hughes's proletarian writings may not be as overt as that of the era's nature writing, they can be better understood by drawing on scholarship on the contexts that have shaped Black writers' ideas about and engagements with nature and physical environments. Kimberly Smith was one of the first to explain that until recently, critical scholarship on the tradition of environmental thought in the U.S. has skewed

heavily toward white authors and tended to define environmental thought as arguments for preserving wilderness and maintaining viable nonhuman ecosystems This definition excludes most early Black environmental thought because African Americans, mired in slavery and Jim Crow laws, had contextual considerations—such as being forced to work land but prevented from owning it or being framed as closer to nature and therefore uncivilized—which prevented any simple framing of environmental issues as unrelated to social and political ones. Since Smith's 2007 study and Paul Outka's 2008 *Race and Nature*, scholars have increasingly unpacked the multiple complexities of Black relationships to nature, especially the troubled starting point of enslavers dehumanizing Black people and aligning them with an uncivilized nature as justification for exploitation and cruelty. Scholars have also shown a rich history of Black writers' engagement with nature and environment that exists outside of narrow definitions of environmental thought. Smith argues that a broader definition of environmental thought as "a set of ideas concerning the relationship between humans and the natural environment, including the norms that ought to govern that relationship" (3) eliminates unnecessarily limited definitions of environmental thinking that do not allow Black environmental thinking to be thought of as such. Carolyn Finney, in *Black Faces, White Spaces*, argues that not only have Black peoples' relationships to nature and environment been framed through the narratives equating Black peoples with an uncivilized nature that may be tamed and used as a resource, but they have also been influenced by legislation and social narratives that defined restorative nature as a place for white peoples alone. Smith's and Finney's insights help reveal the bitter irony in Hughes's outwardly humorous short story "Rejuvenation Through Joy."

In "Rejuvenation Through Joy" and "Slave on the Block," Hughes critiques the idea that African Americans were inherently primitive. As the rise of wellness and back-to-nature

movements gained popularity in the first decades of the twentieth century, the racist notion that Black people were more primitive and closer to a state of nature than whites became, for some white Americans, not a justification for enslavement as it was in previous centuries, but rather a perverse reason for celebration and commodification of Black peoples and cultures. In his 1939 autobiography *The Big Sea*, Hughes indicates that this racist stereotyped was one reason for his falling-out with his wealthy white patron, Charlotte Mason, at the start of the 1930s. Hughes writes of Mason, "She wanted me to be primitive and know and feel the intuitions of the primitive. But, unfortunately, I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me, and so I could not live and write as though I did. I was only an American Negro—who had loved the surface of Africa and rhythms of Africa—but I was not Africa. I was Chicago and Kansas City and Broadway and Harlem" (*The Big Sea* 325). This projection of primitivism onto African Americans helps explain Hughes's caution in engaging with environmental and nature tropes in his writing for a weighty past of charged discourses seems to stand ready to claim such work as confirmation of Black people's primitive connection to nature regardless of the actual context. As Adeline Johns-Putra argues, the care ethic of environmental justice must "relentlessly contextualize" to consider power dynamics (126). In considering these multiple, interwoven contexts in which Hughes is writing, his expressions of environmental justice and care ethics as interrelated become clearer.

The short story "Rejuvenation Through Joy" satirizes the way the era's trends of wellness retreats and the idea of going "back to nature" for health often involved the essentialist and racist fetishization of Black people as primitive, showing both the absurdity and the danger of this belief. In the story, two white men, Lesche and Sol, who appear to be part-time gigolos and fulltime charlatans, devise a scheme to create a wellness retreat called the Colony of Joy in a

New York City mansion. The key to the wellness retreat is for white patrons to experience African and African American dance and movement while listening to Black musicians play the blues and jazz: "Happy Lane's African band, two tap dancers, and a real blues singer were contracted to spread joy and act as the primordial pulse beat of the house. In other words, they were to furnish the primitive" (Hughes, *TWWF* 76). The term "primitive" is repeated frequently as the men stress how "joy" will be "springing from the dark rhythm of the primitive" so that the wealthy clients can find happiness "rooted in the deepest source of life" (87-88). The men market the retreat to wealthy elites, mostly white women, who are looking for happiness and fulfillment. One of the men explains how they will instruct the participants: "See how the Negroes live, dark as the earth, the primitive earth, swaying like trees, rooted in the deepest source of life" (87). The irony, of course, is that white people used this racist conception of Black people as primitive to help justify enslavement and exploitation for centuries, and now white people are reconfiguring this discourse in a seemingly positive way. The irony doubles as regardless of whether or not the white people view their classification of African Americans as a negative or positive thing, the primitive essentialism is still being used to exploit Black people. The white men manage the Black performers with strict instructions not to perform as they would in jazz clubs and even insist the singer wear a red dress, despite her dislike for wearing the colour, in order to accentuate her dark skin tone. She protests, "I'm too dark to wear red," but they "want to show 'em how much light there is in darkness" (86). Consequently, the story not only shows this primitive Blackness to be manufactured by white people for profit but also shows that it once again ignores the actual lives, needs, and feelings of the people it claims to venerate.

In revealing the erasure and exploitation of Black people through the exaltation of a falsely constructed Black primitivism, "Rejuvenation" illustrates the inadvertent dangers Black

people faced in embracing themes of environment and nature. For a Black writer to embrace nature in the American manner of canonical white nature writers like Henry David Thoreau or Sarah Orne Jewett was to risk both affirming essentialist ideas of Black primitivism and diverting attention from the real identities and issues of Black Americans.

"Slave on the Block" is a similarly themed story wherein the projection of primitivism onto a Black person erases his actual identity and turns him into an object of consumption. In "Slave on the Block," a white artist couple are obsessed with African American culture, finding Black people "too charming and naïve and lovely for words" (Hughes, *TWWF* 19). This couple, who claim to appreciate and admire Black people, allow their Black cook and maid to die from illness in her basement room. While they stress how much they like her and that she was a good maid, they seem to have provided no real care for her when she is ill. When the maid's nephew comes to the house, his particularly dark skin causes the woman to declare in delight that "he *is* the jungle," and the couple begin to fetishize him (22). They proceed to pay the young man to model for them and do work around the house. The white folks in this story consider themselves progressive and liberal, but the wife wants to paint the young man as a slave on an auction block, and they do not like it when both the young man and the new cook, another Black woman, have their own interests, moods, and relationships. In essence, the couple think little of the possible trauma of having the young man pose as an enslaved person day after day for their art, and they resent it when their Black employees do not behave simply and act gratefully. The couple think "it was pretty awful having two dark and glowering people around the house" (28). In the same way the charlatans in "Rejuvenation" glamourize and commodify essentialized discourse of primitive blackness, so, too, do the wealthy artist couple. They pride themselves on not being "ordinary people" who would "interfere with the delightful simplicity of Negroes" (28). The

couple believe they care for Black people, but they instead care for their own primitivist *idea* of Black people and the sense of their own personal identity that this gives them. The story demands that readers attend to context as Hughes emphasizes the stark contrasts between white people's ideas of primitive Black people and the reality of two Black domestic workers who like to go to clubs and live in the city.

By explaining the harm inflicted through the seemingly celebratory reconfiguration of the original racist essentializing of Black Americans as primitive, "Rejuvenation Through Joy" and Slave on the Block" show that Hughes's primary concern with environmental and nature tropes was to avoid inadvertent endorsement of this primitive essentialism being projected onto Black people and the closely related commodification of Black peoples and cultures. Hughes, however, did not disavow the natural world, and in fact, it plays a significant role in the vision of social justice reflected in his writing. In the following analyses of *A New Song* and *Harvest*, I will show how Hughes and his co-authors advocate for environmental justice, use the natural world as a guide for care, and understand humans as material bodies in a living world. First, though, I will discuss other stories from *TWWF* that show how Hughes anticipates feminist care ethics in creating stories which reveal caring about and caring for as vital components his version of proletarian fiction.

In addition to satirizing racist notions of Black primitivism in "Rejuvenation Through Joy," *TWWF* emphasizes the importance of both emotional care and domestic labour. The collection's first story, "Cora Unashamed," represents both affective and material labours in the story of Cora Jenkins, a Black woman employed by a white family as a "maid of all work" (4). With an alcoholic, underemployed father and an ailing mother, Cora "as a child . . . had no playtime. She always had a little brother, or a little sister in her arms. . . In the eighth grade she

quit school and went to work for the Studevants" (5). Domestic labour is perhaps the most fraught arena of reproductive labour as it is often derided and notoriously underpaid or unpaid, and yet the need for it is high and constant among all people. Moreover, women, people of colour, immigrants, and the working-class are most frequently the providers of domestic labour. Hughes's story shows how Black working-class girls and women like Cora are often doubly imposed upon—responsible for the reproductive labour of their own families and that of their employers.

While Cora's situation may seem unrelated to the themes of proletarian fiction, Hughes indicates that they are connected through Cora's romance with a white migrant worker who is a participant in the labour movement. When Cora becomes pregnant while unmarried, her lack of shame is a revolutionary challenge to the small town and her white employers. In a small nod to the workers' movement, Hughes makes Cora's lover a unionist, writing, "everyone said he was I.W.W. Cora didn't care" (6). In fact, Cora seems to accept that she must both look after her family and be a "maid of all work" for the well-off white family, but she refuses to feel ashamed: she simply "didn't feel that [her baby] was a disgrace" and "didn't care what the white people said" (7). Cora's employer, Mrs. Studevant, becomes pregnant around the same time Cora does, and the two women both have baby girls. Cora nurses (breastfeeds) both babies, providing the basic reproductive care of feeding in a deeply intimate way. Moreover, Cora is still performing her maid work as a maid between returning home to nurse her daughter Josephine and nursing Mrs. Studevant's daughter Jessie at work. Hughes's narrator describes this situation without comment, indicating the taken for granted entitlement of the employers to Cora's body and Cora's conditioned acceptance of this. This matter-of-fact occurrence exposes a disconnect in care between Mrs. Studevant and her child that will deepen, while Cora's connection with Jessie

will grow as if the pair were actual mother and daughter: “In her heart [Cora] had adopted Jessie” (9). Hughes portrays Cora as hardworking, self-sacrificing, and maternal, and these qualities are the foundation of Cora being the moral example in the story. Cora both performs essential care work and exemplifies the ethical value of affective care, showing that Hughes recognized both as important themes of proletarian fiction.

Conflicts and deficits of care are laid out through Cora’s hard life, both at home and at work. Cora’s father is an alcoholic, and her mother has relied on Cora to raise her own siblings, but Cora continues to work hard despite being forced into a care-giver role at home and work. She gives money to her parents and tolerates the prejudice and overwork of her employers. The conflict between familial care and paid care work is shown in short, sharp relief when Cora, who had been bringing her baby to work with her, is told her child is distracting her from her work. Cora is forced to leave her baby at home to better take care of the Studevants and their child. This increases Cora’s hardship because she must now go home on her breaks to feed and tend to her child. When little Josephine is still a toddler, she dies of whooping-cough. Just as she was not ashamed of her mixed-race, out-of-marriage baby, “Cora was not humble before the fact of death” and curses god for taking her baby. As Cora takes care of the growing Jessie, Hughes highlights how she provides better care than jessie’s own parents do, as the Studevants offer Jessie no emotional support and try unsuccessfully to spank and scold her into being a smarter person. Cora, meanwhile, “stood like a calm and sheltering tree for Jessie to run to in her troubles” (9). This brief, unromanticized comparison of Cora’s loving care-shelter to that of a tree is typical of the way Hughes’s proletarian literature uses the natural world as a correlative to something positive ethical values in a realistic manner. In this way, Hughes makes a subtle connection between care ethics and the natural world. He illustrates the breaking down of care

within the wealthy family and their outsourcing of care to domestic workers, who are often poor, Black women, and at the same time, he gently connects positive forms of caregiving to a natural way of life.

While a Marxist critic might argue that "Cora Unashamed" is not proletarian fiction because it does not show any workers coming to class consciousness or directly fighting for better wages and working conditions, Hughes suggests that Cora's refusal to be ashamed and cher ontinuous care for Jessie are truly revolutionary. When Jessie becomes pregnant while unmarried, her family force her into an unsafe abortion. Cora had been happy for Jessie and told her, "No trouble having a baby you want. I had one" (Hughes, *TWWF* 12). Cora and Jessie are devastated at the loss of the baby, and Jessie dies soon after. While she continues through her own grief and anger to perform her work duties and take care of her parents, Cora steadfastly refuses to say that the birth of Jessie's baby would be a bad thing or that Jessie had done anything wrong. At Jessie's funeral, Cora stands up and exposes the family, who had hidden the truth from everyone else. She says, "They killed you, honey. They killed you and your child. I told 'em you loved it, but they didn't care" (17). She accepts hard work, mistreatment, and even scorn for herself, but love for her romantic partner, and love and care for her child and for Jessie prompt her to stand up to injustice. By focusing on the exploitation and the moral strength of domestic workers like Cora, Hughes illustrates how domestic labourers are as much a part of the class struggle as any factory worker, and through attention to care, shows the class struggle to be more complex than a narrow focus on wages and working conditions might suggest.

Hughes's work both unmasks exploitation cloaked in the rhetoric of care *and* promotes what later theorist would term a feminist ethics of care as integral to socio-political reform. Another story that shows both the exploitation of a Black care worker and the worker's

associated insights into care and its absence is "Berry." This story of a young man, Milberry Jones (Berry), who is sent to work at a camp for disabled children not only displays the white staff's exploitation of and disrespect for Berry but also harshly critiques the exploitation of disabled persons for financial gain. Milberry, who is treated as a "work horse" and treat as a "fool," says to himself that "the ways of white folks, I mean some white folks, is too much for me" (Hughes, *TWWF* 181). That people treat him poorly, taking advantage of him and making assumptions about him, when he has done nothing to warrant it confounds him—not because he cannot comprehend why but rather because he cannot understand people being willing to treat other people so poorly. Still, directly after this, the narrator explains that Milberry's own mistreatment is not his primary concern. Milberry senses "something wrong—something phoney about the whole house—except the little crippled kids there like himself because they couldn't help it" (182). He then thinks of a litany of unethical practices from "cranky" nurses complaining about "little brats" to the "no-good" doctor having sex with many of the employees and finally, the fact that they only serve good food when parents are visiting. The narrator confirms, "The Negro was right. The Summer Home was run for profits from the care of permanently deformed children of middle class parents who couldn't afford to pay too much, but who still paid well—too well for what the children got in return" (182-83). Berry, like Cora, is angered by the injustice of these white people's lack of care for people, especially children, who are more dependent on others for care. Further, being subjected to exploitation and abuse themselves makes these Black care workers more keenly aware of the harmful effects of these failures of care, and their positions as insiders who are privy to, but not part of the power holders, gives them greater insights into the actions of others.

Care work, wage work, and human networks of care also collide in the story "Little Dog," in which Hughes again suggests that care workers, and especially Black care workers, have privileged insight into the necessity of care and the failures of care in capitalist society. The story focuses on a white woman, Miss Briggs, whose attraction to a Black janitor, Joe, who delivers food for her little dog, awakens her full attention to her loneliness. The interracial romance in this story is one-sided. Joe is kind to Miss Briggs and thoughtful in his delivery of the dog's food, but he is married with children and is never aware of Miss Briggs's feelings. Miss Briggs is middle aged. She lives alone and has no close friends or family. The two main causes of her loneliness are her dedication to work and her obligation to care for her ailing mother. "As a young girl she had studied very hard in business school. She never had much time to go out" and when her widowed mother becomes paralyzed she has to take on the burden of care work: "They had never been able to afford a maid even after Miss Briggs became so well paid—for doctors' bills were such a drain, and in those last months a trained nurse was needed for her mother" (162). "Almost everybody had somebody . . . Every woman she knew either had a husband, or sisters, or a friend of long standing with whom she resided. But Miss Briggs had nobody at all. Nobody" (163). There is a suggestion that Miss Briggs finds Black men attractive, as not only is she attracted to Joe, but she visits a restaurant with Black male waiters whom she finds "so nice" (162). Indeed, when she thinks of her workmates or the women in the Rotary Club, her encounters with other white people appear rather disconnected, even perfunctory, but she feels cared for by the Black waiters, who "know her tastes" and have "special dishes" made for her if she is not feeling well. Just as Joe takes care to with the dog's food and is kind to Miss Briggs so, too, do the waiters show her kindness and compassion. No one else, save her little dog, appears interested in her at all. When she moves to another neighbourhood at the end of the

story, “in a very short while [the old] neighborhood had completely forgotten her” (175). Her obligation to care for her mother, both in performing care work and in earning wages to pay for doctors and nurses, is the main cause of her never forming outside connections with other people. Moreover, the people who seem to show any care for her are Black men on the edges of her life. When Miss Briggs remarks about how much she spends on bones for the dog, Joe says, “But I reckon you don’t have much other expenses on hand, do you? No family and all like me?” (174), Miss Briggs is shaken. She watches Joe go and then cries alone. The subtle undertones certainly suggest that perhaps Miss Briggs would be happy if she could have a relationship with a Black man, but the major thrust of the story is the painful solitude caused by sacrificing her own possible relationships to care for her mother emotionally, physically, and financially.

The story critiques the lack of access to affordable professional health care as well as the personal costs of unrecognized care work. At the same time, it illustrates the complex gender and racial dynamics involved in providing care.

While the racial dynamic of Black people providing care for white people is still present, the gender dynamics of care in “Little Dog” do not affirm heteronormative models wherein women are responsible for most care, including emotional comfort. While Miss Briggs takes on multiple care roles for her mother, the Black men who work at her favourite restaurant provide care when they show her kindness and have the cook make her special dishes when they perceive she is not feeling well. The custodian Joe shows care when instead of leaving the dogs bones on the step, he waits for Miss Briggs to come home so he can give them to her personally. Starved for care, Miss Briggs is deeply touched when Joe explains that he did not want some other dog stealing the dog’s food and had been watching for Miss Briggs so he could deliver the food directly to her. The story shows how the simple acts of the waiters and janitor are complicated

through the power dynamic between employee and employed since each relationship involves financial transaction. However, there is still no requirement for any of the men to show the little bits of extra care that they do for Miss Briss. Hughs suggests that her condition as someone who performed sustained modes of care at the expense of her own emotional well-being makes her vulnerable to being extremely affected by small acts of care. He also suggests that these Black workers who perform acts of care have a greater understanding of the vital functions of care in the socio-economic relationships structuring societies.

Though *TWWF* contains fourteen stories, the handful I have looked closely at here are representative of how Hughes focuses on domestic labour and relationships of care to critique socio-economic systems and their detrimental effects on both workers and employers. "Rejuvenation Through Joy" not only satirizes the wellness industry but also critiques racist assumptions that complicate Black people's relationships to nature. "Cora" and "Berry" draw attention to the importance of care work and the revolutionary potential of genuinely caring for others while simultaneously criticizing the exploitation of care workers, power imbalances in care work, and the abuse of those who require more care to meet basic needs. While the Black workers in the stories are often resigned to the types of exploitative employment available to them, Hughes suggest that theor insistence on maintaining their humanity through a caring affect is an act of resistance, and that offering care to other vulnerable people is a form of rebellion. These workers may not be marching or striking, but they undermine the prevailing capitalist mode through caring**.**

Proletarian Poetry and *A New Song*

As Saunders Redding notes in his foreword to the 1973 collection of Hughes's social protest writing *Good Morning Revolution*, if Hughes is not well known as a revolutionary writer,

it is in part because "that was the way [Hughes] wanted it" (ix). Hughes experienced suspicion and abuse from various sources periodically throughout his life after his return from Russia in 1933. More than once, his speaking engagements were protested by anti-communists and Christians who were offended by Hughes's political positions and socio-economic critiques. For example, Aimee Semple McPherson who led a megachurch, also led her followers to picket Hughes's poetry readings and speaking engagements in the 1930s and 40s—after he criticized her as one of many religious leaders excessively profiting from religion (Miller 101-102). The FBI also surveilled Hughes by "sneaking into his poetry readings" in the early 1940s. In 1948, Senator Albert Hawkes denounced Hughes as a Communist on the senate floor, and Hughes was summoned to testify before Senator McCarthy's House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1953 (Miller 11-112). The attacks on Hughes were continuous, and they were essentially ad-hominem. Rather than engage with Hughes's critiques, his detractors relentlessly accused him of communism. Macpherson would even called him "a red devil *in a black skin!*" (qtd. in Hughes "My Adventures" 210). Hughes's desire to distance himself from his radical reputation of the 30s was partly because of a practical concern for his safety but it was also a strategic attempt to place focus back on the content of his work which aimed for a anti-racist racist reform and true equality between races, classes, and gender rather than the violent instillation of communism in America as his detractors claimed.

In 1933, as their political work gained more notoriety in Carmel, both Hughes and Ella Winter faced a mounting campaign of hatred and violence. While Winter was already known as a leftist activist, her association with a leftist Black male stirred additional discomfort in the white community, and rumours circulated that the two were having an affair. Moreover, their public support of leftist cause and the migrant and cannery workers increased public ire. The vitriol and

violence aimed at Hughes was racially inflected. An editorial in the local *Sun* newspaper, for example, criticized Hughes "Communist" politics but framed him as a danger to white women, saying that "White girls have ridden down the street with him, have walked with him, smiling [into] his face" (qtd. in Rampersad 294). Similarly, Winter was accused of being a failure as a woman and mother, illustrating political opponents' frequent recourse to personal attacks. Hughes and Winter criticized the political and economic order, and in return, they were attacked as a Black person and a woman. As a result, Saunders write, Hughes seemed to avoid publicly reading the "very moving militant pieces that carried broad socio-political implications" (Foreword" x). Likewise, biographer Arnold Rampersad notes in his introduction to Hughes's first autobiography *The Big Sea* (1940) that the political content of Hughes's life is noticeably absent from the book. "Another radical," Rampersad explains, "was shocked to notice the memoir contains 'not a single mention of a radical publication you've written for or a single radical you have met or who has meant anything to you" (xvi). However, Hughes's experiences with relentless anti-left hate explain his distancing himself from a radical left, which contributed to the critical neglect of his more overtly proletarian writings of the 1930s, including the poems in *A New Song.*

In contrast to the stories of *TWWF*, which emphasize relations of care in the experiences of Black domestic workers, the small collection of poems in *A New Song* brings together key themes of proletarian literature like marching, collectivity, and embodied experience in more overtly political way. In 1938, The International Workers Order (IWO), a fraternal order based in New York City, chose Hughes for its first featured author of their "literary pamphlet[s] for the people" (Introduction 8). *A New Song* became a collection of seventeen poems, many of which had already been published in little magazines, with an introduction from Mike Gold. In his brief

introduction, Gold calls the poems "the fruit of a decade of experiment, of travel, and of contact with all the bewildering social and esthetic theories of our time," emphasizing the universalism that white Marxist critics tended to celebrate at the time (7). Gold also quotes Max Bedacht, general secretary of the IWO, who says with a similar sentiment, "the poetry of Langston Hughes is a true expression of our ideals because it is an impassioned cry for humanity and brotherhood" and the IWO hopes its "understanding will . . . help break down the artificial barriers erected between people" (8). While the poems do support this universalist approach to proletarian fiction, they also complicate this image of proletarian fiction through a focus on the distinctiveness of Black experience and the introduction of environmental justice perspectives.

Although the poems in *A New Song* move away from an exclusive focus on the distinctiveness of Black experience and more toward the theme of unity between of Black and white workers, the collection includes powerful poems which often invoke the physical embodiment of Black persons. The Black vernacular speech and syncopated rhythms for which Hughes's poetry was known at the time fade in these poems, but they are replaced with significant moments that demand attention to Black participation in the workers' movement. The eponymous "A New Song," for example, features a Black speaker who commands the space to "speak in the name of the black millions." The poems "Sister Johnson Marches" and "Open Letter to the South" also feature Black speakers, while poems such as "Ballad of Ozzie Powell," "Negro Ghetto," and "Lynching Song" convey Black experiences of racial as well as class oppression. These poems particularly stress the embodied experiences of Black people.

The collection begins with what has become its most well-known piece, "Let America Be America Again." Invoking Walt Whitman's "Pioneers! O Pioneers!", the poem speaks directly to the relationship of the American people—in all their diversity—to the physical environment.

While white environmental writers at the time argued for nature conservation and preservation of wilderness and celebrated the merits of time spent in nature, Hughes asserts that access to the land is a privilege denied many, emphasizing that the nature America celebrates was forcibly removed from "the red man driven from the land" (9). The first speaker reminds readers of the founding myth of America as a land of love, freedom, and liberty, imploring, "Let it be that great strong land of love" and "O, let my land be a land where Liberty / Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath." The second speaker scorns the dream of the first with other realities of land, replying. "I am the red man driven from the land." In the next stanza the second speaker elaborates that they are "Tangled in that endless chain / of profit power, gain, of grab the land!" (9). "We must take back our land again, / America!" While this poem does, as Cary Nelson assesses, emphasize a "community of voices" and recognition of "historical imperative to cut across cultural differences and acknowledge shared interests" (125), it also combines that diversity of human participants with recognition of the more-than-human world. The speaker states, "We, the people, must redeem / The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers, / The mountains and the endless plain—", asserting that these ecologies are not simply resources and that the people have a responsibility to redeem them from capitalist exploitation. Much like a new materialist, Hughes contextualizes humanity within the living world.

Hughes's poetry insists on the embodied self as the central figure, the departure point from which all socio-political critique must begin. Kristan Gogan recognizes Hughes's exploration of technique in *A New Song* and the ways in which Hughes uses his poems to create physical and mental experiences of collectivity. If the embodied self is defined through its relations practices as Brugère asserts, then the embodied self entails relationships with environments as well as other living beings. While the story "Rejuvenation Through Joy" shows

Hughes's trepidation of reinforcing primitivist stereotypes, his poems show a complexity of engagement with the natural world as a guide for humanity and in critiquing environmental injustice.

The natural world is significant in much of Hughes's writing as both something that needs to be cared for and as an ideal, the original and constant example of harmonious and connected life. In conjunction with the fraught history of enslavement and racism being justified through nature tropes, the literary history of celebrating nature as beauty apart from the corruption of humanity also influenced Hughes's engagement with nature. Hughes's thinking on the role of nature in writing can be partially gleaned from some of speeches and non-fiction essays. Although he enjoyed natural subjects like "love, roses, and moonlight, sunsets, and snow" ("My Adventures" 135) and wrote about them himself, he saw these as the primary subjects of poets without much trouble, poets with their "head[s] in the clouds," while he being born poor and Black was "stuck in the mud from the beginning" (135). Ironically, in this reflection on being "social poet," Hughes uses clouds and mud to explain why he does not frequently write about the nature, but in unpacking just these two references, we can see the aestheticized earth (clouds) belonging to those nature poets while the unromanticized and sometimes difficult earth (mud) is where Hughes resides. Hughes saw a disconnect between the poetic celebration of the natural world and the reality of the human world of "poverty, oppression, and segregation" (138). Hughes would later say, "I cannot write exclusively about roses and moonlight—for sometimes in the moon light my brothers see a fiery cross and a circle of Klansmen's hoods. Sometimes in the moonlight a dark body sways from a lynching tree—but for his funeral there are no roses" (143). These examples extend our understanding of Hughes's use of nature and earth in his writing—although he sought to avoid the primitivist tropes he

exposes in “Rejuvenation Through Joy,” he also knew the natural world to have great significance to humanity. Therefore, Hughes does not avoid environmental themes so much as he deploys them in deliberate, targeted ways.

A New Song also presents real relationships with the physical world in “Kids Who Die.” This poem which, as Julie Sze states, ends in hopefulness, but before envisioning change made possible through their deaths, the poem lists actual ways of dying: “Kids will die in the swamps of Mississippi / Organizing sharecroppers / Kids will die in the streets of Chicago / Organizing workers / Kids will die in the orange groves of California / Telling others to get together.” These lines draw immediate attention to the expansive American landscape, turning Whitmanesque inventory of American identity into an inventory of death and rebuffing the idea of Black people enjoying a special closeness to nature through a detailed exposition of dangerous work in urban and rural locations. In the final stanza, the speaker imagines, “Maybe your bodies’ll be lost in a swamp, / Or a prison grave, or the potter’s field / Or the rivers where you’re drowned like Liebknecht.” The poem attends to the particularity of the kids’ physical experiences. The hopeful turn comes in the stanza’s final lines where a focus on bodies now becomes the agent and monument of change: “When the marching feet of the masses / Will raise for you a living monument of love.” The kids who die across the country bring together the masses, and when the masses are big enough, the changes will finally happen. But, before this happens, the speaker memorializes the difficult physical experiences of the kids and their bodies as forcibly returned to the earth.

Hughes uses both figurative and literal instances of relation to the natural world to argue for a better relationship with the environment or to suggest that in a just world, the human relationship to the natural world should not be inhibited by economic practices. Further still,

many of the poems suggest human behaviour should be guided by the rhythms of the natural world. The short poem "Negro Ghetto" uses natural elements to portray the captivity of Black people even after the end of slavery. The narrator observes a group of Black people moving down a street:

> I looked at their black faces
> And this is what I saw:
> The wind imprisoned in the flesh,
> The sun bound down by law.
> I watched them moving, moving,
> Like water down the street,
> And this is what moved my heart:
> Their far-too-humble feet.

In the Black faces, the speaker sees their natural forces of movement, power, and light—the wind and sun—trapped within them. The "sun bound down by law" takes on double meaning. The previous line draws attention to the body as confinement of these natural forces, so that we see the trapped nature inside the people, yet the line also invokes the practice of sundown towns through the slight variation of wording that maintains the rhyme: sundown town becomes sun bound town. As such, the line effectively conveys the reality of Black bodies imposed upon—a history of Black bodies being forced out of physical spaces by artificially boundaries imposed by white people, bodies beaten and lynched.[22] The title, "Negro Ghetto," combines with these lines to suggest this may be a group of Black people returning to the Black part of town as the sun sets, and it is no longer safe for them to be elsewhere. Like flowing water following the path of

[22] I use term "bodies" here, rather than people, to emphasize the poem's focus on physical experience and metaphorical composition.

least resistance and taking the shape of its vessel, the Black people follow the path available to them with "far-too-humble" feet. Hughes's elemental imagery shows how racist oppression creates discord, a denial of the sun and wind as life forces within the people. This figure reverses the primitivist essentialism that says Black people are more suited to labour because of a closeness to nature: the universal elements of natural life force in humanity are *restrained* in these people to make them compliant citizens and workers. The poem thus complicates the proletarian symbol of marching by associating marching with misery and joy rather than battle and conflict. In "Negro Ghetto," the people move "like water down the street" while the number of faces evokes the sense that this is a mass of people moving, marching together. However, this is the antithesis of a collective march for socio-political action. These people are trapped, and the march is much more akin to a group of prisoners being forcibly marched. If they are indeed retreating from the white parts of town under threat of violence, it is undeniably a forced march.

"Sister Johnson Marches," on the other hand, complicates proletarian fiction's trope of marching into battle in a different way. As Hughes would later state more directly in "Democracy and Me," he fear marching to be too militaristic, but he desired the unification of people which re represented: "Can we march together then? But perhaps the word *march* is the wrong word-suggesting soldiers and armies. Can we not put our heads together and think and plan—not merely dream—the future America? And then create it with our hands?" "Sister Johnson Marches" is a celebratory poem of a woman marching on May Day. She marches with her "head held high" and "wants to cry" because she is so happy to see the working class marching together, exclaiming, "We owns de land!" This poem features a woman marching, and it is not a precursor to battle. Rather than rage and violence, she wants to cry with happiness.

The poems in *A New Song* are also nuanced. Some of the poems not discussed here are more blatant with their references to figures such as Tom Mooney, and Lenin and events like the Spanish Civil War, and while those poems contribute to the pamphlet's overarching political vision, the poems I have examined here in detail. *The Ways of White Folks* and *A New Song* uniquely support an understanding of *Harvest* as a play that anticipates feminist ethics of care as well as new materialism's attention to embodied relationships between humans and the material environment. While *TWWF* appears on the surface to be a series of meditations on Black and white personal relationships, and *A New Song* at first seems to be a fairly formulaic Third Period Communist political pamphlet, each set of texts is truly nuanced in enlightening ways. Each interracial relationship in *TTWF* which I have examined here asserts the inextricable nature of work and care. Moreover, as I have shown, the stories suggest that genuine care for others and ourselves should direct action and that acts of care can be political resistance. The poems also resist the militaristic associations of the trope of marching in proletarian literature by showing that marching is not always empowering and does not necessarily lead to battle. Finally, both the stories and the poems further reveal the cautious but important presence of the natural world in Hughes's vision for humanity. They provide greater understanding of the complexity of Hughes's vision of collectivity, his emphasis on the importance of care, and his careful use of images of the natural world to foster greater recognition of human embeddedness in material environments.

Care as Political Action: *Harvest*

The 1933 cotton strike on which *Harvest* is based revealed union structures and class structures shaped by the cotton industry, the breadth of labourers' contributions to farming knowledge, and the interdependence of banks, authorities, and agricultural business. "In short," Devra says, "the cotton strike throws into bold relief the elements that were to mold class

relations in cotton into the late 1930s" (79). The massive strike was the culmination of thirty-seven agricultural strikes over four counties, affecting over 65% of the state's crops (Weber 79). Consequently, the strike effects were far-reaching enough that they revealed an incredible entanglement of social and economic interests and structures. Race and ethnicity were also at the forefront, with well over half of the strikers being Mexican. In fact, earlier in the year, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce attempted to deport striking workers to prevent the strike movement gaining momentum (Wever 80). While Steinbeck replaced cotton with apples and tried to minimize complications by eliminating racial diversity in his depiction of the strike, Hughes, Winter, and Hawkins spoke to present the complexity of interests and involved parties in the cotton strike. Steinbeck was able to make an insightful analysis of care work in the context of agricultural strikes as well as consider aspects of collectivity in *In Dubious Battle*; however, in removing diversity and the attendant complexities of race and gender in economic systems of exploitation, Steinbeck misguidedly removed integral parts of the situation, parts without which no real collective solution could be created. Conversely, Hughes and Winter. understood race and gender as inseparable from class and in shaping the socio-economic system that relied on worker exploitation, and as such, their presentation of the strike in *Harvest* shows race, gender, and class interwoven rather than in a hierarchy of oppressions.

Despite there being no record of any personal correspondence or relationship between Steinbeck and Hughes, the two authors shared common experiences and concerns for California's striking agricultural workers. As noted, both Steinbeck's novel and Hughes and Winter's play take the 1933 San Joaquin Valley cotton strike as source material. They both also feature fictionalized versions of real strike figures, most importantly the strike's organizers, Pat Chambers and Caroline Decker. Like *TWWF* and *A New Song*, *Harvest* effectively resists the

masculinist narrative of proletarian fiction by both representing and de-emphasizing marching. *Harvest* also stresses the need to reconsider human relationships to the natural world through an environmental justice perspective. Most significantly, however, *Harvest* centralizes care as the primary component to socio-political action. These core issues of collectivity, nature and environmental justice, and care underpin Steinbeck's, Weatherwax's, and Hughes and Winter's strike texts. However, while Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* regiments collectivity through the organization of the camp, *Harvest* more closely aligns with Weatherwax's emphasis on collectivity through personal relationships. While Steinbeck and Weatherwax provide negative and positive interpretations of the march, Hughes and Winter resist the march as pinnacle of the workers' struggle, refusing representation of marchers as either a dangerous mob or a collective with shared consciousness. Read in the context of Hughes's stories and poems, *Harvest* provides further insight into the common threads of care-based ethics and concern for the more-than-human world in agricultural proletarian literature.

Environmental justice and feminist ethics of care overlap in that environmental injustice is often caused by an egregious and systemic lack of care. Moreover, environmental injustice results in bodily harm, interfering with the victims' abilities to perform basic acts of care for themselves and their dependents. Moreover, because of its frequent unhealthy and toxic effects, environmental injustice increases the number of people needing care from home care givers and institutions such as hospitals. Consequently, although environmental justice is not specifically aligned with a feminist ethics of care, it is deeply entwined with questions of care. At the root of environmental injustice is the absence of care which forces some to live in harmful and deadly environments. In their representation of the farm owners and their enablers, Hughes and Winter expose through the farm owners and their enablers a process of denying care to increase profit,

demonstrating "neglect [and] the effects of carelessness" and consequently, the necessity and power of care (Puig de la Bellacasa 70). In tandem with the harmful absence of care, the play representation of the workers that care is also a powerful form of agency. When the workers begin to actively care for one another, as Marty initiates in her empathy and generosity for Rosita and her children in the first scene, they begin to take action that will impact socio-political structures. The play stages a tension, then, between the social narratives telling workers not to care for other workers and the workers' realization of the power of affective and active care. Eventually, a picture emerges of individualist capitalism promoting not caring about others as a means of increasing economic control and profit for the owning class. This picture is countered through demonstrating care as the agential means for breaking the hold of the oppressive socio-economic system.

Hughes began *Harvest* as a collaboration with journalist and leftist activist Winter. The play's early titles were *Blood on the Cotton* and *Blood on the Fields*, but the authors eventually chose the title "Harvest" suggesting the they wanted to focus less on militaristic violence and more on building some posistive. The title comes from the Marie Welch poem, "Harvests," which Welch wrote about the strikers and Winter liked (Winter 199). The poem powerfully begins, "Now among good harvests / The human harvest fails," and it continues its own damning critique while maintaining the quiet hope symbolized in the word, *harvest* (qtd. in Winter 199). Only after the play was rejected by the Theatre Union, a company dedicated to proletarian plays, did Hughes and Winter consult with producer and writer Ann Hawkins. Despite the revisions and Hughes's efforts to get the play produced, *Harvest* never was published or staged. The play, as collected and published in Susan Duffy's *The Political Plays of Langston Hughes* (2000), is sourced from Hughes's papers which contain various drafts and notes, including two versions

labeled “final draft” (Duffy 61). Duffy reconstructed the play to eliminate duplicate scenes and to follow the order of the events of the strike. The play’s complicated history leads to several conventions: the play is referred to by its final title, *Harvest*; it is recognized as co-authored by Hughes, Winter and Hawkins; and it is considered an unfinished play since the authors did not assemble or approve the final draft presented in the later publishing. However, the play was completed and revised at various points in the 1930s when Hughes attempted to have it produced, allowing for a reasonable assumption that the published version of the play remains close to what the authors intended.

As the original playwrights, Hughes and Winter brought their artistic and journalistic backgrounds to bear on the project. A journalist, Winter collected articles, handbills, notices, and sundry related materials from the strike, creating a binder of source material for herself and Hughes, which they would then offer to whoever might produce the play. Hughes’s experiences with experimental proletarian theatre in Russia and Winter’s journalistic approach are visible as the play adheres more rigorously to the actual events of the San Joaquin cotton strike and related events within the labour struggle than Steinbeck’s *In Dubious Battle* does. Like other agrarian proletarian texts, *Harvest* shows the unique challenges of the rural, agricultural settings in which migrant labourers lived and worked as equally a part of the proletarian labour struggle. But while Steinbeck minimized the roles of racialized peoples and women, Hughes and Winter emphasize the heterogeneity of the workers and strike leaders. The play also rejects marching as a defining symbol of the movement and instead focuses on dialogues across difference and the consequential fostering of care-based ethics. Finally, the play’s concern for care extends to the more-than-human world in an environmental justice perspective as it considers environmental pollution and related human health.

Harvest focuses on three family groups of migrant farm workers—Mexican, Southern White, and Black—as they begin the cotton harvest at the fictional Tilden Ranch, somewhere in the mid-southern area of California's Central Valley. Opening with a Mexican family stopped on the side of the road, their car run out of gas, the first scene introduces the hard travelling, starving families of migrant pickers. The play portrays the poor conditions for pickers as the three main groups arrive and begin working at the ranch, and then it introduces organizers Mack and Jennie—the fictionalized Pat Chambers and Caroline Decker. The workers, who are already struggling with lowered wages and the costs of moving from farm to farm to pick, are confronted again with poor and exploitative working and living conditions. Mack works among the other pickers, gently but firmly raising the workers ire at the farm owners by frequently naming and explaining the ways the workers are abused. As the workers eventually organize, they attempt to dissuade pickers who are willing to cross the picket lines (called scabs) and to negotiate with the farmers and their supporters. Other important events include the wage-setting meeting of the farmers and authority figures, the various visitors to the strike camp such as the relief worker, the local professor, and the Mexican consul, and finally, the deadly union meeting that concludes the play. Each of these events corresponds with real life events.

In contrast to the popular image of the strike novel, *Harvest* is a strike story without a march. Neither Steinbeck's apprehension about mindless mobs nor Weatherwax's collective consciousness of marchers appears in the play. Instead, the play's representation of meaningful dialogue and the cultivation of affective care across perceived differences models an actionable plan for nurturing collectivity from which socio-political change will grow. In contrast to Hughes's complex portrayal of marching in the poems in *A New Song,* Hughes and Winter's *Harvest* does not present mobs or marches as particularly hopeful or worrisome features of the

labour movement. In fact, the play does not have any scenes of marching. The play only refers to, but does not show, picketers going out in cars to stop scab cotton pickers, and in the final scene, people show up with their picket signs. Consequently, the play suggests that purposeful picket marching is tangentially important to the strike's goals, but it is simply a part of the action rather than pivotal or defining features. Instead, the play's meeting scenes, both planned and spontaneous, are portrayed as crucial points for information sharing and decision making. The extremely different approaches to marching in Hughes's previously discussed poems, "Sister Johnson Marches" and "Negro Ghetto," one jubilant and one despondent, help explain the play's neutral presentation of marching. Similarly, in the speech "Democracy and Me," Hughes fully articulates his own worry that marching implies "soldiers and armies." If Hughes's interpretation of marching guided his and his coauthors' decentering of scenes of marching in *Harvest*, then we can see that for Hughes, marching could not be the pivotal factor in the play because he viewed it is representative of both positive and negative instances of collectivity. In a certain light, then, Hughes's work shows how both Steinbeck's negative and Weatherwax's positive displays of marching can both be legitimate interpretations of what marching can mean. Read together with Hughes's poems, *Harvest* suggests that marching is too contextually dependent to be inherently defined as positive or negative, and therefore, it cannot be the defining symbol of positive collective action. In place of marching, Hughes and Winter. posit caring affect—that is, caring about—as an unambiguous foundation for ethical collectivity.

The opening scene of *Harvest* sets a tone of relational care ethics that follows throughout the play. The play opens on a dark California road as a Mexican family of migrant workers discovers their car has not broken down but rather ran out of gas. As the mother, Rosita, and the father, Domingo, and an older son discuss whether to use their last quarter for gas, their

predicament unfolds for the audience: the baby and two young children have not had milk for several days. Their single quarter would not buy them enough gas to get to the ranch for their next job, but if they do not get to the ranch by morning, they will lose a day's pay and no one will eat. When a passing white family of migrant workers stops to see what is happening, two key features of the ethics of care unfold. The first is a solicitude of care, exemplifying that "ethics is typically embodied in the process initiated by solicitude or care, a process which makes it possible to establish mutual bonds and an equalization of condition in deeply asymmetrical relations and situations which moral principles and law render inextricable or imperceptible" (Brugère 34). When Domingo asks to buy ten cents' worth of gas from the white family, but the older white man, Adam, who uses racist slurs, does not want to give Rosita's family any gas, but his family, Aunt Marty and Shorty, do. Entailed in the family's request for gas is a plea that they be given gas so that they can use their last fifteen cents to buy milk for the near-starving children. Moreover, the gas is so the family can get to the ranch and work without missing anytime and thus pay. Through both words and appearance, Rosita's family is asking not just for gas but for consideration and care for their well-being. The families different racial and national identities are foregrounded in the scene, and much of the interaction is guided by the women. Hughes and Winter counter the essentializing of race and gender in *Harvest*, not by pretending no differences exist, but by excavating relational experiences to identify both the impact of divisive discourses of identity and the commonalities amongst the different groups comprising the working class.

The scene further enacts the democratic culture and dialogue required for relational ethics, rather than individual morality, as the white family discusses whether to give the other family gasoline. Individualistic morality would not demand that a poor family give a resource, gasoline, away that they too have need of. The contrast between individual morality and ethical

relationality and individual morality plays out as the two families discuss their situations as migrant pickers. Brugère contends that "Ethics, more than morality, asks for a democratic culture, rooted in public debate and the possibility of dialogue" (33-34), and this scene of debate is an exposition of dialogue across race and gender difference. Even as the curmudgeonly Adam and Luther echo racist rhetoric, they still participate in a discussion of wages, access to resources, and the hardship of travelling for work. It is only when Aunt Marty asserts her rights through ownership of the car, calling out, "Let 'em have it, Adam. This is my car. I reckon I got some say-so," that the matter settled (73). Marty is able to assert herself through appeal to ownership, the standard of masculine individualism, but she does so to assert a different set of values based in care and decided on after a discussion of humanity, need, and context. Finally, as a police officer stops to see what happening, the reality that the white people are a part the same class as the Mexican family is emphasized as the cop calls them all "lousy foreigners" and says they look like "trouble-makers" (75). It is obvious to everyone but Adam and Luther that the white and Mexican families are both nothing more than migrant workers and "tramps" (75) in the police officer's view. This opening scene reveals the shared oppression among these groups, as indicated through the police officer and their shared difficulties in pursuing work, and it also highlights positive commonalities like their loving concern for children and their shared desire to work for their own security and comfort.

The play also shows how the employer class uses discourses of identity to justify the mistreatment of workers, creating a different standard of care for different categories of workers as if different features of the workers' identities—such as skin colour, ethnicity, and even marital status—naturally gives them different, lower requirements for care. Mexican workers are particularly denigrated as needing little to survive and portrayed as willing to "work for nothin"

(Hughes et al. 83). Marty also has the impression that Black workers are stronger and able to pick cotton more quickly, and will therefore, "be stealin the bread out uv our children's mouths" (80). These notions are brought out in conversation about working conditions, and Mack explains the lengths growers went to bring in cheap Mexican and Filipino labour, and once they had all the workers they needed, "the growers started payin' the starvation wages" (81). The dialogue draws out the connections between racist discourse and economic oppression. Division is sowed between white and racialized workers while simultaneously the presence of racialized worker is used justify lower standards of care.

The play further shows how this systemic socio-economic oppression is reliant upon a broader destabilization of care, since lack of affective care for living beings and environments fuels the lack of practical care for the working class which increases profits. Like Hughes's attention to the non-essentialist human-nature discourses and relationships in *TWWF* and *A New Song*, *Harvest* critiques human misuse of the more-than-human world, strongly suggesting that human behaviour and socio-economic systems must be in tune with the natural world in respectful, reciprocal ways. Moreover, the play asserts that evidence of inharmonious relationships, such as mass illness and malnutrition, so common to victims of environmental injustice, are not evidence of working-class and racialized people being inferior or ignorant, but rather are evidence of harmful, unethical practices that harm the natural environment as well as the workers. Hughes's vision for environmental justice, according to Julie Sze's analysis of "Kids Who Die," is one that criticizes wealthy consumers for their complicity with exploitation and advocates for "making work, care, food, energy, and lives matter, not rendering them cheap, disposable, and dead" (23). Sze's statement nicely sums the forces at play in Hughes and Winter's *Harvest* as well and helps draw attention to the prioritization of care within the play, for

although the play focuses mainly on human experiences, it also demonstrates concern for the ways in which human abuse the natural world.

As theatre scholar Catherine Peckinpaugh Vrtis has noted, the play represents the real strikers' concerns about water and sanitation as these were particularly harmful conditions. Indeed, access to clean water and sanitary living facilities were top priorities to workers, and Hughes and Winter emphatically dramatize this in the play, making sure to illustrate exactly how dirty water and lack of proper sewage systems expose the workers and their families to deadly illnesses. In the play, Marty's family is picking cotton when Marty sees Roy going to the stream. She says, "Boy, don't go a-drinkin that gulley water" and explains to the others, "I found a calf's foot in our bucket this mawnin!" (77). Actual water pumps were scarce on the farms, so natural water sources would seem like a reasonable alternative, but the amount of pollution in the water sources frequently rendered them vectors of dangerous disease. The calf's foot is the first stark image of foul water, and because it is a piece of a farm animal, it counters the pristine popular images of California's agricultural valleys. In the play, Marty then asks Mack if any of the farms nearby have better water, and Mack replies, "No, and most got worse toilets" (79). Buster adds that at another place, they had to walk two miles to get water. Mack adds, "I'm afraid there's going to be sickness in all these camps. Ditch water, and holes in the ground for toilets all over this area" (80). Mack highlights the uncomfortable fact that all the migrant workers need to relieve themselves and with farmers providing little or no facilities, most of that human waste is scattered about the camps and fields. The ground water and local streams are likely to have some concentration of human waste in addition to any runoff from the farms or dumping, like the calf's foot Marty found in the morning water. While Marty was aware of the danger from the calf's foot, Mack's information about the toilets shocks her. According to Weber, over18,000

cotton pickers were on strike over a 100 mile "cotton belt" (79, 88) during the San Joaquin Cotton Strike. With attendant family members, the worker concentration around these farms and ranches would create a tremendous amount of waste. Hughes and Winter do not shy away from the discomfort of the topic, and the play directly connects the farmers' failure to provide basic provisions of clean water and toilets with the degradation of human and environmental health. It further shows human and environmental health to be in a deadly loop where contamination of one leads to contamination of the other.

The play shows that in addition to being primarily responsible for the unsanitary living and working conditions of the migrant workers throughout California's central valley, the farm owners weaponized the poor conditions against the strikers. This aspect is exposed in both Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* and Hughes and Winter's *Harvest* through the health inspections of strikers' camps. While no health inspectors visit the farms prior to the strikes to ensure workers and their families are provided basics, such as those listed in the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union's real-life demand for "free sanitary housing, wood, light, and water," government agents were deployed to strike camps to ensure these sanitary needs were met. Of course, these agents were actually a method of breaking strikes. If the strikers' camp were broken down by government authorities due to health code violations, the strikers would have nowhere to stay, and the strike would effectively be broken. Within the play, the health officer pronounces the camp healthy in one moment, and in the next moment, the sheriff gives the owner of the land notice he is "responsible for maintaining a public nuisance" (Hughes et al. 120) The health officer quickly backtracks claiming, "I was merely expressing my private opinion. Sanitary arrangements are in very bad condition. The sewage system is inadequate. Yes, it will be a public safeguard to have the camp evacuated" (120). The collaboration of authorities

to break strikes in this way is a documented true occurrence. The declaration of strike camps as health hazards, as seen in Steinbeck's novel and Hughes and Winter's play, reveal not only a tremendous hypocrisy but also that the farm owners were well aware of the obligation to provide sanitary conditions that they were not fulfilling before the workers started striking.

The play also considers how location can be a key factor to environmental justice as access to supplies further influences people's vulnerability to environmental hazards. Much like today's concern for food deserts, underserved places where low-income peoples cannot obtain healthy or adequate food, the migrant workers in California faced vast expanses of farmland that hindered their access to food and supplies. As Carey McWilliams explains, California agricultural developed in much larger parcels than most of the farms in the rest of the country.[23] These expansive ranches and farms not only required farm workers to travel great distances for work but also complicated their access to water and basic supplies. Avaricious agribusiness owners frequently capitalized on this with the company store model—creating commissaries on the farms that sold the workers food and basic supplies—generally at inflated prices and often of poorer nutritional value. In *Harvest*, the workers lament the rising prices of necessities like the cotton-picking bags that they purchase from the ranch at $1.40 Much like Old Dan's dilemma of having to buy expensive canned beans at the orchard store, *Harvest's* Buster cannot afford the 95 cents that the "Ranch commissary" charges for a bucket. This revelation comes after fellow workers tell him he needs a bucket to boil the gulley water to keep from getting sick. Buster further relates that, at his last ranch, the only source of clean water was two miles away and everyone had to fetch water by bucket. Along with the shock of the gulley water being polluted

[23] McWilliams explains the unique monopolization of large tracts of land in California that would contribute to many of the oppressive living and working conditions for agricultural workers. *Factories in the Field* remains a relevant and fascinating text.

with farm run-off from animal slaughter and human waste because of a lack of toilets, the play shows the farm owners are doubly profiting from keeping the workers in unhealthy conditions. The owners save money by not providing access to clean water and sanitary toilets, and then they price gouge on any equipment that the workers need to help mediate the unhealthy effects of the neglect.

Hughes and Winter reveal an entanglement of tactics being used to suppress and exploit the working class, and recourse to racism and personal identity comprised some of the most prominent these tactics. Historian Cletus Daniel has shown that, in the decades prior to the Great Depression, many of California's agricultural employers were not initially comfortable with the idea of degraded working and living conditions for agricultural employees, but the propagation of pejorative racial and social narratives eased consciences. Rhetoric, often circulated in newspapers, asserted that nonwhite labourers, including Chinese, Mexicans, and Filipinos, were "naturally suited to agricultural work by reason of their relatively small physical stature, ability to tolerate hot weather, native stoicism, and innate lack of ambition" (Daniel 64). To justify the mistreatment of single white migrant men a similar appeal was made, claiming that they were limited by a "collective social degeneracy" as one newspaper columnist stated (65). Consequently, identity-based politics became an important tactic in justifying exploitative practices and degraded working and living environments. Racism and classism were directly linked to agricultural businesses profiting through neglect. Everything from lower wages to unsanitary housing could be at least partially explained away through rhetoric that framed the workers as neither needing nor deserving the same living standards as other people. Through attention to these entangled threads, *Harvest* exposes the interconnectedness of environmental violence with racism and classism.

Black Americans, Mexicans, and poor White Americans are all targets of prejudice in *Harvest,* but the Mexicans often take the brunt of racial abuse. When the strikers demand access to clean drinking water at the farm owners meeting, the farmer owners all laugh when one says, "Who the hell told Mexicans about running water?" (Hughes et al. 93). Another man adds, "If we did put in a tap the Mexicans'd let it run all day" (93). The farmers imply that Mexican people are not used to having running water and that they would be irresponsible if they were to have it. In addition, the play adds another layer of complexity by hinting at the farmers' own difficulty accessing water for irrigation. In showing that the poorer farm owners had to compete with the rich for the state's limited water sources, the play reveals access to water as a complicated and profitable affair at multiple points in the economic system.[24] The Mexican workers, though, received the most vicious racial denigration. Historians place the Mexican percentage of the cotton work force around 75% in the 1920s and 30s, a number which suggests agribusiness had both a dependency on Mexican workers and a fear of being outnumbered (Weber 49). In this context, targeting Mexican workers clearly undermines their potential to gain any economic power.

In addition to the play's attention to water, *Harvest* also decries the workers' lack of access to healthy and adequate amounts of food. This, too, was frequently justified through racism and classism. As in the opening scene, Rosita's children are hungry and do not get milk on a regular basis, but the play goes further to show the whole family suffers from hunger and a lack of nutritious variety in their diets. Rosita's family primarily eats tortillas and beans because these are cheap staples, but the racist conception is that Mexicans eat tortillas and beans

[24] Access to water was further complicated by the vast tracts of farmland which often placed some farms at great distances from water sources. See Daniel and McWilliams for informative, extended discussion of the unique development of agricultural plots in California.

frequently because of customary preference. The wealthy ranch owner in the play, Tilden, expresses this sentiment: “That’s about all a Mexican buys, a can of beans a day and he’s fixed” (90). Tilden further states that “Mexican labor is completely satisfied” (94) in sharp contrast to the play’s opening scene of the Mexican family tired, hungry, and out of gas miles from their next job. Tilden does not consider that Mexican workers might like to eat different foods if they were not constricted by low wages, and he certainly does not entertain the idea of unsatisfied Mexican workers not getting enough to eat. These moments of attention to lack of basic requirements, environmental support, and related discourses are layered throughout the play to build a complex and damning critique environmental injustice and degradation of care.

In the play, forms of care such as food and medical attention, in addition to being withheld to increase profit, are withheld, or interfered with, to manipulate workers into accepting their own exploitation. While the lack of the means for basic reproductive care like proper housing, food, water, and sanitation result from the business owners neglecting infrastructure and setting low wages, government agencies still provide some social supports, but these are deliberately targeted by employers and police. Three instances in the play portray the range of direct interference with these government systems of care. Perhaps the most predictable example is when police stop the trucks that have been out collecting food for the strikers. The police “throw it all in the road. Spill sacks of flour and sugar all over” under the flimsy excuse that the truck is being used for picketing (116). While allies and well-meaning people in the surrounding area donate food, the police intervene to destroy it. Hospital treatment is also denied to striking workers. Shorty explains to visiting officials that John Viza, a man with a head injury, and Rosita, who is now suffering from what is apparently cholera, were denied treatment at the local hospital. Viza clarifies, “They told me if I went back to work, they fix me up” (114). The health

officer implies that the hospital staff meant that the workers would have money to pay for hospital treatment if they returned to work; however, it is clear that the hospital is denying treatment in an effort to end the strike. This exposes another double-bind the migrant workers faced in California: they were not considered members of any community. Meyers says of the hospital, "It's small—it's run for the benefit of residents of the country. Outsiders pay" (114). The migrant workers, though often travelling the same circuits and being integral to the state's economy, were not granted any residential status, and therefore, when the workers tried to resist exploitation, essential services could be denied because they were never officially granted in the first place. Like the police's reasons for destroying the strikers' food, reasons for denying healthcare are flimsy, designed to provide cover for punitive action against migrant workers and strikers.

The third key example of the necessities of care being withheld and manipulated is shown through the play's portrayal of the government relief workers sent to the strike camps. Miss Prather, one of two relief workers sent to the strike camp in the play, is portrayed as sincere in her desire to help the people, but it quickly becomes apparent that she is unwittingly helping break the strike. Miss Prather complains to Jennie that the striking families are refusing to take the government milk despite there being "nothing to it at all" (Hughes et al. 117). They simply require "the license numbers of automobiles . . . nationality of the recipient . . . birth and marriage certificates, name of their father and mother's father and last address" (117). Jennie angrily explains that this information is used to blacklist vehicles and deport Mexican workers when the lists are provided to the relief administration. Miss Prather tries to convince the strike leaders the relief workers "take no part in political questions, no sides," but when asked what she would do when authorities ask for her lists of strikers' information, she cannot fathom

"hinder[ing] the Administration" by withholding it (118). Prather is further exasperated at Mack's complaint of the people not getting any relief. She asks Mack, "Do you expect us to get around quicker than we do in this heat" and explains she is "worked off her feet as it is" (118). Reflecting the inadequacy real world conditions, in a camp of "fourteen thousand strikers and their families—on a strike front of two hundred miles," Miss Prather is one of a total of two relief workers (118). Despite Jennie's and Mack's explanations and what she sees all around her, Miss Prather refuses to depart from her belief that she is an apolitical force of good, calling the strikers "misled" and "ignorant" while lamenting "those poor babies standing around with crying babies, and this beautiful rich milk provided by the Government of the United States specially" (119). Mack curtly tells her before he walks away that the government requires the strikers to sign a paper saying they will go back to work pending arbitration before they can have the milk. Miss Prather's scenes explicitly spell out the legally sanctioned methods of leveraging starving children to force workers to submit to their own exploitation and abuse.

In the real world, physical, linguistic, and moral separation were deployed as a means of keeping workers from uniting enough knowledge and support to effectively oppose worker exploitation. Clara Weatherwax recognizes this in *Marching!* by portraying the Japanese and Chinese sailors transcending difference by communicating through sand drawings and gestures, and the pinnacle of Weatherwax's statement on communication across racial, cultural, and linguistic difference comes when all the people at the workers' meeting connect through the innovative piano performance. While Weatherwax shows that separation can be surmounted through nonverbal languages of music and drawings, Hughes and Winter use both narrative dialogue and dramatic techniques to show how workers can resist identity-based division to develop collective agency. As, Ramona Tougas has noted, *Harvest* calls for actors to facilitate

multi-racial communities through crossing traditional boundaries of stage performance. Tougas identifies the ways in which "*Harvest* unsettle[s] divisions and conflicts specific to racialized, national, and linguistic identity in the United States" and emphasizes that the play's intervention with its requirement of "physical proximity of a multiethnic cast to the audience," physically creates "relationships that critically revise the social injustice" (266) that the San Joaquin cotton strike aimed to challenge. Tougas's analysis shows how the physical staging of the play supports the play's central goal fostering care through relational presence.

As argued above, in his poems and short stories, Hughes anticipates Weatherwax in suggesting a form of workers' consciousness that is embodied and prioritizes collectivity. In the play there is not as much opportunity for exposition of this because of the dialogue format; however, the play offers unique opportunities to perform materiality and collectivity. Hughes and Winter provide guidance through stage direction to ensure visual and auditory representation, and they also use innovative techniques to manipulate the performance to connect audiences with the play. Visually, the play requires actor representation of as many racialized peoples as possible and the stage directions ask for Filipino representation to be included to "add to the melting pot that is California's low-paid agricultural reserve" (68). As Ramona Tougas notes in her discussion of the play's transnational themes, the strike headquarters' sign is written in Spanish and English and displayed under the U.S. flag, giving "both languages equal space in contributing" (280). Women are also present in the play in meaningful and equal numbers, eschewing the overly masculine presence seen in many proletarian fictions. These visual representations are joined by spoken representations as Spanish mingles with English and African American vernacular to maintain the visual and auditory heterogeneity throughout the play.

Conclusions of Care

While the entangled issues of the labour conflict are complex, *Harvest* shows how lack of care, is a common component across seemingly disparate problems like racism, malnutrition, and violence. In the play, just as in real life, the stressors put upon care-related functions propel the revolt against the economic exploitation. Moreover, the focus on the need for practical care entailed in things like clean water, sufficient healthy food, care for the sick, and satisfactory living spaces prompts more thought on how caring for other humans, non human beings, and environments is necessary to create equality and fairness in socio-economic systems. The play further shows how disruptions of caring affects, particularly perpetuated by narratives of racial difference, help facilitate economic exploitation by creating distrust, competition, and animosity amongst workers who are all being oppressed and exploited. Hughes and Winter bring together actors from different backgrounds to represent workers from different backgrounds, and show that by conversing rather than marching, the workers learn they are all victims of capitalist exploitation and environmental injustice. Through these conversations, characters like Marty, Mack, and Buster further begin to understand how discourses of racial difference are being weaponized against the workers while the play as whole conveys this more substantially to its audience. Additionally, the play stresses the ways in which this exploitation interferes with the care work of social reproduction. By focusing on caring relations between families who are Mexican, Black, and White, *Harvest* not only shows the authors to show the complex ways in which racial identity is used to keep workers from uniting against employers, but also demonstrates in a realistic way the building of care through discussion and across perceived differences.

Chapter Four

Carlos Bulosan and the Natural World as Exemplar

> Life is a collective work and also a social reality. Therefore the writer must participate with his fellow man in the struggle to protect, to brighten, to fulfill life . . . He writes so that this will be a world of mutual cooperation, mutual protection, mutual love.
>
> Carlos Bulosan, "The Writer as Worker"

> Not all human bonds are reducible to a form of commercial trade.
>
> Fabienne Brugère, *Care Ethics*

Reading Carlos Bulosan in conjunction with John Steinbeck, Clara Weatherwax, and Langston Hughes provides perspective on the development of proletarian literature and the role of the activist author. Bulosan was very aware of both his own and the other authors' engagement with the burgeoning genre of proletarian literature and the fraught socio-political scene. Moreover, the four authors together show a sustained concern in their proletarian literature with ethics of care, networks of care, and human relationships to the more than human world. Although Bulosan did not publish *America Is in the Heart* until 1946, his literary career started in the early 1930s as he began writing poems, stories, and nonfiction pieces for workers' magazines and other small publications. Like Steinbeck and Weatherwax, Bulosan grapples with the function of collectivity, but similarly to Hughes, he shows a more nuanced understanding of this major theme. Where Steinbeck exemplifies popular fears of mobs and Weatherwax promotes collectivity as the path to accessing a higher consciousness, in *America*, Bulosan portrays collectivity as not only essential to human freedom and equality but also as something dynamic with possibilities for positive, negative, and neutral outcomes. Unlike Steinbeck and

Weatherwax, Bulosan was clearly proletarian, and his passion to use literature as a socio-political tool places him the same set of Depression Era experimental-activist writers, proletarian literature's avant-garde. Bulosan's large body of work, like Steinbeck's and Weatherwax's novels and Hughes's 1930s writings, tackles with questions of collectivity and care in the socio-political struggles marking the labour movement, as well the question of how literature may best intervene in real-world problems.

As Michael Denning emphasizes, Bulosan emerged from the struggles of the agricultural fields as an author while Steinbeck came to the fields as an intellectual observer (*The Cultural* Front 280), and indeed of all four authors, Bulosan should be considered as having the most practical experience living and working as a member of the agricultural proletariat. While Steinbeck, Weatherwax, and Hughes were primarily observers of the labour struggles defining the 1930s, Filipino American author Bulosan spent the decade in a precarious fight for survival among the migrant labourers of America's West coast.[25] Bulosan was already physically injured from work accidents and illnesses experienced in the Philippines when he arrived in Seattle in 1930 at age 19, but U.S. rhetoric in the occupied Philippines filled Bulosan with belief in America as a land of plenty and equality waiting to welcome him. He recalls thinking in his first few months in the U.S. that all Americans should be searching for a "common denominator" so that they may understand and be of service to the country and feeling like "Icarus escaping from prison to freedom" ("My Education" 124). Instead, Bulosan found a country plunged into what would become an extended economic depression and plagued by social and systemic prejudices.

[25] Bulosan was never an official U.S. citizen because of anti-Filipino policies and legislation, but he certainly was Filipino American through both his lived experience and ideological dedication.

He experienced years of migratory labour, illness, starvation, and economic hardship, all exacerbated by racist violence.

By 1946, when Bulosan published his seminal work, the semiautobiographical novel *America*, the U.S. had moved on from the Great Depression. Hindered by chronic illness, Weatherwax had long since disappeared from the literary scene, while Steinbeck was a war correspondent during WWII and now a well-established author despite the agri-business backlash against his Dust Bowl Trilogy. Hughes, though still engaging with labour and leftist politics, was settling into another productive writing period with more focus on everyday experiences of Black Americans. Bulosan, however, was still committed to developing and refining a distinctly proletarian literature and engaged with the ideas of socio-economic reform that proliferated during the Popular Front Era. The labour movement, however, was receding in the postwar economic boom and the concept of proletarian literature, as activist writers had conceived of it in the 1920s and 30s, seemed to be quickly dying away. Many critics had declared the death of proletarian literature as early as 1935, when the Popular Front replaced Communism's Third Period.[26] Philip Rahv, who had previously championed proletarian literature, famously published in *The Southern Review* in 1938 a "Political Autopsy" of proletarian literature, declaring it "an episode in the history of totalitarian communism [that] will be remembered as a comedy of mistaken identities and the tragedy of a frustrated social impulse in contemporary letters" (628). Bulosan's continuing commitment to proletarian literature was not a mistaken foray into a flawed and fading genre, though. Bulosan was dedicated to both his craft of literature and his lifelong dream of freedom and equality for all people, but unlike

[26] For a definitive account of the premature announcement of the end of proletarian literature and why it was wrong, see Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front*.

Steinbeck, Weatherwax, and Hughes, Bulosan continued in the 1940s to pursue proletarian literature as a tool for realizing that dream. He believed that rather than being an expression of a single political theory or act of revolution, proletarian literature was about voicing the people's struggles and working to better their lives. Accordingly, Bulosan sought to take the best strategies from previous proletarian literature to deliver both his own critique of the tremendous burdens that capitalism's failures of care placed on working class bodies and his contrasting vision for social justice, which is rooted in care ethics and in respect for the natural world.

Like Hughes, Bulosan decenters marching and the idea of the labour struggle as a masculine battle and instead focuses on interpersonal relationships between workers as equally important to the labour movement. Although struggles of class, race, and gender take centre stage in *America,* concomitant in his understanding of each of these struggles is a concern for networks and ethics of care. Like the workers in Steinbeck's regimented strikers' camp and Weatherwax's community-minded lumber town, the multiracial proletariat in *America* must rely heavily on each other as caregivers in situations where mainstream society, including employers, governments, and the more privileged classes, seem not only not to care about them but also to actively attack their ability to care for themselves. Denning recognizes that fraternity and the figure of the "brother and pea picker [are] at the heart of Bulosan's migrant narrative," but he argues that there is a "profound ambivalence" embodied in the narrative's portrayal of this "alliance of brothers" because they not only embody both "utopian solidarity" but are "haunted by sexual aggression and anxiety" (275). While Denning suggests that the drama of the story resides in attempting to "resolve the contradictory nature of this kin structure," which contains both positive and negative experiences, I propose that text is not at all ambivalent about these kinship structures; rather, through its portrayal of a multitude of relationships between workers,

America insists on the necessity of collective relationships while deliberately illustrating how the capitalist and white supremacist socio-economic milieu degrades these essential networks of care (275). Marching, in symbol and actuality, moves to the periphery of *America* as Bulosan examines relationships of care as the true foundations of equitable societies.

Masculine brotherhood is significant to the experiences of the novel's main character, a fictional representation of Bulosan called Allos, but in my reading masculine brotherhood is not the novel's sole or ultimate form of caring relationship portrayed in the novel.[27] In recent criticism, Francis Sollano argues that "brotherly feeling" for his biological brothers provides the basis for Allos's "social and ethical self-making," asserting that Allos's brothers and his search for a new brotherhood ushers in his ethical self-actualizing (450). Indeed, as Sollano posits, it is through relational understandings that Allos forms his social and ethical identity as he seeks to recreate brotherhood in the collective of workers. My reading, however, expands consideration of masculinity and brotherhood to examine other form of familial-like care in the multiple modes of relationality that the text portrays. Bulosan gives significant attention to Allos's additional relations with both men and women, from the simple but life-saving hot meal a stranger provides to a female romantic partner who performs sex work to support them both. Through relations complex and simple, Bulosan's novel deeply examines interpersonal relationships in the ethical formation of individuals and collectives. To a lesser but still significant extent, the novel considers human relationships with the natural world and nonhuman life. *America* demonstrates an awareness of the imbrication of human with nonhuman life and the need to protect life-sustaining networks of care from harmful socio-economic systems, and this awareness is also

[27] The character begins as Allos and later is called Carlos and Carl. To avoid confusing the character with the author, I will refer to the character as Allos unless addressing the importance of naming within the text.

present in many of Bulosan's poems and essays. These networks and relationship are expansive and cannot be reduced to masculinist, anthropocentric narratives of migrant worker "brotherhood."

Of the authors in this project, Bulosan is the only one who was both a migrant worker and farmer. Bulosan was born in the Pangasinan Province of the Philippines into a peasant farming family, which was being forcibly transitioned into wage labour. He also worked in the U.S. throughout the Depression in domestic positions and as a migrant farm labourer. Bulosan, then, truly lived the agricultural proletarian struggle for most of his life. His early life in Binalonan, Pangasinan was shaped by his family's tumultuous struggle to survive amid the fallout of Philippine-American War (1898-1902) and the subsequent U.S. occupation of the Philippines. While violence and a decimation of the country's infrastructure painfully affected the Filipino people, the accelerated imposition of landlords and corrupt bureaucrats combined with American programs to create a new class system that would radically change life for the farming peasantry to which the Bulosan family belonged.[28] In the essay "My Education," Bulosan explains how he "hated absentee-landlordism," a system beginning with Spanish occupation of the Philippines that "threatened the security of the peasantry till it became a blight of our national life" (124). Belonging to this transitional period profoundly shaped Bulosan. He was immersed in the beautiful landscape of Pangasinan and the traditions of a life closely tied to the natural world, but the rapid changes of U.S. imperialism and the Philippine bureaucratic class brought both new ideals and unfair challenges. Not unlike the fictional Joad family in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of*

[28] The Spanish colonial period of the Philippines began in 1565 with direct Spanish rule beginning in 1821. The opening of Filipino ports to international trade in 1834 began the trajectory of imperial exploitation of the Philippines natural resources. The American occupation was an extension of foreign incursion and destabilization for the islands.

Wrath and their real-life American counterparts, Filipino peasant farmers were losing their family lands to suspect money-lending practices and prospecting enterprises. These struggles led Bulosan to chase the ideals he believed were easily achieved with hard work in the U.S., and he would take the lessons of his early agricultural life with him.

Bulosan's belief in the American dream, as well as his critique of how capitalist exploitation and racism undermine that dream, is informed by the physical world and natural abundance.[29] Despite finding more hardship in the U.S., Bulosan's belief in the equality and freedom espoused in the American mythos underscored his writing and work. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Bulosan's beliefs in the original yet unfulfilled American ideals as expressed in *America* were frequently positively viewed as assimilationist and nationalist by reviewers and the public in the period directly following World War II. In *America,* the protagonist Allos, the representation of Bulosan, keeps faith in the idea that America will realize its promises of equality and freedom: Allos's brother Macario famously declares, "America is in the hearts of men" while Allos ends the novel thinking, "I knew that no man could destroy my faith in America that had sprung from all our hopes and aspirations, *ever* (327).[30] Though fluctuating with experience, Allos and *America* always return to this belief in America nation, and this led many to presume *America* ultimately to be an assimilationist, nationalist text. However, eminent Bulosan scholar E. San Juan Jr. intervened to spark a new era of criticism, insisting on contextualizing Bulosan's work through an understanding of Bulosan's socio-political vision as rooted in the peasant-worker struggles in the Philippines in addition to his experience in the U.S.

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[29] While the American Dream has some variations in what it specifically entails, I am using the basic meaning that underlies these variations: the idea that with hard work, anyone, even someone who begins with absolutely nothing, can become financially successful and secure in the U.S.

[30] The first-person narrator of the *America* represents Carlos Bulosan; in the novel he is referred to as Allos, Carlos, and Carl. Since he starts as Allos, I maintain the name throughout for clarity and to differentiate from the author.

San Juan Jr.'s historical materialist approach to Bulosan's work provides a significant basis for understanding Bulosan's dialectical technique of posing seemingly contradictory interpretations and solutions in order to offer a more complex vision of America that includes both optimism and critique.

San Juan Jr.'s attention to the material and "spiritual-biological" dimensions of Bulosan's work provides a helpful starting point for my argument that *America* and several of Bulosan's poems and essays anticipate new materialism's emphasis on the interconnection between human social relations and the more-than-human world. According to San Juan Jr., dialectics are key to *America* because Bulosan focuses on "the development of character within the historical process of society . . . between spiritual-biological needs and the material circumstances of social existence" and "convey[s] a vision of truth that transcends the limited interests of the ego" (94). The spiritual-biological, as San Juan Jr. terms it, may be thought of as the emotional and physical embodiment that constitute a person's consciousness, while "the material circumstances of social existence" are the "social and historical tendencies" that shape people's experiences (94). This dialectic for San Juan Jr., then, is between the individual embodied self and the larger world of community and socio-political circumstance. The text's proliferating dialectical shifts enable Bulosan to infuse even the protagonist's most personal moments with a "representative identity" of the workers' collective struggle. San Juan Jr. identifies this crucial dialectic but stops short of considering biological life as more than a set of needs and occasionally even dismisses Bulosan's references to the natural world as romantic or mystical rather than properly materialist. However, I argue that Bulosan's engagement with the natural world and the material effects of physical labour on workers' bodies is borne of his early life in rural Philippines, and that his dialectic of nature and civilization is key to the novel's messages of socio-economic reform. Building on San

Juan Jr.'s dialectical approach, I assert that respectful attention to the physical world and nonhuman life as crucial to human equality are critical to Bulosan's socio-political project, and that his version of proletarian fiction suggests that agricultural labour entails a body of knowledge and way fo interacting with others that anticipates material feminist ethics of care. Accordingly, his work further suggests a relational ethics that is antithetical to the profit-oriented and individualist tenets of agribusiness and industrial capitalism.

Bulosan wrote prolifically about struggles for freedom and equity in a world besieged by political and economic greed. The majority of criticism about Bulosan's extensive body of proletarian literature has done important work focusing on how these texts engage with discourses of racism, nationalism, and labour exploitation. Yet, as Kelly Adams asserts in her postcolonial environmental study of Bulosan's *The Cry and the Dedication* (1995), Bulosan's insights are not limited to race and class but also include environmental care and reflection on the interconnectedness of violence against nature and violence against humans.[31] Adams's work suggests that a similar ecocritical approach should be widely applied to Bulosan's works. In fact, Bulosan's vision for a just world, like that of many of the female and marginalized authors of proletarian literature, demands an interdisciplinary approach that includes feminist lenses such as feminist new materialism. Sarah Wald, in her book *The Nature of California*, argues that Allos and the other labourers in *America* "assert their humanity" by reclaiming national landscapes, that is, by refusing to be invisible, abject pieces of the economic machine through insisting on their connection to the American land (132). Wald makes an important connection here between natural landscapes and political struggle, but I argue that Bulosan's interest in the earth and the

[31] Bulosan never finished *The Cry and the Dedication*. He wrote the novel in the late 1940s and the 1950s. The novel was first published, unfinished and posthumously, in 1995.

natural world goes beyond social documentation and political tool. My argument builds on these insights to argue that the natural world and human relationships with living ecosystems are critical components of Bulosan's socio-political vision as expressed in *America* and many of his stories, poems, and essays.

This chapter has three main arguments. First, I consider Bulosan's contribution to defining the genre of proletarian literature through his major work, *America Is in the Heart*, which Denning cites as one of the proletarian literature movement's major works although it appeared years after the movement's alleged death (228). In the 1930s, Bulosan participated in the West coast labour movement and the leftist and proletarian literary scene. Along with creating the short-lived Filipino worker's magazine *The New Tide* (1934), Bulosan published poems, stories, and essays in most of the leading periodical publications, such as *New Masses*, *Poetry, The New Yorker,* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. Similarly, his writings show that he read widely of creative and critical pieces of the workers' movement. I argue that in *America*, Bulosan draws on this body of proletarian writing in an attempt to create in *America* a more perfect version of the proletarian novel and author than was seen in the 1930s, reaffirming his continued belief in the socio-political cause of a Popular Front and in the power of literature to effect social change. Indeed, I argue that Bulosan's *America* engages with and solves problems identified in the 1930s as weaknesses of proletarian literature, particularly an overemphasis on the authenticity of the worker-writer, the tendentiousness and dangers of conversion narratives, and the uncertainty about the value of protest marches as expressions of collectivity.

Second, I draw on Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality to argue that *America* is not only an innovative contribution to proletarian literature but also a materialism memoir, dedicated to showing how "the self is constituted by material agencies that are simultaneously

biological, political, and economic" (*Bodily Natures* 87). Trans-corporeality focuses on the permeability and impressionability of living bodies and "mediating membranes, which may be biological, social, and political" (15). Accordingly, trans-corporeality is not inherently negative or positive. As Alaimo argues in *Bodily Natures,* as industrialized and monopolistic methods of capitalism sought to increase profit by denying the physical vulnerability of workers' bodies, proletarian authors took increasing measures to illustrate the harmful effects of socio-economic practices, particularly on the human body but also on other living bodies of nonhuman animals and ecosystems. James Fitz Gerald's "Hounded by the Terrible Threat: Illness at the Edges of Citizenship," well explains the multiplicity of challenges faced by Filipino people both in U.S. occupied Philippines and in the United States. American intervention in the Philippines recast Filipino people as ignorant of sanitary habits and as "pathogenic vectors" (603) under the terrible irony that the Philippine-American war had destabilized health infrastructure, disrupted community care, and led to routine exclusion of Filipino people from health services. Fitz Gerald's historical explication reveals many of the circumstances that made health and bodily conditions such prominent concerns for Filipinos in both the Philippines and the U.S., arguing the novel "brings into sharp relief how mixed predicates of race and class . . . intensify forms of health inequality" (601). Bulosan's writings document the ways in which his own body, like that of his character Allos and others within his writing, is a document of lifelong hardship and trauma. I assert that *America* offers a materialist memoir in the specific proletarian literary tradition of illustrating and documenting how bodies are enmeshed, or co-constitutive, in social and material environments; moreover, by reading *America* in the context of Bulosan's poetry and essays, I demonstrate that Bulosan goes beyond documenting only the harmful effects of trans-corporeality to show how people can "build connections rather than boundaries" (Alaimo, *Bodily*

Natures 111) and work towards and ethical flow of trans-corporeal exchange both between humans and between human beings and the rest of the living world.

The role of the more-than-human world and—by this I mean the ecological systems and living bodies inhabiting them—in Bulosan's work in underassessed. In his early criticism, San Juan Jr. negatively evaluates some of Bulosan's poetic invocation of the natural world as romantic or mystic. Many critics have also assumed that the earth in *America* is primarily figurative, a symbol of the American Dream rather than a material environment that is of interest on its own terms. This not an unfair assessment, as elements of nature and earth do also serve symbolic purposes in the text; however, *America* and many of Bulosan's other writings make significant examinations of the elements of the more-than-human world in their own right. Sarah Wald offers an insightful argument that the landscapes of the Philippines and the U.S. are key to *America's* narrative, and my own argument extends this attention to landscape to consider human interconnection with living landscapes. Wald positions the Philippines as the novel's "narrative center" and Allos's love for nature in the Philippines as his "cultural roots" which form the basis of his anticolonial political views. She proposes that the attractiveness of the U.S. landscape evokes Allos's love for the similarly beautiful land of the Philippines, land from with Allos's family has been deposed by imperialism and predatory lending. In this way, Wald recognizes the tremendous significance of the more-than-human world in *America*, but her analysis focuses on Allos's engagement with the world as "landscape," making it a foundation to the novel's anticolonial political discussion of land possession and use. While I agree with Wald's assessment, it is not a complete picture of the role of nature and the more-than-human world in *America* and Bulosan's other writings. I will argue that Bulosan's writing suggests real

interdependency with the natural world and that respect for its nonhuman inhabitants as living beings are integral to Bulosan's socio-political vision.

My third claim is that Bulosan's attention to trans-corporeality and living world informs his texts' examination of care and care networks. By constructing *America* as both a proletarian novel and a material memoir, Bulosan painstakingly reveals the economically motivated degradation of care and care networks among the working-class. Instead of focusing on scenes of marching, he pays close attention to the importance of care work and how the working-class cares about and for one another as well as the ways in which care is withheld, disrupted, or degraded in a capitalist and white supremacist society. He further asserts the importance of care to collectivity. Like Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle,* Bulosan's *America* frets over the negative possibilities of collectivity, but rather than worrying about mob behaviour in strike actions, Bulosan expresses concern for the re-enforcement of antisocial behaviours outside of the organized labour movement, as some of his brothers together pursue crime, violence, and other dangerous behaviour. These negative examples of brotherhood, however, form one side of the novel's dialectic of collectivity. I argue that the novel also reaches a positive understanding of networks of care, in part by contrasting unhealthy relationality of the workers who pursue violence and crime with positive relationality of workers who provide physical care and nourishment. I assert that the ethical understanding of care is a foundational component of Bulosan's vision of socio-political reform.

America as Proletarian Novel

Originally believed to be an autobiography but later discovered to be a mixture of autobiography, composite accounts of others' experiences, and some artistic license, Bulosan's novel *America* is widely considered as an essential text in Asian American literature and

Bulosan's defining work. *America* tells Bulosan's story from his childhood in U.S.-occupied Philippines to his odyssey of survival as a migrant laborer in the Western U.S. during the Great Depression. In conjunction with Bulosan's other writings, *America* shows that Bulosan was a self-consciously proletarian author, participating in the literary movement's struggle to define and sustain itself. San Juan Jr. and more recent critics such as Jeffrey Babusao and Allan Punzalan Isaac emphasize the uniqueness of Filipino American experience due to U.S. occupation of the islands and the consequently liminal status of Filipinos.[32] Indeed, as citizens of U.S. occupied Philippines, Filipino migrants in the U.S. were considered neither citizens nor immigrants. They were consequently barred from the privileges and rights extended to either group. Experiences of classism and racism consequently dominate Bulosan's life and many of his works. Bulosan's writing, however, not only exposes injustice but also tries to provide remedies. Recognition of care and human enmeshment in the more-than-human world are key components of Bulosan's vision. Like Steinbeck, Bulosan gathers lessons from nonhuman life, but unlike Steinbeck, Bulosan tends to concretize this knowledge in a practical rather than metaphorical way. Where Steinbeck's knowledge of the natural world most often manifests in metaphors and analogies, such as his descriptions of workers as animal like, Bulosan shows through his account of Allos's early life how he gains insights through practical interactions with nature and animals, with the living world. Like Weatherwax in the feminist-materialist first chapter of *Marching!*, Bulosan creates in the first part of *America* a picture of an embodied collective experience rooted in a living environment.

[32] Cabusao's edited collection of Bulosan criticism *Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt* provides an excellent introduction to the periods of Bulosan's life and career. Punzalan's "Displacing Filipinos, Dislocating America" unpacks the precarious position of the Filipino workers in *America Is in the Heart*.

America has been both celebrated and criticized as a novel of nationalist assimilation; as critics like San Juan Jr., Denning, and Wald have shown, however, these interpretations minimize the significance of the novel's proletarian and postcolonial content and critique. San Juan Jr. rejects against the nationalist interpretation, insisting on the revolutionary aspects of the text which he argues call for action rather than acceptance and integration. Similarly, Denning rejects readings of the novel as "the epitome of the sentimental, populist, humanist rationalism" (273). Instead, Denning says that the novel's moments of seeming nationalist enthusiasm represent the narrator's attempts to overcome the brutality and despair of his life in America. As Denning notes, proletarian literature in this period has frequently been interpreted in its most recognizable terms with less attention to subtler, complicating threads within the texts. My reading, then, builds on Marxist critics San Juan Jr. and Denning to show how Bulosan's proletarian novel expands attention from the masculine conflict between workers and employers to a broader vision that anticipates feminist care ethics, and from historical materialism to a new materialism that gives consideration to the material world's agency.[33]

As the contemporaneous criticism of Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* and Weatherwax's *Marching!* shows, the ideal proletarian author and novel were not easily defined even at the height of the left's proletarian literary period in the 1930s. Bulosan was not idle in this period as he wrote and published poems and read extensively in history, philosophy, classic literature, and literary periodicals. A formidable autodidact, Bulosan clearly studied proletarian literature and its criticism in preparation for writing *America* and deliberately constructed *America* as a proletarian novel. Bulosan challenges the proletarian genre, though, as he focuses less on marching and battle to consider collectivity in terms of care. Like Hughes, Bulosan does not

[33] Other important critics include Mai Wang, Elaine Kim, and Audrey Wu Clark who situate Bulosan within Asian American literary traditions and the context of internationalism

subordinate race and gender to class, and instead shows the inextricability of racial and gender identity from class relations. And, like the other agricultural proletarian authors, Bulosan pays increased attention to nature and the more-than-human world.

In his nonfiction writings, Bulosan expresses a Marxian vision of the proletarian writer, proposing that the successful writer must not be alienated from the content of their work. In the essay "How My Stories Were Written," he describes the key to his own writing as a marrying of the individual with the universal in that "art is not alien to life but a transmutation of it in artistic terms," a transmutation that requires individual to "synthesize reading, writing, and experience" (109). However, to write in this way "takes years of painstaking preparation" (109). The writer, therefore, is a skilled worker, using their exceptional, but earned, skills to produce written works. In the same ways that a skilled craftsperson is part of the working class, so too, is the proletarian author. This view of the proletarian author aligns with the Bulosan persona throughout *America,* as Allos must resist the temptations of migrant underworld to nurture his individual intellectual skills. In presenting the narrator Allos as not removed from the common and group experiences but rather struggling to resist the self-destruction of alcohol, gambling, and crime, Bulosan shows Allos does not represent the American ideal of the exceptional individual whose unique qualities enable them to rise in society. Rather, Allos is a worker, learning his skills of thinking and writing through his experiences among other workers.

Although it is partly autobiographical, *America* is not simply an autobiography: it is a self-consciously crafted proletarian novel. *America* is actually a composite of Bulosan's personal experiences, and the experience of people he knew or about which he had heard. Although Bulosan takes artistic license, the events in the text happened in some form in the real world. As Elaine Kim explains, early Asian American literature has a tradition of "autobiography or

personal history dedicated to the task of promoting cultural goodwill and understanding" (47). Bulosan's "sustaining desire to win American acceptance," says Kim, aligns him with "the Asian goodwill ambassador writers" (57). This insight illuminates Bulosan's choice to create *America* as an autobiography and helps us to understand how the novel's content may appear assimilationist to some because it does attempt to build common ground between Filipino workers and middle-class white readers. Still, however much *America* may represent a plea for cultural and racial acceptance, it is also a proletarian critique of socio-political practices and a call for a radical reform. Mai Wang further illuminates Bulosan's participation in American literary traditions that shape the country's social narratives. Wang excavates the presence of Walt Whitman and what Sacvan Bercovitch identifies as the American jeremiad in *America*. Wang suggests that the American tradition of the secular jeremiad explains the "paradoxical" nature of Allos's unflagging belief in an ideal America despite the continual racial and economic injustice he experiences. Compellingly, Wang shows how Bulosan "adapts the Whitmanian ideal of future-oriented universalism in order to illustrate the pressing need for the Filipino American community to achieve greater equality" through both activism and literature (192). While these more recent studies of *America* focus more on the racial and cultural than proletarian aspects of Bulosan's work, they do reveal significant ways in which Bulosan draws on Asian American and American literature to effectively shape his proletarian novel as a socially motivated intervention.

My focus, however, is on how Bulosan's novel fulfills the left's ever elusive aspiration for a proletarian author and novel that are at once authentically proletarian and literarily elevated. For the left, and especially for the editorial boards of periodicals like *New Masses*, the shaping of the exemplary proletarian writer was as central a concern as the shaping of the exemplary

proletarian novel. Although interest in proletarian literature declined significantly at the end of the 1930s, *America,* which Bulosan wrote in 1943, shows through its portrayal of Allos how Bulosan himself embodied the Left's ideal of a proletarian author who is also skilled literary artist. Allos, as a double for Bulosan, finds his purpose in writing for the enlightenment and liberation of the economically exploited lower class and the racialized, gendered, and marginalized people whose victimization is concomitant with economic exploitation. Like Bulosan, Allos turns to the numerous periodicals produced by the left during the politically fraught 1920s and 30s, as the novel shows him reading the *New Masses, Partisan Review, The New Republic, and Anvil*. Allos not only reads these materials as quickly as he can borrow them, but he also begins writing poetry and journalistic pieces, just as Bulosan did. This artistic education shapes the narrative as a type of proletarian künstlerroman, the evolution of an artist. Although the novel has been variously categorized as autobiographical-semiautobiographical novel, migrant narrative, and autobiography, and as literary critics have described the core identity of *America* as transnational universalism, secular jeremiad, Popular Front Americanism, and historical material consciousness, all of these valuations indicate both the breadth of Bulosan's literary knowledge and his deliberate application of that knowledge to create *America* as his proletarian masterpiece. Yet, of all these influences, it is the formation of the proletarian writer-worker through his experiences of physical labour in agricultural as well as urban settings that is central to Bulosan's novel and its insights about the importance of care to the development of a more just American society.

Trans-corporeal Memoir

I argue that in focusing on the embodied experiences of labour and the material impacts of capitalism's failures of care, Bulosan's novel shows that agricultural proletarian fiction can

also be read as what Stacy Alaimo calls a trans-corporeal memoir. Although the text is only semi-autobiographical and includes composite experiences, *America* follows Alaimo's definition of a trans-corporeal memoir in that it "insist[s] that the self is constituted by material agencies that are simultaneously biological, political, and economic" (*Bodily Natures* 87). Bulosan's contemporary Carey McWilliams, in his introduction to the 1973 edition, says of *America*, "it can be fairly said . . . that some Filipino was indeed the victim of each of these or similar incidents" (vii), and *America* is indeed a memoir of real events, people, and physical effects. Bulosan focuses considerable energy on the physical realities the working class faced to exhibit how living bodies are constantly shaped through biological as well as social forces, creating a trans-corporeal memoir. Moreover, trans-corporeal memoirs are particularly vital to proletarian literature because they challenge capitalism's efforts to occlude the bodily harm caused by dangerous workplaces and by the failure of employers to provide access to the basic resources for the reproductive labours of maintaining worker's lives. Bulosan foregrounds Allos's painful physicality from his first prolonged leg injuries in childhood to the removal of his lung in Los Angeles, and the novel's bodily awareness consistently demands acknowledgement of the impacts of socio-economic practices on workers' bodies.

Focusing on the the human body's imbrication with the material environment has additional risk and purpose for marginalized groups because of the essentializing discourses that justified oppressive treatment of workers by essentializing the physical equalities of particular groups of people. On the one hand, the working class needs to bring attention to how exploitative working conditions and employers' failure to provide adequate means for workers to care for themselves undermines their physical health, but on the other hand, women, racialized groups, and even migrant single white males were subject to rhetorical campaigns claiming they were

naturally defective and were naturally meant for certain types of work. Many agricultural employers were not immediately comfortable with the idea of degraded conditions for their labourers, but racial and social myths helped to ease their consciences as rhetoric circulated that racialized workers like Filipinos and Mexicans were "naturally suited to agricultural work by reason of their relatively small physical stature, ability to tolerate hot weather, native stoicism, and innate lack of ambition" (Daniels 63-64). As for single white migrant men, newspaper articles deigned them destined for nothing better because they were limited by their "collective social degeneracy" (64). The agricultural employers, whether they initially approved or not, had a vested interest in a discourse of politicized and largely racialized natural selection that enabled them to maintain a peasant labouring class as cheaply as possible. Accordingly, the people in these marginalized groups recognized more readily that "bodily immersion within power structures . . . have real material effects" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 86) and that their future health depended on exposing the lie that they were naturally inferior and the truth that all human lives are shaped by co-constitutive relationships between human bodies and the material environment.

Bulosan incorporates trans-corporeal (auto)biography into *America* because he witnesses and experiences the inescapability of the increased bodily vulnerability of the peasant and proletarian classes, and the particularly vulnerable position of the Filipino migrant workers in the U.S. Fitz Gerald notes that the soaring mortality rates among the poorest people in the Philippines were fueled by outbreaks of previously controlled diseases like Cholera, typhoid, tuberculosis, and smallpox, with hundreds of thousands dying between 1898 and 1903 (602). These high rates of illness and mortality were convenient justification for U.S. narratives of racial inferiority and policies of paternalistic colonialism in the Philippines. During the migration of Filipinos to the U.S., this racist conceptions of Filipinos as an inferior and diseased race meant

that Filipino workers were perceived as health threats to white Americans. Bulosan's novel shows how the physical suffering of Filipinos in both the Philippines and the U.S. was caused not by racial inferiority but by the degradation of and lack of access to the means of caring for. Basic necessary care like healthy and adequate food and living spaces, medicines, and health care were severely limited or absent for many.

Early in the novel, the U.S. occupation of the Philippines establishes the fast-paced labour of capitalism and its physical dangers. Allos begins experiencing the speed-up mentality of wage labour as a young child in the Philippines. Desperate to help his family, Allos like many others, goes to work picking coconuts for the recently arrived copra company. Importantly, this is a corporation arriving in the Binalonan for the mass harvesting of coconuts for the production coconut oil. As the narrator explains, many such copra companies had sent agents from Manila to the provinces to expand harvesting as the scale of production and exportation increased. Allos climbs trees to pick coconuts for others employed by the copra industry, getting to keep one of every five he picks. He describes climbing the tress as a dangerous job: "sometimes the trees were 100 feet high; sometimes the trunks were too big for [his] short arms" (46) Allos works faster, trying to make more money, and falls and breaks one leg and one arm. Moreover, Allos works twelve-hour shifts at this dangerous job to give all his earnings to his mother who is in bed after giving birth again. Bulosan illustrates a matrix of pressures. Here, agribusiness's exploitation of the provincial people creates economic pressure that leads to their own exploitation of children. Superadded to this is the absence of economic supports to the family survive while the mother's reproductive labour temporarily removes her from the field of economic labour and the father's inability to repay the loan leveraged on the family's remaining farmland. Finally, it is when the last day comes to pay the owed installment on the family's land

that pushes Allos to work even faster, and "unusually late." Allos already works from six am to six pm, climbing trees to pick coconuts. Working late means more than twelve hours climbing trees. All these factors combine to place Allos in a frenzied state of desperation, and in his rush, he falls from a tree, fracturing his arm and leg.

This injury leaves the family without Allos's income and increases their hardship. Without any social safety net, the peasant families must work and endure physical illness and injury with no chance of relief. Like his sister Irene, who dies painfully in the family home from an unknown illness while the family helplessly watches, Allos receives pieced-together amateur help for his physical ailments. His father takes him to an *albolario*, described as both a "chiropractor" and "little more than a witchdoctor" (47). Whether the albolario is responsible is unclear, but Allos heals over the next few months and even gets to go to school. When the heavy rains come, though, his legs swell and he loses the ability to walk. Allos's legs swell to greater and lesser degrees for months, and he is housebound. With a new baby sister at home, Allos must stay home from school even during periods when his legs are not swollen because he now must care for his baby sister while his mother works. Bulosan casually inserts this conflict between economic and reproductive labours into the narrative as Allos cries and tells his mother he wishes he could return to school, but his mother says, "You will go as soon as your sister is big enough to be alone in the house" (51). The family is not able to stay together and can barely care for itself. Father does not come to town, where the family is, because he is hiring himself out as a day labourer to local farmers, desperately trying to raise enough money to pay the last installment of the loan taken against the last of their land. This, of course, leaves the mother with a new baby and severely injured boy for which to care, yet she is forced out of the house each day to earn enough to provide food and shelter for them all. In turn, the boy must care for his

sister, who is just learning to crawl. The physicality of the family is not only vulnerable to accident and disease but also simply in competition with their ability to support themselves.

Although Allos hopes for an economically and physically secure life in America, the novel that in California, the working class is exploited and denied care in similar ways. From Allos's crossing of the Atlantic through his years travelling the West Coast and doing various kinds of agricultural and domestic labour, the novel reveals a relentless assault on the bodies of the poor. These assaults are frequently portrayed through what Denning calls the proletarian grotesque, with shocking details meant to penetrate the distance between middle-class readers and the othered migrant worker; moreover, Bulosan crafts the narrative to expose how capitalist exploitation creates forms of trans-corporeality, as each physical wound is shown to be caused by social, political, and economic conditions that make workers' bodies more vulnerable. The Filipino migrant workers are segregated, often only allowed to stay in the poor bunk housing on farms and ranches or in Chinese ghettos when in towns or cities. The novel shows how this inadequate housing becomes a site of various forms of violence. Allos wants to maintain his own understanding of personal dignity and respect, and this is contrasted with the violent behaviour of other men in these segregated areas. Witnessing alcoholic binges, brutal rapes, fights, and theft, he says, "I was terrified in this building of lost men". But while this portrayal of poor Filipino men as dangerous criminal can be seen as reinforcing the concurrent circulating narrative that Filipino men are animalistic threats to white society, *America* details the ways in which Filipino men were abused, starved, and excluded from common forms of society that might provide them with the support necessary to develop relationships based in care rather than violence, desperation, and addiction. The Chinese gambling halls, which were also sources of various illicit intoxicants, were one of the few places the Filipino men could go when not

working. Not only were these often-violent places one of the only gathering options, but they attracted the frequently starved men by offering free coffee.

These relentless physical threats also haunt Allos and other migrant workers as they travel in search of work or to escape acts of racist violence. When white vigilantes attack a Filipino camp outside the farm for which they are working, Allos and two friends must flee. They are trying to board a freight train when detectives chase them, and one many José falls beneath the train as he struggles to break free from a detective's grasp. One of José's feet is shorn completely off while the ws "was still hanging" (149). When railroad security and police chase and detain the Filipino men, and when authorities detain Filipino men, they work with prejudice and impunity. Allos relates being tarrested without explanation while he was eating in a small restaurant in a new town in Oregon. He is interrogated by the police: "Where did you come from? . . . Are you Filipino?" (158). When he finally answers yes, the police punch him: "Crack! It was that quick and simple" (158). After recovering, Allos calls the man a bastard, and the police set upon him, beating him unconscious. Bulosan shows that incidents of similar violence caused directly by racist hatred or through conditions created by such bias were common occurrences for the Filipino migrant workers.

The novel also shows how the blatant violence is superadded to the indirect violence of the removal of care for economic gain. After a day of "back-breaking" work planting cauliflower seeds, Allos returns to a bunkhouse "made of old pieces of wood . . . and crowded with men" (160). The narrator plainly describes the workers living in filth: "There was no sewage disposal. When I ate swarms of flies fought over my plate. My bed was a makeshift tent under a huge water tank, away from the bunkhouse. I slept on a dirty cot: the blanket was never washed. The dining room was a pigsty" (160). Bulosan's simple sentences deliver the facts with no

embellishment, leaving no more space for the reader to evade the physical reality than the workers have. Later, Allos is hospitalized with tuberculosis, an infectious disease that spread easily among workers in such spaces. As a material memoir, *America* documents the suffocating reality faced by the Filipino migrant workers that is defined by multiple fronts of assault on their physical bodies.

Yet the novel also shows that, amidst the never-ending violence, Allos finds comfort in the natural world. After the he police who detained and beat him in Oregon leave him at the California border, Allos walks through a forest along the coastal highway for several days. He ponders the brutality of the police officers, wondering if it were "possible these men enjoyed cruelty?" (159). He finally boards a freight train and sits atop an empty boxcar. It is here that he watches "the beautiful land passing by" and sees places where he "would someday like to build a home" (159). This is one of several moments when Allos views the rural environment in an inspiring way while traveling. In these moments, brutal violence is contrasted with time in natural settings, and Allos is repeatedly renewed and reminded of home and of his hope for a good life through these small moments of reconnecting with nature.

Natural Foundations

To suggest that humanity's harmonious relationship with the living world is Bulosan's primary concern would be an exaggeration; however, to say it is integral to his socio-economic vision of freedom and equality is not. In the living world, Allos sees not only beauty and freedom but also a possible source of guidance for humanity. Throughout *America*, the natural world acts as a foundation for ethical behaviour and as a reminder, calling Allos back to the knowledge of respectful and harmonious relationships between human, land, and animals. Allos's early experiences before his father loses their land echo Lisa's vision of the future in Steinbeck's *In*

Dubious Battle of a homestead with mutually beneficial human-nonhuman relationships. Bulosan sets Part I of *America*, which accounts for roughly one-third of the novel, in the Philippines where Allos lives primarily in rural settings immersed in nature. This section accounts for much of the novel's portrayal of more-than-human relations. However, while the natural world appears less prominently once Allos arrives in the U.S., the latter parts of the novel are interwoven with small, meaningful reflections on the natural world. These instances recall those formative moments in the Philippines and the possibilities of life being built from caring relationships.

In Part One of *America*, the narrator relates his early life in the Philippines, and this is foundational to the novel's development of the idea that humans must have a complementary relationship with the natural world. When the novel opens, Allos is helping his father on the family farm, and while the plot focuses on the return of his brother Leon, the narration is filled with positive references to the land and to nonhuman animals. Allos introduces the land as "the common earth that had fed our family for generations" (6), and further explains, "we had crop rotation as an insurance against starvation and the generosity of the soil was miraculous" (7-8). Here, the earth is feeding the family, and the soil is generous; moreover, the earth is common, that is in relationship with everyone. There is continuity and a suggestion that the earth knows the family because of the generational relationship. Boundaries are denoted not by fences and walls but by landscape features like the mango tree that separates Allos's father's land from his grandfathers' land. Rather than plantation style single crops and market-driven season, crops are planted and harvested according to seasonal rain patterns and the nourishment of the soil. Bulosan shows the family's appreciation for animals throughout the same sections. For example, the carabao (water buffalo) is described as both kind and patient, appearing as a companion to

the father who leans on the carabao and only prods the carabao "gently and suggestively" with the lead rope when he is ready to plow again. The man and the animal walk "slowly and industriously" as the plow the field together (6). Leon, who is uncertain what to do after greeting his father and brother, gives the carabao an "affectionate glance" and begins helping with the plowing. This bucolic scene establishes Allos's guiding principles, and he tells his readers, "I was to go back again and again to this moment for an assurance of righteous anger against the crushing terror that filled my life in a land far away" (7). Bulosan creates the dialectic in this important moment as Allos is angry and scared about the conditions in America, but he is also hopeful. Through Allos's foundation of harmony and love rooted in the relationship with the more-than-human world, Bulosan establishes care for the natural world as an equal component of the novel's ethical foundation, and in pairing it with critique of the socio-economic conditions in the U.S., he suggests it is a corrective.

Allos suggests that the generous earth cares for the family just as they care for the earth and the animals that help them raise their crops. This mutually agential care for the more-than-human world is connected to better care between humans, suggesting a reciprocity where caring in one instance fosters a capacity for care in the other. Allos's father, who he recalls taught him "to love the earth" and to treat their farm animals "as though they were human beings," also shows unusual compassion for humans even when it goes against tradition (54). As critics like San Juan Jr. have explicated, Bulosan uses a dialectical method, interlacing positive and negative reflections on individual behaviour and vast socio-political systems, and he applies this method not just to critique the U.S and idealize Filipino peasant culture but also to provide a nuanced assessment of Filipino ways of life. This contributes to what is often framed as Bulosan's transnational or universalist vision because his texts seek to synthesize the best of the Philippines

and the U.S. to fulfill a vision of socio-economic equality and justice. In Part I of *America*, Bulosan establishes the respectful and harmonious relationship with the earth and living creatures as the ideal that will guide his life, but he also criticizes the "primitive" marriage customs of his fellow peasant farmers. Allos paints a gruesome picture of his neighbors stoning Leon and his unnamed wife after old but still maintained custom announces to the entire community, through a smoke, signal that the woman is not a virgin. Leon and his family would have been within his customary rights to denounce his wife and annul the marriage, but Leon loves his wife and still wants a married life with her. Moreover, the father throws himself in front of the couple, crying, "she is a good, industrious woman, and my son wants to live with her," and the crowd viciously whips him (10). Allos cuts the ropes that the neighbours used to tie the wife and husband and says he will "never forget how [his] brother lifted the girl in his arms as ceremoniously and gently as he had done that afternoon and carried her tenderly into their house to begin a new life" (10). This example shows how the family's caring for one another exceeds the misogynistic customs and the pressure to succumb to community judgement. The father, who would do no more than gently twitch a whip at his carabao is whipped by friends and neighbours for defending his family. This marriage scene reaffirms the father's aversion to violence and the caring relationship between father, Leon, and Allos in the opening scenes as they tend to their farm.

Bulosan's account of, Allos's childhood experiences with birds further develops the idea that animals deserve human care and even affection but also complicates this idea as pressure to participate in the growing capitalist economy causes the family to begin treating the birds as commodities. When Allos is recovering from an unknown leg affliction, his brother helps him feel better by taking him to see wild birds and then teaching him to capture the bird. These

moments are often read metaphorically with the birds representing humans who are wrenched from their home environments and trapped in painful situations. While this symbolic reading of the bird chapter does align in some ways with Bulosan's critique of the exploitation of migrant labour, Bulosan also presents the birds as important living creatures who have value independent of their symbolic meaning. In congruence with the novel's earlier recognition of nonhuman animals and the soil itself as active partners with the family, the birds may also be read as significant living beings who are part of the living network of care that fosters the family's ethical foundations. Luciano first brings a bird home to Allos, telling Allos he must care for it. Luciano expresses compassion for the bird by comparing its experiences to a human's and through asking Allos to imagine himself in the place. The bird is mournful in captivity:

> "Why is it crying, brother?" I asked. "It has lost something precious, I guess," said my brother, stroking the bird gently, his eyes far away. "Maybe a wife and some little *sibbed*. Wouldn't you cry if you lost something dear to you?" "I would," I said. "I would cry until I died." The bird crouched in a corner and looked at my sister, crying and bowing to the floor as though it were a human being in mourning. (53)

The bird looks and sounds incredibly sad, and Luciano interprets this as a reaction to having lost its loved ones. The bird's physical behaviour is also compared to that of human in mourning. The passage does not so much portray bird as human-like but rather asserts that the bird experiences strong emotions in the same ways humans do. At the same time, the brothers capture and eventually sell the birds for profit. In this way, Bulosan refrains from a complete idealization the human relationship to nature and nonhuman life. As Luciano desires economic gains, the brothers shift to selling the birds, suggesting the economic pressure erodes Luciano's care for the birds. Allos thinking about how he would feel in a similar situation is an empathy building

exercise that makes him more mindful of both humans and nonhumans as thinking, feeling beings capable of great suffering, and he takes this lesson in care with him into adulthood.

The narrator remembers this as "the most pleasant" time of his life and recalls how his father had taught him to be kind to the useful farm animals, that he had "learned to deal with [the] carabaos as though they were human beings" (54). He further explains sleeping on the back of his favourite carabao and the way the peaceful animal would simply crop grass and wait for the boy to wake up. During this period, Luciano cares for Allos, carrying him to the river and pond. The older brother gently takes the younger swimming in the water and rubs his swollen legs with the natural red clay. This period is foundational for Allos, and it is built through his brother's care and teaching, and the lessons are rooted in the natural world. Allos says "my education with Luciano was very useful to me when I was thrown into the world of men, when all that I held beautiful was to be touched with ugliness" (55), asserting both the rightness of these earlier experiences and Allos's future reliance upon them for guidance and sustenance.

Although he stays in towns and cities, rural and natural scenes, from farms and orchards to forests and deserts, surround Allos in America, injecting his difficult migrant life with nourishing moments rooted in nature. Allos's life in the U.S. is frenetic as he migrates for work and tries to avoid the violence of law enforcement, vigilantes, railroad workers, and a host of dangerous characters he encounters as he tries to survive. Yet, when Allos is able to slow down, he connects with the natural world in significant ways. In hospital in Los Angeles recovering from several surgeries due to his advanced tuberculosis, Allos shelters in the shade of a single large tree which grows over the hospital porch, believing in "the potency of the tree" and its "soothing coolness" (250). While people in the other wards die, those with access to the tree do not, and it begins to "indicate recovery and survival" to Allos. Tuberculosis is an example of

trans-corporeal permeability of bodies that results in harm, and here Bulosan pairs that with the fact the visual and tactile contact with a tree can affect how bodies are able to heal. The more-than-human environment actually provides healing care for the tuberculosis patients. In transit, Allos often has moments where he is able to simply observe the world around him. From busses and trains, he observes "this broad land . . . with joy" and a feeling of belonging "here in the color of green, the bitter taste of lemon peels, the yellow ripe peas" (270). Allos fully integrates his early learning of relationship to the land and evolves this understanding to something more than respectful interdependency, seeing himself as a part of the natural world. In talking to another Filipino in California who is attached to the land with an almost "mystical belief" in its fertility, Allos explains how his desire to possess the earth and draw nourishment from it has now become "an encompassing desire to *belong* to the land—perhaps the whole world" (273). These moments of connection punctuate Allos's experiences in the U.S., and fittingly, the novel ends with Allos once again on a bus in contemplation and he thinks that it is the "American earth" that unfolds to receive him "like a huge heart" (326), once again comparing the living earth with the human heart. In this moment, the generous earth that fed his family in the Philippines reverberates in the American landscape.

A Guiding Nature: Bulosan's Poetry

Although the themes of nature are subtler in the final parts of *America*, reading the novel along with Bulosan's poetry helps illustrate how Bulosan was seeking ways to articulate how and ecological vision as integral to his vision of social and economic justice. San Juan Jr. has asserted that Bulosan's poems frequently turn to "a vapid mysticism, a facile nature-worship that leads to a spurious transcendental pose" (69). In contrast, I argue that there is nothing inauthentic about Bulosan's poetic engagement with nature. In considering this poetry with *America,* I show that it

is possible to read Bulosan's representation of nature not as poetic flourish or posturing, but as an effort to develop a vision of social, political, and economic reform that reflects his genuine belief in the need for humanity to live well through interrelationships with the more-than-human world. Throughout his poetry, Bulosan crafts depictions of the natural world in which each living thing displays agency, needs, and desires. The poem also expresses the view in his poems that humans are suffering from their socio-economic practices being outside of the natural life rhythms and beyond what the earth can healthily support. In this section, I examine several poems published in *Poetry* magazine's February 1936 issue as exemplary of Bulosan's treatment of nonhuman nature as lively and worthy of consideration as living beings or entities in their own right; moreover, these poems suggest that humanity is harmfully out of alignment with the natural world and needs to realign with it. These poems, therefore, support a reading of Bulosan's *America* and Bulosan's overall socio-political vision as including the necessity of caring relationships between human and nonhuman life.

A poem of seven short lines, "Secret" compares an unknown person to the night, and in its central metaphor, comments on the complexity of perceiving the aliveness of things which humans do not immediately recognize. The unknown person's face is "Like the night that spreads / Over the sea with thick wings / But has no body / To tell of its existence." While the subject of the poem is the person's face, the entire second half of the poem portrays the natural occurrence of night as an actor, a kind of subject with agency that moves and affects the entire world. The night's physical form, however, is difficult to grasp. This brief poem is a statement about the unknown person's face, but in developing the similie comparing the human face to the night, it is equally an expression of Bulosan's recognition of natural phenomena as having a kind of animacy.

The idea that the natural world is made of active, feeling beings and phenomena is significant to Bulosan's vision of socio-political reform because it means that these beings are parts of the human world, too, and require thoughtful and ethical engagement. Following "Secret" in *Poetry,* "No Story" expands on themes of sentience and agency in the natural world.

> Grass repeats the story of the wind. It bends
> Down on glassy knees and whispers to the earth.
> The earth laughs lovelily [sic] and poisons its leaves.
> But this snow quieter than grass under rain, what does
> It tell the sun? It is spineless. When the sun burns
> Its stove, it emerges into the earth.
> It has nothing to tell, but gives the words
> Of a story that the earth whispers to the grass.

Here, Bulosan personifies nonhuman elements to present the cycle of the seasons as a kind of storytelling. The wind tells the grass fall is arriving, and the grass tells the earth who "poisons its leaves" with humour and love. Snow, rain, and sun all take their turns merging into the earth. They have "nothing to tell," but instead provide the sustenance," giv[ing] the words" that the earth will whisper to the grass as it brings it back to life in spring. This poem reflects the rhythm and cycles of the natural world in the ways that recall Allos's description of the generous earth in the first part of *America*. Bulosan's uses personification to signal the aliveness of the natural world: the earth laughs and whispers; the grass and wind tell stories. Each element is a sentient being participating in life cycles through interacting with the other beings. The aliveness expressed in the poem pairs with the respect for the natural world in the first part of *America*, helping build a picture of the earth and its inhabitants not as resources for extraction and profit but as living partners with human life.

Bulosan's poems "In Time of Drought" published in the same issue of *Poetry*, focus more closely on human embeddedness in the natural world. San Juan Jr. reads this poem as being simplyabout two lovers trying to escape from their everyday lives for a tryst in unspoiled nature. However, the poem has focuses very little on the romantic meeting and instead offers lessons from the more-than-human world to troubled humans. Rather than as simply a poem about lovers, I argue that the poem provides a critique of the industrial system that keeps the lovers apart while aligning the pair with the "tuber roots," "red tiger lilies," "roots outstaying / The rose," and "Life answering life." In this poem, the speaker invites the listener to meet them in the night, describing the natural world, plants, roots, and "parched earth, / Crying for rain". This actual drought does not just symbolize, but aligns with the pair's own exhaustion and longing for relief:

> Let us wait late tonight and see how naked we appear
> Under no sun, how unutterably defeatable we are
> By the razor cry of exhaustion, of our body's strange
> History. For such is the excess of our desire:
> We surrender, being whipped by futilities. (Lines 9-13)

Here, the speaker expresses the vulnerable state of the human body, following the previous stanza's expression of the roots' and flowers' desperate struggle as they wait for rain. The human couple who will appear "naked . . . Under no sun" represent humanity without the all the trappings of a world pushing them to believe they are so very different and set apart from the rest of the living world. The poem suggests that exhaustion defeats their fragile, living bodies. The lines could be read in two ways: the pair could be exhausted from participating in an economy that demands too much from its workers and is driven by the capitalist desire to extract and accumulate more than they need. The pair could also be fighting against injustice, "whipped by

futilities." That they are meeting exhausted and in the middle of the night suggest that they are not a part of any comfortable middle or upper social class and are indeed workers.

In the final long stanza of "In Time of Drought," the speaker presents an alternate path. First the speaker invokes the industrialized world that has left its mark on the workers bodies: "From this dread doom, there is an escape to no conflict; / This is only a cloud of smoked realities . . ." This is the poem's lone image of the industrial world—an image of doom, conflict, and dirty air all occluding a true vision of life. These lines frame quickly create an image of the painful context in which the lovers must meet. By portraying these industrial "realities," as a "cloud" though, the speakers asserts that they are escapable. The poem proposes as a solution that people can draw sustenance from awareness of the natural world's life cycles:

> And now I hear the temporal cry of the loam, of birds
> Sluicing the late evening air, hushing the land,
> And the leaves are signaturing the approach of winter.
> Nothing is more exquisite than the silver scream
> Of the starved earth awakening to the thistles of rain,
> Life answering life. I knew this from the easy
> Stir of blood answering blood, of roots outstaying
> The rose, and the sharpened slant of a tree without leaves.
> Tonight the faint clash of earth is answering silence.

Natural imagery displays how trees and plants like the rose also have times when they appear exhausted and defeated. In the winter or during a drought, the rose bush will have no flowers, and the tree will have no leaves; both may look like dying, naked branches for a time. But the earth awakens for rain, and the stir of blood awakens new life. The poem recognizes that although trans-corporeal enmeshment in the violent environment created by capitalism can

exhaust and injure human bodies, humanity's imbrication in the natural world is not an impediment to be overcome, but a guide to creating good lives and a world of freedom and equality. At this moment when the speaker/lovers are naked, exhausted, and feeling defeated, the poem suggest, they must remember they, too, are living entities that, after seasons of scarcity and hardship, will flourish again.

Capitalism's destructive effects and failures of care are central to Bulosan's proletarian writing. Equally, Bulosan's novel, essays, and poetry show the natural world at the heart of his vision for a just human world. His texts document both the degradation of care and the trans-corporeal realities of being working class in such a world, but complementing the this, his stories are steeped in references to the natural cycles of life found in plants, animals, and natural phenomena. Bulosan's early experience in the Philippines created a foundational belief in respecting human enmeshment in the more-than-human world, and as *America Is in the Heart* reveals, the incredible natural vistas in the U.S. recalled and affirmed both the truth of those early lessons and their universality. Bulosan's enduring commitment to proletarian identity and literature attests to his insights and belief in the ability of literature to make meaningful interventions into real-world problems.

Conclusions

In 2025, migrant labour is still a relevant and fraught topic, and current incidents of worker exploitation and abuse could easily fit into the proletarian literature of the 1930s. In the United States, President Donald Trump's administration has begun intense pursuit of migrant workers thorough the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in what the United Farm Workers (UFW) call "violent and cruel federal actions [that] terrorize American communities, disrupt the American food supply chain, threaten lives and separate families" (Associated Press np.). The UFW released this statement in response to the death of Jaime Alanís Garcia, a farmworker who died from injuries sustained when he fell off a greenhouse roof during an ICE raid in July 2025. In 2023 another farm worker, José Arturo González Mendoza, died on a North Carolina farm from a combination of intense heat, lack of drinking water, and an allowance of only one five-minute break (Debusmann and Drenon). The company in charge of the farm, Barnes Farming Corporation, whose management never called for or provided medical help for González Mendoza, was only fined for hazardous conditions. Deaths such as Alanís Garcia's and Gonzàlez Mendoza's are glaring reminders that migrant worker still face both the harmful working conditions and the violent persecution agricultural proletarian authors worked so hard to expose.

Similarly, just as the abuse and exploitation of migrant workers has continued since the Depression, capitalist economic structures have continued to strain human ability to perform even basic forms of care work. As Nancy Fraser explains, the "crisis of care" is currently a matter of urgent concern as multiple pressures are "squeezing a key set of social capacities" responsible for basic care. In our current stage of capitalism, Fraser argues, care work has been externalized to families and communities as social welfare programs are dismantled, yet the

system has “simultaneously diminished their capacity to perform [care work]” through “relocate[ing] manufacturing to low-wage regions [and] recruit[ing] women into the paid workforce (104). Essentially, the social system still requires women and the working class to perform social reproduction while the economic system also requires them to work demanding but low-paying jobs. Steinbeck, Weatherwax, Hughes, and Bulosan all used their proletarian fiction to demonstrate the ways in which capitalism’s increasing demands on labour, profiting from poor work conditions, and wage cutting conflict with the reproductive labour of care work. Each of the texts in this project speaks not only to its own historical context but also to the ongoing crisis of care.

As Nancy Fraser shows, capitalism without strong provisions for social welfare, racial and gender justice, and environmental protection is fundamentally incompatible with, and “systematically undermines” the care all living beings need to survive and flourish (99). That capitalist discourse has repeatedly attempted to designate social groups such as women, people of colour, and migrants as naturally responsible for social reproduction and care reveals this longstanding conflict. Essentializing rhetoric to authorize exploitative labour practices has been an integral strategy of capitalist economics since industrial capitalism promoted the ideology of separate sphere that made women responsible for care work and colonized and racialized peoples, including Africans and later African Americans and Filipino migrant workers, were treated as exploitable resources under the expansion of capitalism. Proletarian literature not only challenges these essentializing discourses but also exposes their economic motivations. This dissertation adds to our understanding of proletarian literature’s contributions as it draws attention to a significant branch of proletarian literature that complements its critique of exploitative capital with an analysis of how the labour movement not only fought for workers’

rights, but also developed positive models of ethical relationality. Proletarian literature, especially agricultural proletarian literature, thematizes care and the necessity of caring about and caring for when structuring relationships and systems.

My thesis has argued that care as an ethical foundation for socio-economic reform is a particular feature of agriculturally based proletarian literature and that the authors extend care and consideration to the more-than-human world. I have argued that locations such as farms, orchards, and forests where workers are in more intimate contact with nonhuman nature and natural environments than workers in urban areas inspired the writers to consider engagement with the more-than-human world as providing possible remedies for exploitative and abusive socio-economic systems. Proletarian literature's trans-corporeal focus on workers' bodies and environmental focus on workplace and living conditions suggest care ethics may be an underlying feature of proletarian literature in general, and I hope that my contribution to this field will inspire more attention to the specific manifestations of care ethics in proletarian literature.

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