A CONTEMPORARY WESTERN WRITER
GERALD HASLAM:
HIS MEANS TO A NEW WEST AND THE WORLD

by
Janina Weeks

A thesis submitted to
Sonoma State University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English

Marta Blazek, Chairman

Helen Dunn

Gerald Haslam
Date May 24, 1988
Copyright © 1988
by Jonina Marie Weeks
I grant permission for the reproduction of this thesis in its entirety, without further authorization from me, on the condition that the person or agency requesting reproduction absorbs the cost and provides proper acknowledgement of authorship.

I grant permission for the reproduction of parts of this thesis without further authorization from me, on the condition that the person or agency requesting reproduction notifies me regarding said reproduction, and providing said person or agency absorbs the cost and provides proper acknowledgment of authorship.

DATED 6/24/58

(Signature)
ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study:
Gerald Haslam is representative of the contemporary Western writer whose works reveal a new West, not the mythical or formula Western of the past. He has focused his writing on the Great Central Valley; the people, places and events typical of their lives. However, this has not limited the universality of his themes.

The purpose of my study is to examine Haslam's work for clues leading to an understanding of how he has used his locale to rediscover the West and, in turn, achieve universal significance.

Procedure:
This study has used all of Haslam's short story collections and many of his nonfiction books, magazine articles and tapes. I have also used information obtained as a participant in his Spring 1988 classes in Western Literature at Sonoma State University, and also information obtained through personal conversations with him. I have also used many of the nonfiction writings of some of his contemporaries in my study.

Findings:
The locale of the Great Central Valley has had an enormous influence on Haslam, and he has used it as a focus and springboard for much of his fiction. This has been to his advantage as it provides him with nonstereotypical sources devoid of the myths of the formula Western. Haslam's West consists of real people and places which enable him to achieve in his fiction commonality of experience, the essential of universality.

Conclusions:
Haslam is an exemplar of the contemporary Western writer in providing the reader a new West through his Great Central Valley. What's more, he proves that the regional writer can achieve universal significance. He should be read for both entertainment and insight into the human condition.

Chairperson:

M.A. Program: English
Sonoma State University

May 24, 1988
Preface

Fate, the catch-all for so many coincidences: I believe in it.

It was one of my first "outings" in Sonoma County since moving from the East Coast. He, Gerald Haslam, was one of my fellow guests at the party. I remember that his hair was short, a crewcut I thought at the time, and he looked athletic. I learned from a conversation that he rode his bike to and from work, a distance of approximately 15 miles per day.

Later during the evening, I was informed by other guests that he had written several books of fiction and magazine articles and was a professor of English at Sonoma State University. I was shocked! A man who wore a crewcut and looked like an ex-jock was a professor of English and wrote books? This was certainly not what my stereotypes dictated a professor should look like, much less host the sensitivity and insight inherent to a writer. Approximately three years later he would be my professor and I would be doing my Master's thesis on his works.

What's more, this crewcut-ex-jock-bike-riding-author-professor was to debunk a few more of my stereotyped expectations. Specifically, it was through his writings that I was to rediscover the West, a process
which necessitated discarding my fantasy that its
gun-toting heroes and their high adventure were indicative
of a region different from the rest of the more complex
world, and reassessing my childhood hero the Lone Ranger
and his resounding, "Hi Ho Silver!" (to this day I can
remember some of the Merita Bread commercials that
interrupted my vicarious thrills of adventure). Even Sky
King and the perennial virginal Penny would have to go as
would the always smiling Roy Rogers and his fun-loving
sidekick, Andy.

However, it was worth it, for in their place I
found real people with fears, joys, hopes, and dreams with
whom I could identify. This, in turn, afforded me the
opportunity to learn a little bit more about myself. How
Gerald Haslam accomplished this would eventually be the
theme of the following study.

Fate, the catch-all for so many coincidences:
I'm glad of it.
Table of Contents

General Introduction 5

PART ONE
The Contemporary Western Writer

Chapter One: The Regional Writer: From the Specific to the Universal 9

Chapter Two: The Western Writer's Dilemma: The Mythical West 13

Chapter Three: The Contemporary Western Writer's Solution: Rediscover the West 19

PART TWO
Gerald Haslam, A Contemporary Western Writer
Uses His Locale to Rediscover the West

Chapter One: The Sticks: Haslam's Means to the Topsoil and Subsoil of the New West and the Universal 28
Chapter Two: The Great Central Valley: Haslam's Debunker of Stereotypes 37

Chapter Three: The Great Central Valley: Haslam's Window to the World's Varied Voices and its Darker Side 47

Chapter Four: The Great Central Valley: Haslam's Window to A Changing World 59

Chapter Five: The Great Central Valley: Haslam's Means to Making the Connection 70

Chapter Six: The Great Central Valley: Haslam's Means to Celebrate the Human Spirit 90

* * * * *

Works Cited 102

Works Consulted 104
General Introduction

When the reader begins to read one of Gerald Haslam's collections of short stories, he immediately becomes a participant. Many of the stories are, in fact, addressed directly to the reader, his attention alerted with a "you boys," or, as if in response to his question, "Dam rights I's pissed!" Even when they are narrated, the reader has the instinctive feeling that the characters' stories are being told expressly for his benefit. The result is that the reader feels comfortable. He is a visitor, but a welcomed one, one of the guys sitting among the characters in a box car, at the site of an oilfield, or, more often than not, a fellow patron of the Tejon Club. In short, there exists a conversation between the writer, his characters, and the reader.

However, something very personal happens amidst this communal setting. The reader, especially if he is a "paleface," someone not from the West, becomes keenly aware that this is not the "tourist" West of postcards, travel brochures, or any such literature one might find at a travel agency, much less a Chamber of Commerce. For example, the reader finds no scenic beach scenes, no picturesque Malibu hillside homes, no Beverly Hills health spas, no movie star limos or "Welcome to Hollywood" signs.
beckoning him. In their places are oil rigs, cotton fields, 40 pickup trucks, and unglamourous-sounding places like Kern County, Oildale, and the Tejon Club.

What's more, this is not the West of the readers' Zane Grey paperbacks or Louis L'Amour novels, nor the West of his childhood heroes: the Lone Ranger, Hopalong Cassidy, Tom Mix or John Wayne. Instead, there are men who play seemingly childish tricks on one another, tell bawdy jokes, brag about how many guys they've "whupped," how many girls they "got," and continuously engage in "pissin contests." The women are often rough and tough, their language "unlady-like," and distinguished from the men only by the size of their breasts, a mode of recognition the reader somehow feels they do not mind. Furthermore, these are characters who are often prejudiced, angry, gullible, naive, and yes, insecure. The result is that the reader, after his initial shock, realizes that he is indeed privy to a New West, or, as Haslam refers to it, "the other California."

However, the reader's comfortableness is not dissipated, but, instead, he feels oddly at home as a kind camaraderie develops that transcends being "one of the guys" to being at one with his fellow human beings. The characters' fears, disappointments, and insecurities become the readers' or, as one critic so aptly stated, "We feel
our own unanswered agonies" (Haslam, Snapshots x). It would not matter if the stories were set in the Tejon Club or in the 21 Club in Manhattan. Thus, the reader goes from "the other California" to anywhere, to everywhere. This experience, according to Haslam, signifies that "western writing has come of age" ("Rediscovering" 1024). This New West, rather than "the all-engulfing myth," is the trademark of the contemporary Western artist. Hence, the focus of my study: How does Gerald Haslam, a contemporary Western writer, use his "other California" to rediscover the West?

I begin Part One by defining the traditional regional writer, his means and intent, and then proceed to identify the problem particular to the contemporary Western writers and the various means that are being employed by them to meet this challenge. For this part of my study, I have referred to Haslam's nonfiction, most of which addresses these questions. In addition, I have used research provided by his contemporaries, other Western writers and critics.

In the second part of my study, I have concentrated specifically on Haslam and how he has used his locale to address the goals and problems noted in Part One. For this I have referred to all five of his short story collections: Okies (1973); Wages of Sin (1980); Hawk

I might add that I have had the advantage of being a student in Gerald Haslam's class on Western Literature at Sonoma State University in the Spring of 1988. Haslam's class lectures afforded me a primary resource to his personal philosophy and ideology integral to all of his fiction and non-fiction works. The result is a study of a contemporary Western writer and how he uses his locale, the Great Central Valley, to rediscover the West, and, in turn, develop themes of universal significance.
PART ONE: The Contemporary Western Writer

Chapter One

The Regional Writer:
From the Specific to the Universal

According to Haslam, when he, as a student, submitted a series of his own short stories as part of his doctoral dissertation, one of his professors candidly asked him, "Who cares what happens in the sticks?" Haslam's response was, "I do."

Now an established writer, author of five collections of short stories, one novel, and numerous nonfiction articles and books, Haslam still cares because, as he says, "I'm from the sticks and I know what happens there is what happens in life, all life" (Voices 18). It is this conviction that has given impetus to his fiction and one that he repeatedly expounds upon, both in his nonfiction and in his class lectures on Western literature. What's more, it is this conviction that positions him directly in a long line of regional writers who traditionally recognized their place, their locale, as a means to the universal.

Max Westbrook, for example, in his Preface to The Guide to Western Literature, points to the fact that
regionalism has been intrinsic to literature, and its universal applicability, "an old paradox." He reminds us that Hamlin Garland called Homer a regionalist, and gives as his own examples Thoreau and Faulkner (xviii).

Novelist George R. Stewart, in his essay in Western Writing, a collection of essays edited by Haslam, begins his chapter by noting Horace's manifesto for regionalism contained in Odes, and ends with Chaucer's in his prologue to Treatise on the Astrolabe. Stewart even cites the biblical story of Adam and Eve, specifically their choice of fig leaves for garments over other leaves. Equally dramatic is Stewart's own proclamation that all literature is likely to demand a regional approach, even if the author's intent is the study of all mankind:

For even through an ivory tower the wind of the country blows, bringing perhaps the smell of pine woods or perhaps of new-plowed land or perhaps of an oil refinery; but still it blows. (40-48)

Obviously the examples cited would have strengthened Haslam's response to his college professor. However, equally effective would have been a metaphor he gave during one of his first lectures in Western literature in February 1988 at Sonoma State University. The example he used was bears. Haslam explained that if the reader has the optical skills, he, when looking at one bear should be able to see all its ancestral bears from the beginning of time.
This illustration coincided with still another comment made in class in regard to his teaching philosophy, one recorded in his nonfiction *Voices of a Place*:

> If I were developing a literature program in this state . . . I would start by teaching local or nearby redskins who write about recognizable experiences and places . . . and then move students toward the classics. (20)

Both illustrations point to a repeated theme professed by Haslam: the specific as the means to the larger; the one bear as the means to all bears. Its application to the artist is made evident in his proclamation that "Good writing about any region is good only to the extent that it has universal appeal" (*Voices* 16). Hence, this is the credo of the regional writer. It is what distinguishes his work from the "Old Provincialism" that Haslam defines, citing James Houston's definition, as "'a stubborn attachment to the only place one really knows'" (*Voices* 20). The regionalist's locale was and is his means to the greater world of which it is a part.

Obviously, the diversity of our larger, more complex world, its various cultural and geographical factions, makes this transformation increasingly more difficult. The application of Homer's little farm in the Sabine Hills to the greater Greek islands and cities, and Chaucer's England to the larger province of Catholic Europe and its cultural capitals of France and Italy, was,
of course, much easier. Today, on the other hand, commonality of experience, the essential of universality, requires increasingly the artistry of the writer. His pen must seek out and focus upon those common denominators despite modern civilization's various geographical and cultural factions. It follows, more than ever, that his works' people, places and experiences must not be shrouded in myths applicable to only the all good or beautiful, the all bad or ugly. As Haslam would undoubtedly agree, the reader must be exposed to the real bear: its good and bad, its ugly and beautiful, in short, not the mythical bear of childhood fairy tales.
Chapter Two
The Western Writer's Dilemma:
The Mythical West

The "Far West" is traditionally considered to be that area of the United States which encompasses the Pacific states of California, Oregon and Washington, including British Columbia and Alaska. Historically, as James D. Houston notes in his essay "The Far West," it has been one characterized by its variety (326-328). Its settlers' many different religions, cultural and ethnic groups are equal to the area's various microclimates and terrain. What's more, the lures of the land were equally varied. There were its physical attractions: its beauty, its work opportunities, and, of course, its gold. There were also psychological attractions: it was a land of opportunity and high hopes; its "open society" an opportunity to play the "final card." In short, the coastline provided both a physical and psycho/spiritual boundary.

Hence, it was the area's psychological attractions that were to have far reaching effects as they foreshadowed the makings of the mythical West. Its "noble savages" were to become America's heroes; its frontier the nation's symbol of freedom; its codes, America's gospel. Mary Grace Maloney's thesis on Gerald Haslam's locale,
entitled "Central Valley Mythology," offers an interesting variety of archetypes provided by the West. Among them are the fundamental rebellion against restraint, the ability to reach beyond the limits, and the drama of discovery and expectations; in short, the "stuff" of the American dream (2-13).

Ultimately, this mythical West was to be the Western writers' nemesis. To deny it in their writings was to deny the expectations of most of their reading public, awestruck Easterners. What's more, exclusion of the myth was to deny their works the critics' acceptance. As Haslam notes in his introduction to Western Writing, "When western books are set in the present, critics seldom call them western: the national myth only allows the West a past." The result is "critics have had problems dealing with western writing as anything but myth." He supports this statement by quoting Wallace Stegner's observation that "'Critics rarely approach [Western literature] from the near, or literary side. They mount it from the right . . . and ride it hard as myth . . . .'" (4). Further on in his essay, Haslam notes:

Western writers have struggled with the enormous power of fantasy--fantasy still widely held, indeed, widely sought--in their attempts to relate the awesome past to an elusive present . . . . The West has retained a national fascination throughout our history, so much so that many Americans remain unwilling to recognize its complexity, its continuing life along with its powerful past. (7)
Indeed, it is the general consensus that the overall "culprit" responsible for the exploitation of such writers as Mary Helen Jackson (Ramona) and Owen Wisner (The Virginian), whether it be innocent or professional, was the expectations of the naive and awestruck Eastern reader. However, James H. Maguire, in his essay "Encountering the West," offers a more philosophical account through citing Wallace Stegner's essay "History, Myth, and the Western Writer," "the best essay," according to Maguire, "yet written on the development of western fiction." He notes that Stegner attributes the inhibiting forces to "the West's great environmental and ethnic diversity; the flood of pulp fiction whose formulae froze the most colorful western themes and characters into simplistic petrified myths; constant immigration, late and irregular development, and a citizenry that had always been 'notably migrant.'" What's more, Maguire concurs with Stegner's assessment that, "'Fearing the loss of what tradition we have, we cling to it hard, we are hooked on history!'" (6).

Vardis Fisher, on the other hand, sheds light on the psychological factors perpetuating the mythical West. In his essay "The Novelist and His Background," Fisher proposes that the western fantasy has prevailed to a large extent because it answers mythic human needs, needs transcending mere consciousness (59-68).
This point was well illustrated by James Houston in his essay "The Far West," in which he cites a book *The Adventures of Esplandian* published in 1510, which reveals that the Far West was dreamed about long before anyone really knew it was there. For example, the hero of this romance states:

'Know then, that on the right side of the Indies, there is an island called California, very close to the side of the Terrestrial Paradise . . . . They were of strong and hardy bodies, of ardent courage and great force. Their island was the strongest in all the world, with its steep cliffs and rocky shores. Their arms were all of gold, and so was the harness of the wild beasts which they rode . . . .'' (328)

Thus, the geographical location of California may have been its "Catch 22," it being a universal psychological symbol for a new beginning, or the end of it. The latter was somewhat negatively expressed by Joan Didion, as noted by Haslam in his introductory essay to "Earth Tones." She writes:

'. . . California is a place in which a boom mentality and a sense of Chekovian loss meet in uneasy suspension; in which the mind is troubled by some buried, ineradicable suspicion that things had better work here, because here, beneath the immense bleached sky, is where we run out of continent.' (1027)

Hence, the causes of the mythical West are varied and complex. Ultimately the results were themes and characters long associated with Hollywood horse operas,
stereotypical paperbacks, and the formula Western: pure
adventure and escapism, with emphasis on thrills and good
deeds.

A more recent manifestation is the glittering
Southern California image conveyed in books, movies, and
songs, the latter most humorously illustrated by Haslam
through his quoting the lyrics from a 1945 movie:

'The climate is better
The ocean is wetter
The mountains are higher
The deserts are drier
The hills have more splendor
The girls have more gender
Ca-li-for-ni-ay!'
(Voices 23)

Haslam coined this most recent version of the mythical
west, "fantasy California," describing its ruling
stereotype as "sun-bleached blonds on roller skates
exchanging high fives while hurrying to hot tubs after
toiling in marijuana patches."

However, on a more serious note, Haslam points to
the fact that inevitably such fanciful expectations result
in disappointment and disillusionment. He notes, for
example, the irony in the fact that Nathaniel West, whose
The Day of the Locust Haslam considered "fantasy
California's greatest expression," revealed in a letter
his own disillusionment when he wrote, "'This place is
Asbury Park, New Jersey . . . . In other words, phooey on
California'" (Voices 23).
J. Frank Dobie, in his essay "The Writer and His Region," offers the most catastrophic view of the consequences when he implies that standardization stemming from the writer's fear of the critics and the loss of the reading public can lead to "acquiescence, conformity, no thinking at all" (17).

Obviously, the recourse for the Western writer is to start over, to rediscover the West. It is this, indeed, that Haslam, in his introductory essay to the aptly entitled "Rediscovering the West," implies in citing Michael Marsden's suggestion that popular Westerns must motivate "'the human spirit to win the West again, but this time to win it as it should have been, with respect for human dignity and human rights'" (1024). What's more, the feasibility of this recourse is addressed by Haslam in his nonfiction book *Voices* when he quotes Wallace Stegner's observations that "'there is every sort of richness, every sort of quality in California . . . and the merely sensational doesn't need to be hyped'" (25).
Chapter Three

The Contemporary Western Writer's Solution:

Rediscover the West

Rediscover the West! A call that is being met by many of today's Western writers with both the verve and courage of their ancestors' initial response to "Go West!" It is no wonder, for their challenges are equally difficult, the physical demands now replaced by those requiring artistry's sensitivity and skill. It is not mountains they must surmount, but, as so aptly stated by David Lavender in his essay "The Petrified West," "ash heaps of a century of foolish composition" (156). Of course, Lavender's description is in reference to the mythical West, one that, as noted previously, must be dispelled before the reader can know that the West is not a country of the mind, not remote, not, as Haslam states, "a distant reserve of static values and fantastic figures into which city dwellers can retreat" (Introduction, Western Writing 3).

It was, ironically, the assassination of national leaders, the disillusioning war in Vietnam, and the possibility of nuclear holocaust in mid-20th Century that, according to Haslam, forced the writer to face the problems of survival of the latter part of the 20th
Century. As he notes in his introductory essay to "Rediscovering the West," "If they [Western Writers] don't enjoy the luxury of dwelling in an imagined past, they may with reason hope the actual historic West has prepared them for the present" (1017).

In his essay "Unknown Diversity," Haslam identifies various other causes for this new direction, citing, for example, the growth of presses and literary magazines in the West and the founding of the Western Literary Association in 1966 (1167-1175). These were to provide an outlet for the Western artists' works, heretofore traditionally denied them by Eastern publishers, the so-called "establishment." The result was, as so aptly expressed by Haslam, "The old sense of regional persecution that once led westerners to cast hooded eyes toward Eastern literati wafted away like yesterday's smoke signals" ("Rediscovering" 1022).

He continues this theme in his introductory essay "Present Trends," in which he notes that the Western writer after the 60s was unable to view himself and his world with the same naivete present in the early part of the 20th Century (1162-1166). Hence, the call to rediscovery, a process that mandates a "debunking" of the myth and a re-establishing of the connection between a real past and its present. Stated another way, the contemporary Western writer is wiping the slate clean and
filling in the gulf created when reader's expectations did not meet with reality.

As a forerunner of this rediscovery, Haslam cites William Eastlake, who gives his readers an ethnically diverse cast of characters, expresses concern over possible ecological disaster, as well as dares to pose questions about America's foreign policy (Introduction, "Rediscovering" 1017-18). Eastlake, in other words, exemplifies the contemporary artist who unabashedly looks through the fog and mist to the realities of the present, its problems intact. It is this unflinching look that has cut through the illusions, and demythologized the West.

Still another means being explored by the contemporary Western writer as part of his "debunking," takes on an imaginative and irreverent twist: the myths--the Western stereotypes and traditional roles--are examined by the writer in unromantic modern arenas. Haslam gives as examples Abbey's The Brave Cowboy (1956); Max Evans' The Rounders (1960); Thomas Berger's Little Big Man; and Ed Bullins' play Goin' a Buffalo (1968) (Introduction, "Rediscovering" 1021). The result is that, in recreating their West, they use "shards" remaining from earlier 19th-Century artists' versions. The rewards of this "irreverancy" are works of greater complexity and richness. Haslam "nips" the traditionalist's questioning this irreverent "debunking" when he points to the fact
that his contemporaries are also more imaginatively and more conceptually open than his predecessors, both expanding their vistas and questioning assumptions. It is this maturity that, in turn, gives credibility to Western writing as the writer defrocks the myths that separated his world from the readers'.

A more traditional means being employed is the substitution of the myth with the reality of the writer's own Western experiences. This is an obvious enough technique but one not previously capitalized upon by Western writers. They, instead, had been "brainwashed" into believing the perceptions and places that shaped them did not offer their writing a means to universality. The latter was applicable only to the experiences of the Eastern literati.

In his introduction to Western Writings, Haslam cites the early works of writers Andy Adams and Eugene Manlove Rhodes as examples of two early 20th-Century artists who trusted their own experiences rather than succumbing to the formulae of their peers. These authors' subjects had heretofore been considered trivial: the trailing herd of beeves and a less than heroic cowpoke. However, they were the nonmythical "stuff" of everyday experience and observation, resulting, according to Haslam, in moving stories. Their works give credence to J. Frank Dobie's Wordsworthian assertion in his essay,
"The Writer and His Region," that "nothing is too trivial for art but good art treats nothing in a trivial way" (19).

Haslam's specific in-depth study of Jack Schaefer in the Western Writer's Series is, on the other hand, a tribute to a writer who had never been west of Toledo. Yet, according to Haslam, Schaefer's fiction reflects historical fact rather than tired Western cliches, a result of the author's solid research in lieu of personal experience. For example, Schaefer's background in Shane seems to be a real frontier with real people, giving the novel a credibility that raises it above other novels of its kind (19). This praise was echoed by Western critic and scholar John R. Milton in his essay "The Novel in the American West," in which he notes that "Schaefer strips the myth and mist from the cowboy and shows him plausibly, authentically and excitingly with insight and humor" (72). Schaefer's research is obviously not to be confused with the mere collection of facts associated with the limited talent of the peeping and the peering, in short, hawkers of stolen goods. Instead, here is an example of an author who derives substance from his research and transmutes it into significant fiction by means of the writer's magic and skill.

That substance Haslam identifies as the "awareness" of an area. It is this which, as it records
and stores, "functions independent of and more vitally than consciousness." This, in turn, enables the regional writer to tap those deep unconscious riches on which literature feeds, to "reach down to the subsoil of feeling that lies far beneath the topsoil of thinking" (Voices 18-19). It is the absence of this awareness that leads to glorification, not regionalism. Obviously the "redface," the born and bred versus the "paleface" outsider, is more likely to have access to this subsoil. However, as Jack Schaefer's writing reveals, it can be available to the paleface. In fact, Haslam suggests that the ideal is the combination of the redface and the paleface, the native born and blooded, shaped by education and social complexity, the result of which is a crisper objectivity, "a tad of distance" (Voices 19). This seems to suggest the skill and intelligence of a Schaefer and the experiences of an Adams or Rhodes, in short, the knowing of one's subject through both experience and research.

The ash heap cleared, the myth and mist dispelled, the contemporary Western writer can then proceed to the second phase of rediscovery, the reconnecting of the real past with the present. Haslam concurs with Wallace Stegner's observation that "'you don't choose between the past and the present, you find the connections, you try to make the one serve the other'" ("The Western Story" 156). In fact, Wallace Stegner,
historian, teacher, author and 1972 Pulitzer Prize winner (Angle of Repose), is generally considered to be the exemplar, both as exponent and practitioner, of this phase of rediscovery, one which he refers to as "rigging the lines" between past and present (Haslam, "Rediscovering" 1025).

It is this interdependence of the past and the present to which Haslam alluded in one of his Spring 1988 class lectures: He explained that we are all standing on our ancestors' shoulders and to deny our past, our traditions, is to deny our roots to reality. This statement is reminiscent of his metaphoric bear as a means to see all bears.

Other Western writers echo the same concerns. For example, John Graves writes, "'... The man who cuts his roots away and denies that they were even connected with him withers into half a man ...'" (Haslam, Introduction, "Rediscovering" 1020). Vardis Fisher, in his essay "The Novelist and His Background," is even more emphatic with his proclamation that the past is essential to understanding the child, a step which precedes the one to understanding the man (59). Interestingly, this recognition of the relationship of one's past and present dates back to the early part of the 20th-Century when Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung gave birth to modern literature's view of time: we are our memories, the sum of
our past. However, these were tenets for other artists, the Western writers trapped in the West's glorified history.

There is evidence a new direction is being taken by today's Western writers. Haslam states it in an introductory essay most succinctly:

It is clear that contemporary artists are discovering a new West built on the old, a West that can face the threat and promise of the present, face them with a verve and a belief that life is not only worth living but worth fighting for. Without rejecting the past, westerners are no longer trapped in it. In fact, many of the finest authors are recreating it to include previously ignored realities while rejecting illusions previously cherished, and doing so most effectively when stressing local history rather than an all-engulfing myth. ("Rediscovering" 1017)

Of course, implied in this revision is an honesty that often, as Haslam reminds us, affronts more than a few traditionalists. The Lone Ranger and Hopalong, replete with their adventures and heroic deeds, are being replaced by Japanese internment camps, black cowboys, cluttered cities, uppity women, promiscuity, racism, polluted streams, drugs, sex, and rock'n roll, none of which is to be found in the Eden of the mythical West. Instead, this realistic approach is aimed at awakening readers to what they are losing before it is lost, or, as philosopher George Santayana would say, in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. As Haslam notes, contemporary Western literature is aimed at shocking westerners and
non-westerners alike into survival (Introduction, "Rediscovering" 1019). Hence, it is a literature of both activism and progress.

The myth debunked and the link between the real past and present reconnected, the Western writer can then proceed to the vertical part of his and the reader's journey, the specific to the universal, and, in turn, achieve the recognition that is accorded to all good writers.
PART TWO: Gerald Haslam:
A Contemporaray Western Writer
Uses His Locale to Rediscover the West

Chapter One
The Sticks:
Haslam's Means to the Topsoil and Subsoil
of the New West and the Universal

The "sticks" to which Haslam's college professor
referred in his question regarding his student's subject
choice for his doctoral dissertation was, of course, the
Great Central Valley of California. It is the locale that
serves as the backdrop for most of Haslam's short stories,
its people, places and history, and the impetus for all
his universal themes.

Geographically speaking, this is one of the
largest valleys in the world, that "vast cleft in the
middle of California . . . over 400 miles long and 50
miles wide." In his essay Voices of a Place, Haslam
provides a geological, geographical, social and economic
description of his Valley that clearly reveals the
author's academic knowledge of his area; the homeboy
"redface" occasionally voicing himself with his reference
to the area, because of its warring and yet interdependent
technological and agricultural factions, as one containing both "riches and anguish" (1-13).

More important to both Haslam and his readers is the fact that the Valley is his "blood country," the area in which he was born, raised, and married. Hence, it is the area in which the author's feelings are steeped and still resonate, the result of which is, as Haslam himself states, that "no other locale of the land or the heart more intrigues [him]" (Voices xi).

This reverence for his locale is vividly expressed in an essay entitled "Oildale" (Voices 56-57). In this essay, Haslam, the "redskin," reminiscently recalls two visits to "home," Oildale, the place of his birth located at the southern end of the Valley. With the insight and perspective privy to the born-and-bred, Haslam notes the changes in his hometown through the contradictory love-hate messages of the bumper stickers that decorate two pickup trucks; by the addition of the "ubiquitous trailer parks," replete with their metallic awnings and porches; by the increase in signs announcing security systems; by the juxtaposition of the "rickety lawnchairs--poor people's air conditioners--" with the newer cars and trucks parked in the homes' front yards. The people's adjustment to these changes he notes by the old men eating at a McDonald's, and their failure to
adjust by the frustrations of the long-haired, tattooed young men living in his old neighborhood.

What is also revealed in this article is Haslam's own ambiguous feelings, imbued with both guilt and relief, his hometown now a reminder of poverty and its consequences. Nevertheless, it is his affection that speaks the loudest as he proudly reminds the reader that Oildale was also the hometown of country singer Merle Haggard, and as he defends his locale against the gothic Southern stereotype assigned to it by "thin-wristed experts," "local liberals," and "those who do not live [there]." Explaining the area's racism (which he admittedly abhors) as more often than not expressions of economic fear, the result of its inhabitants historically having to compete with the non-whites for jobs, Haslam attributes to his area's people the adulation due survivors:

What fearers of fascism forget is that most of Oildale is populated by folks who have established themselves in the middle class by dint of hard work, survivors whose daughters now aim for honor roll and university, whose sons play football and fight wars . . . who accept the churning present anyway. (62)

In his fiction, Haslam's reverence for his locale is seen in his continuous focus on this area in his stories. One could say it is his way to give credence to an area where so much is taken for granted, though it is the richest agricultural region on earth; a way to
preserve its sectional uniqueness in the face of the nationalization of American culture, the McDonald's homogeneity versus the intimacy of the local Chat'n Chew; a way to give permanence to an area that, because of its irrigation, is, as Haslam notes, literally sinking (Voices 6). What's more, it is Haslam the writer's way to take advantage of an area that he considers to be "the most productive and interesting literary region in contemporary California" (Voices 22). However, more importantly, Haslam's Valley offers him the means to write of the "things that made him: the soil, the society, the experiences," affording him the opportunity to subscribe to his own advice to "know your place as it really is and write honestly of it" (Voices 25).

Obviously, his readers reap the benefits as Haslam's knowledge of his locale is born of books and experiences. He, in turn, exposes them to the topsoil of his area, those neighborhoods and backstreets not accessible to its thoroughfares' spectators, as for example his Okies' cardboard shanties, grape-packing sheds, cotton fields, and oilfields; his Wages of Sins' swamps, canyons and rude country roads; Snapshots' junkyards and irrigation ditches; Hawk Flights' dusty fields, its vacant lots and tack rooms; and the rivers and sordid street life of his latest collection, The Man Who
Cultivated Fire. And, of course, there is the Tejon Club of so many of his stories.

The reader is also exposed to a wide range of subnormal (not subhuman) characters of all shapes and sizes: the Okies' retarded "idyet" and harelip; Wages' retarded Chicano and lonely pervert; Snapshots' lady dwarf porno star, pimple-faced bully and deaf migrant boy; Hawk Flights' tobacco-spitting Okie and Mexican witch doctor; and The Man Who Cultivated Fire's displaced veterans and eccentric uncle. These are just a sampling of Haslam's varied cast of characters overlooked by the Hollywood formula Western or dime store Western paperback. However, this is Haslam's "other California," his means to debunking the stereotypical scenarios of the mythical West.

What's more, because the Valley is also the region about which Haslam, the born and bred "redskin," has awareness, the readers of his fiction have access to the area's subsoil as well, that beneath the topsoil of thought. This is the very area to which Haslam alluded in his essay, "Oildale," when, upon hearing the "howls and screams" of a neighborhood fight he stated, "It was not a new scene to me . . . . And I was raised on this street, having seen my father fight here and having bled here myself . . . . I knew exactly what was going on . . . ." (Voices 60). Haslam refers to this awareness in his Jack
Schaefer Western Writer's Series as the "collective secrets," privy to an area's street corner artist, tale teller, or novelist (11).

Hence, readers are not only exposed to the Valley's places and people, but the "whys" of their behavior as well. The result is that Haslam's debunking and revisioning of the stereotypical West and its inhabitants are ones wrought with a perspective that is both understanding and accepting. In short, Haslam's "debunking" is a gentle and sensitive one.

For example, Haslam's "Wages of Sin," in his collection of the same title, is both an important and prime exemplar of one of many such insightful psychological probes inherent in the demythologizing of his stories' "he-men." In this particular story the reader is given en masse all the elements of the men's-only-stuff-of-stag-parties, the barroom lifestyle characteristics of many of his male characters: beer drinking, gambling, vulgar language, and the stock Western braggart who has "'9 INCH' plastered on the front and back of his 1960 Caddy •••" (44). It is all there, including one of Haslam's "epic urinations," a phrase coined by Gerald Locklin in reference to the stories' frequent "pissin contests" (22).

Most importantly, it is in this story that the reader is exposed to the "whys" of his characters'
behavior with its opening lines in which the narrator announces:

Damn rights I's pissed! Me, after fourteen year on the job, getting cut back to thirty-hour a week. I busted into Red's Lounge hotter'n a Tiajuana taco and slurped me down a couple brews just as fast as I could, then in walked Swede Erickson ... . 'What's on yer mind, Billy Bob?' he asked me. So I let him know. Swede ... went and told me he'd got cut back hisself three months before. I drank me another beer, not feelin quite so sorry for myself. (43)

Hence, with this story, the reader begins to see what he/she probably innately suspected all along: The beer drinking barroom lifestyle offers the men, out of work and short on pay, a therapeutic outlet not unlike the sanctioned middle-class encounter group.

The bragging, so often a part of Haslam's male characters' makeup, is represented in this story by the loud-mouthed Bodean whose claim to "nine inches of danglin sirloin" is typical of his incessant boastings (43).

However, Haslam has assigned to his narrator one simple line which explains it all: "He's [Bodean] the only man I ever heard of could work 12 year and still be a roustabout [the low man on the job ladder]" (45). In short, as this line reveals, Bodean's obnoxious bragging was his way of saving face, his accessible means to self-worth, one that has become through the years as instinctive as any man's self-defense reflex. Therefore, it is no wonder that when the Swede expresses his concern over whether his wife will
understand his being laid off, Bodean, immediately, like Pavlov's dog, instinctively responds with his typical sexually-laden: "'Only one thang a woman understands!'" (45), an ironic comment as the reader becomes aware that such sexual innuendoes are the only things Bodean understands.

Of course, this comment results in the "pissin contest," another immediate way for these men to prove they are men in their emasculating economic situations and in their topsey-turvey world where, as subtly revealed in the story, making love in the bushes is sanctioned, whereas "taking a leak" in a trout stream is considered "out of order" (46). Viewed in this context, and considering the propensity for violence so often characteristic of a population of a disproportionate number of males, Haslam's "epic urinations" are seen as a non-violent recourse indicative of civilized men, not merely childish antics of lower-class ruffians. This insight is made viable through the author's exposé of his locale's subsoil.

Ironically, it is Bodean's girlfriend who, in defending his defeat in the "pissin contest," unintentionally speaks the truth when she says, "'It ain't the length of the pipe, it's the strength of the rig'" (48). The men know this, but they, out of work, do not have access to the "rig." However, her crude statement is
reminiscent of the deep truth insisted upon by the late author Vardis Fisher in his essay "The Novelist and His Background" when he quotes Emerson's lines:

'Tis not in the high stars alone,  
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,  
But in the mud and scum of things,  
There always, always something sings!'  
(68)

It is through Haslam's knowledge of his locale's topsoil and his awareness of its subsoil that his readers have access, through the "mud and scum of things," to the truth so necessary to his rediscovered West and the universality of his themes.
Chapter Two
Great Central Valley:
Haslam's "Debunker" of Stereotypes

As noted in Part One, the contemporary Western writer must debunk the mythical West, clear it of its fog and mist, in order for his works to achieve universal significance. This is a prerequisite necessary in establishing the commonality of experience that awakens the readers' sensibilities to their oneness with all mankind; in short, affording them the vision to see all of Haslam's bears. Here the Great Central Valley, Haslam's locale, takes on an additional responsibility, one which it adequately fulfills by the very nature of the place. Hence, it becomes not only Haslam's means to write about that which he knows, but an effective contemporary Western writer's debunking tool as well.

For example, as Haslam notes, the Valley "defies the state's flashy stereotype . . . . Scuffed boots, not Gucci loafers characterize it" (Voices 2). He attributes this to his Valley's retention of cultural values unglossed by the sudden sophistication of urban life. "Turn on the radio," he says, "and you'll hear music not apt to be piped into an elevator." What's more, "you'll see more dark faces with white foreheads--or dark faces with dark foreheads--than stylish tans" (Voices 13-14).
Thus, the Valley offers Haslam the direct no-frills-to-the-point approach so necessary to the contemporary Western writer, and in particular to Haslam the man. His preference is revealed in an interview with his contemporary Gerald Locklin in which he is quoted as saying, "'I abhor the racism and xenophobia of my home area . . . . But I nevertheless prefer the frontal approach of life, the lack of trendiness, and the potential for effective change I find in Kern County'" (Gerald Haslam 16). This same attitude was conveyed in a private conversation in February 1988; though not in direct response to his works, it was equally revealing. Speaking on his views on Catholicism, Haslam recalled a time in his life when he was thought to have a serious illness. Seeking the solace of his faith, he found most comfort in an "empty church." Stripped of the man-made artifices of spirituality, it was direct communication which he obviously sought, one that is synonymous with the no-nonsense, frontal approach afforded by his locale. The compatibility of the man and artist with his "blood country" does indeed give credibility to the late author Mary Austin's belief in the shaping influences of one's place (Lectures, Spring 1988). Indeed, Haslam would be an ideal candidate for academic study of this cause and effect relationship.
The result is that Haslam's locale, by its very nature provides his stories and their readers, a setting and characters atypical to the formula Western, horse opera, and dime paperbacks. There are, instead, along with those previously noted, such unglamorous places as the men's room of his "Walls" (The Wages); the oil site of his "Widder Maker" (Hawk Flight); the sleazy hotel room of his "Smile"; and the bunkhouse of his "Silver Bullet" (Okies). What's more, the men listen to country music, drive pickup trucks, don tattoos, and, as already noted, constantly engage in "pissin contests." Likewise, the women are equally non-stereotypical: independent, rough, and, as one of Haslam's male characters noted, "'meaner than cat shit'" (Okies 90).

In addition, Haslam has provided through his locale, characters who are both honest and dishonest, insightful and naive, generous and unkind. One need only to compare the uppity Mrs. Hollis of "The Doll" (Okies) with the kindly protagonist in "Sweet Reason," to obtain a glimpse of Haslam's diversity in providing his reader both the good and bad of mankind, the "Siamese twins" of "His Ways are Mysterious" (Snapshots). As aptly stated by historian and biographer W. H. Hutchinson, "They [Haslam's characters] are very human lives and stripped of the artifices and pretences of so-called polite society ... (Haslam, Snapshots x)."
Obviously, Haslam's new West is devoid of the mythical Western heroes portrayed by Hollywood's Lone Ranger, Roy Rogers, and Hopalong. His locale, as previously noted, simply does not permit this, nor does Haslam the writer. The non-mythical new West requires instead real people: good, bad, insecure, confident, discontented and happy. In fact, more often than not, when the so-called classic heroes appear in his stories, they are portrayed by Haslam with tongue-in-cheek. They are revealed as pseudo-heroes, men who have assumed their laurels or performed their heroic deeds through either a misunderstanding or accident.

This pseudo or mock hero is best seen in Haslam's "Man of the Year" (Wages of Sin). In this story the laurels of heroism are being bestowed upon a thug for saving another man's life when, in actuality, it was a man he almost murdered. The story that led to his heroic status was, in fact, made up by a friend. Thus, with the last scene of the story, the real man behind the hero's mask, the "lifeblood of the community," is comically seen surfacing as he flirts with "Miss Kern County," one of the participants of his award ceremony. With his final words in the story, the man behind the mask is completely revealed: "'What'd you say, sumbitch?'" (36).

This "hero-by-accident" is also referred to in an incident in Haslam's "His Ways are Mysterious" (Snapshots)
when the story's naive protagonist, Glendon Leroy Stone, inadvertently saves a man from choking to death. In reality, however, he was trying to hold the victim down so as to prevent him from hitting the bunkhouse kitchen cook, an act that, if successful, would probably have killed the choking man.

Rather than give his reader the "glorified Western hero," Haslam has chosen instead to use his no-nonsense West to explore the challenges and difficulties of being a man and the universal consequences of people living their lives according to stereotyped expectations.

For example, in his "Before Dishonor" (Okies), the stereotype male expectations are represented by the tattooed narrator and lead character, Jerrell. His tattoo, with its macho proclamation "Death Before Dishonor," is permanently affixed to him; hence, as critic Gerald Locklin noted, "he is marked as a self-styled tough guy who will spend the rest of his life having to prove it" (13).

The humor and irony of our protagonist's predicament is made evident at the conclusion of the story when he interrupts a roller derby to "whup" a black player who has flirted with his date. However, the racist, his manly tattoo intact, ironically ends up being stomped on
by a black woman. This final irony even the character himself seems to recognize in the self-mockery of his final comments:

I noticed that tattoo and commenced chucklin' . . . . Then I giggled, then laughed, then I just roared. Death Before Dishonor, and me laying on that track with a little nigger gal straddlin' me spittin' in my face. Boy howdy! (67)

Haslam also focuses on the trials and tribulations of trying to be a man in his "Ace Low" (Okies). In this story it is the "young bucks," high school-aged boys, who exemplify the machoism associated with the barroom lifestyle. The narrator, one of the young bucks, for example, has nicknamed his car "Studwacker."

Ace, the owner of the bar, on the other hand, is different than the rest of the "guys." This is established early on in the story through the narrator's description of Ace's out-dated clothes, including the way he liked to sit, "his legs crossed funny, right next to each other, not ankle-to-knee." In other words, his dress and behavior did not conform to the narrator's stereotyped expectations: "If you didn't know him you'd swear he was half on his ass" (80). It is Ace, however, who ends up proving to the boys the futility of their macho lifestyle, as he produces for them the "souvenir" of the "barroom
hero," the ear of one "Badass" Milsap, the prototype of what the boys could/would become (88).

The "Great Vast-ectomy Escapade" (Snapshots) is similar to the preceding story in that the reader is once again exposed to the same barroom crowd, only the names, ages and place have changed, i.e., the adult "Big Dunc" of this story, the younger Merle Duncan of "Ace's Low." In short, the same macho behavior, so fundamental to Haslam's male characters, dictates as the story opens with the men sitting around the bar (in this story the Tejon Club) reminiscing about various sexual conquests, their memories replete with the descriptions of the sizes of the women's breasts.

Big Dunc is the most obnoxious braggart of the crowd. Therefore, when Bob Don, a fellow patron, expresses his fears about getting a "vast-ectomy" or, as stated in the character's male lingo, "getting his balls carved" (73), it is Big Dunc who braggingly, unsympathetically, and repeatedly says, "'Nothing to it'" (73). What's more, to prove he is "not chickenshit," he makes a pact to get a "vast-ectomy" "'if a little peckerhead like you [Bob Don] gets one'" (76). Of course, his true colors are revealed when Bob Don, the patient turned trickster, reveals Dunc's bravado with the "piece of resistance," the bloody sheep testicles, the supposed souvenir of his "vast-ectomy" (78). With the last scene
Big Dunc is seen "fishtailing away." Hence, as with Haslam's "Ace's Low," the author both debunks the macho-myths and exposes the reader to the universalities behind the masks and, as with the other story, allows his characters to do it for him.

Interestingly, these same characters will reappear in Haslam's latest collection of short stories, The Man Who Cultivated Fire, in "The Attack of the Great Brandy Bear," their bravado now revealed through a hiking trip in the Sierras. Obviously, these characters are among Haslam's favorite exemplars of men-playing-men, ones he consistently likes to poke fun at in his debunking of the macho stereotypes of the mythical West.

Sometimes, however, Haslam's debunkings are painful, but it may be because the character's veneer is thicker. A case in point is the narrator of his "She's My Rock" (Okies). He is the barroom hero, the young stud taken to the extreme: a hoodlum, racist, woman chaser, braggart, and moral coward. Haslam even has him steal Lucky cigarettes, the advertised man's brand; hence, cleverly heightening the effect of the character-playing-man, or at least the media-hyped stereotyped version of a man.

However, by the end of the story our "man" is blind and dependent on Nola Sue, a harelip, the very one he had so unkindly rejected in his youth, and the one,
even in blindness, he verbally rejects as he insists, "I don't need no goddam harelip" (100). It is Nola Sue who speaks the truth with her response, "No, buy nyou need a woman" (100). As Haslam notes at the story's conclusion, "And she was right," for his men are not the independent, "holier than thou" heroes of the mythical West, but human beings wanting/need ing another human being for their completeness.

The universals of Haslam's debunking are further revealed in his themes dealing with the consequences resulting when stereotypes dominate the actions of his characters. This is most evident in his "Sin Flicks" (Snapshots) when the lead character finds his perfect mate in the least expected guise, a woman dwarf. But his comprehension is too late, his insight thwarted by the stereotypes that dictate how a woman of his affection should look.

In typical Haslam fashion, the expectation versus the reality motif is given humorous treatment as well as in his "The Last Roundup" (Hawk Flights). In this story, the myth is debunked at The Last Roundup Saloon during a wet T-shirt contest during which the narrator learns that appearances do not make the man. Likewise, his uncles learn that all "young folk" do not look alike. In the uncles' case, the lesson is humorously learned when they
are told to look at the different sizes of the women's breasts at the contest:

'Do you still think all young folks look alike?'

Fud broke out laughin'. 'Judas Priest, I's talkin' 'bout faces, not knockers. I bet if there's a way to put braces on 'em they'd do'er, but for now there's still somethin' to be said for the way they are. There's still a little variety left, by damn! (33)

Finally, Haslam has made available to his readers the very lessons utilized by today's Western writers, and those made available to Haslam by his nonstereotypical locale: It is when the writer limits his vision to the mythical West that his readers are denied the truth, hence a victim of his sham. On the other hand, the new West, Haslam's "other California," does not "undercut" the reader but provides him, instead, the realities of truth. The positive versus the myth is the understated theme of Haslam's "Jimmy Eight" (Wages). In this story the two truck drivers emerge from the dope-peddling, girl-in-every-port, media-hyped stereotypes as hard working family men who are only as tough as they have to be. In short, they are real human beings. The universal application of this theme can be seen when the stereotypes that dictate one's prejudices are proven false; he/she is, in turn, afforded the brotherhood of his fellow man. Hence, the contemporary Western writer's new West is certainly a step toward this morality.
Chapter Three
The Great Central Valley:
Haslam's Window to the World's Varied Voices and its Darker Side

In the true spirit of the regional writer, i.e., the Thoreaus, the Mary Austins, the Faulkners, Haslam is keenly aware of the bigger world and his responsibility to convey the universalities of his locale. As he states in his Voices, "... all writing is finally set in some place at some time. The question of universality of power hinges more on an artist's talent and craft than on an area's limitations." Haslam's Valley does not fail him. It is his "window to the universe, the archetypal, the significant. Its subjects are more than sufficient and its people embody for [him] the human condition" (20-21). He expounded upon this statement in a letter to his contemporary Gerald Locklin, in which he wrote, "'I don't write about the valley, I use—or try to use the valley to write about the world'" (Locklin 5).

As a microcosm of the world, the Great Central Valley does in many ways fill the bill. Its people consist of a multi-ethnic cast, resulting not from the lure of gold nuggets or movie careers, but the availability of hard physical labor. "Chinese, Japanese,
Southern European, East Indian, Mexican, Filipino, Okie, Black—wave after wave of people," Haslam notes, "have migrated to this flat territory; the result is a rigorously heterogeneous culture . . ." (Voices 12). This characteristic of his locale enables Haslam to provide his stories with a wide variety of ethnic characters such as the Chicano boys in "Companeros" (Okies); the Swede in "Wages of Sin" (Wages); the Japanese family in "Home to America" (Hawk Flights); the Chinese, Wing Nu, and the Irish, Mr. Reilly, in "Sojourner" (Hawk Flights), and, of course, the Okies of so many of his stories.

What's more, Haslam uses these "varied voices" in poetic fashion in two of his works. One is the essay, aptly entitled "Voices of a Place," contained in a book of the same title. In this work, Haslam interjects his discussion of the geographical, social and economical backgrounds of the Valley with various discourses ranging from the recollections of a farmer, a housewife, and an oil driller, to a prayer of a Yokuts Indian, the ballads of Merle Haggard, and an excerpt from John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath (l-17). The second example in which Haslam has employed this artistic technique is a fictional story entitled "Sojourner," contained in his collection Hawk Flights. The interspersed discourses in this piece are passages lifted from nonfiction records such as letters, newspapers, and political speeches (l-7). In
both works Haslam uses these "varied voices" to add credibility to the discussion or story, and to fill-in-the-blanks in much the same way as did the chorus of an ancient Greek play.

Furthermore, Haslam has at times based his ethnic characters on specific ethnic personages from his area. Most identifiable is the Armenian, Samuelian, in "The Man Who Cultivated Fire," a story in Haslam's newest collection of the same title. The character, Samuelian, is obviously based on the character of the Great Central Valley writer, William Saroyan, as the fictional "mad Armenian" is very much like the author as described by Haslam in his biographical essay entitled "William Saroyan" in A Literary History of the American West.

For example, Haslam's depiction of the author as a "great favorite of neighborhood children" (478) mirrors Haslam's depiction of the fictional Samuelian as "one in whose yard most of the kids played, and who seemed to delight in their company" (12). There are other similarities: the character in the story is portrayed as a people-person who "always tried to be friendly" (11); Haslam in his essay describes Saroyan as "powerfully pro-human" (476). Likewise, according to Haslam, Saroyan was "a prime candidate for literary ostracism" by those who could not understand the author's complexity. This statement is reminiscent of the story's grandmother's
prejudicial treatment of the "mad Armenian": "A singing madman," she called him, because "he is cultivating weeds into a fire hazard." Hence, the character's "weeds" were a "fire hazard" in much the same way as were Saroyan's probing themes that revealed the artificiality, the "weeds," of the human experience. What's more, the character's zest for life, his fear of growing old, as evidenced in his "Ah, to be young" (15), are typical of the author who, according to Haslam, also loved life and bemoaned growing old.

As implied in this story, Haslam's Valley, in spite of the area's heterogeneity, was by no means integrated, a fact which Haslam abhors but shares with his readers in his nonfiction "Oildale." In this essay he notes the typical resentment of the area's underclass whites toward the gains of nonwhites: "'This is white country but a damn Mescan's bossin' me. Shee-it!'" (Voices 59).

Haslam has shared this darker side of his Valley in his fiction as well. For example, in his "Flesh and Blood" (Snapshots), the story opens with the narrator boldly calling the reader's attention to a tree with its engraved date "Mar-3-27" (98). The reader soon learns that the tree and its markings are the site and date of "the big lynching," one that was prevented by the
preserve its sectional uniqueness in the face of the nationalization of American culture, the McDonald's homogeneity versus the intimacy of the local Chat'n Chew; a way to give permanence to an area that, because of its irrigation, is, as Haslam notes, literally sinking (Voices 6). What's more, it is Haslam the writer's way to take advantage of an area that he considers to be "the most productive and interesting literary region in contemporary California" (Voices 22). However, more importantly, Haslam's Valley offers him the means to write of the "things that made him: the soil, the society, the experiences," affording him the opportunity to subscribe to his own advice to "know your place as it really is and write honestly of it" (Voices 25).

Obviously, his readers reap the benefits as Haslam's knowledge of his locale is born of books and experiences. He, in turn, exposes them to the topsoil of his area, those neighborhoods and backstreets not accessible to its thoroughfares' spectators, as for example his Okies' cardboard shanties, grape-packing sheds, cotton fields, and oilfields; his Wages of Sins' swamps, canyons and rude country roads; Snapshots' junkyards and irrigation ditches; Hawk Flights' dusty fields, its vacant lots and tack rooms; and the rivers and sordid street life of his latest collection, The Man Who
Cultivated Fire. And, of course, there is the Tejon Club of so many of his stories.

The reader is also exposed to a wide range of subnormal (not subhuman) characters of all shapes and sizes: the Okies' retarded "idyet" and harelip; Wages' retarded Chicano and lonely pervert; Snapshots' lady dwarf porno star, pimple-faced bully and deaf migrant boy; Hawk Flights' tobacco-spitting Okie and Mexican witch doctor; and The Man Who Cultivated Fire's displaced veterans and eccentric uncle. These are just a sampling of Haslam's varied cast of characters overlooked by the Hollywood formula Western or dime store Western paperback. However, this is Haslam's "other California," his means to debunking the stereotypical scenarios of the mythical West.

What's more, because the Valley is also the region about which Haslam, the born and bred "redskin," has awareness, the readers of his fiction have access to the area's subsoil as well, that beneath the topsoil of thought. This is the very area to which Haslam alluded in his essay, "Oildale," when, upon hearing the "howls and screams" of a neighborhood fight he stated, "It was not a new scene to me . . . . And I was raised on this street, having seen my father fight here and having bled here myself . . . I knew exactly what was going on . . . ."

(Voices 60). Haslam refers to this awareness in his Jack
Schaefer Western Writer's Series as the "collective secrets," privy to an area's street corner artist, tale teller, or novelist (11).

Hence, readers are not only exposed to the Valley's places and people, but the "whys" of their behavior as well. The result is that Haslam's debunking and revisioning of the stereotypical West and its inhabitants are ones wrought with a perspective that is both understanding and accepting. In short, Haslam's "debunking" is a gentle and sensitive one.

For example, Haslam's "Wages of Sin," in his collection of the same title, is both an important and prime exemplar of one of many such insightful psychological probes inherent in the demythologizing of his stories' "he-men." In this particular story the reader is given en masse all the elements of the men's-only-stuff-of-stag-parties, the barroom lifestyle characteristics of many of his male characters: beer drinking, gambling, vulgar language, and the stock Western braggart who has "'9 INCH' plastered on the front and back of his 1960 Caddy . . ." (44). It is all there, including one of Haslam's "epic urinations," a phrase coined by Gerald Locklin in reference to the stories' frequent "pissin contests" (22).

Most importantly, it is in this story that the reader is exposed to the "whys" of his characters'
behavior with its opening lines in which the narrator announces:

Damn rights I's pissed! Me, after fourteen year on the job, getting cut back to thirty-hour a week. I busted into Red's Lounge hotter'n a Tiajuana taco and slurped me down a couple brews just as fast as I could, then in walked Swede Erickson . . . . 'What's on yer mind, Billy Bob?' he asked me. So I let him know. Swede . . . went and told me he'd got cut back hiself three months before. I drank me another beer, not feelin quite so sorry for myself. (43)

Hence, with this story, the reader begins to see what he/she probably innately suspected all along: The beer drinking barroom lifestyle offers the men, out of work and short on pay, a therapeutic outlet not unlike the sanctioned middle-class encounter group.

The bragging, so often a part of Haslam's male characters' makeup, is represented in this story by the loud-mouthed Bodean whose claim to "nine inches of danglin sirloin" is typical of his incessant boastings (43). However, Haslam has assigned to his narrator one simple line which explains it all: "He's [Bodean] the only man I ever heard of could work 12 year and still be a roustabout [the low man on the job ladder]" (45). In short, as this line reveals, Bodean's obnoxious bragging was his way of saving face, his accessible means to self-worth, one that has become through the years as instinctive as any man's self-defense reflex. Therefore, it is no wonder that when the Swede expresses his concern over whether his wife will
understand his being laid off, Bodean, immediately, like Pavlov's dog, instinctively responds with his typical sexually-laden: "'Only one thang a woman understands!'" (45), an ironic comment as the reader becomes aware that such sexual innuendoes are the only things Bodean understands.

Of course, this comment results in the "pissin contest," another immediate way for these men to prove they are men in their emasculating economic situations and in their topsey-turvey world where, as subtly revealed in the story, making love in the bushes is sanctioned, whereas "taking a leak" in a trout stream is considered "out of order" (46). Viewed in this context, and considering the propensity for violence so often characteristic of a population of a disproportionate number of males, Haslam's "epic urinations" are seen as a non-violent recourse indicative of civilized men, not merely childish antics of lower-class ruffians. This insight is made viable through the author's expose of his locale's subsoil.

Ironically, it is Bodean's girlfriend who, in defending his defeat in the "pissin contest," unintentionally speaks the truth when she says, "'It ain't the length of the pipe, it's the strength of the rig'" (48). The men know this, but they, out of work, do not have access to the "rig." However, her crude statement is
reminiscent of the deep truth insisted upon by the late author Vardis Fisher in his essay "The Novelist and His Background" when he quotes Emerson's lines:

'Tis not in the high stars alone,
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,
But in the mud and scum of things,
There always, always something sings!
(68)

It is through Haslam's knowledge of his locale's topsoil and his awareness of its subsoil that his readers have access, through the "mud and scum of things," to the truth so necessary to his rediscovered West and the universality of his themes.
Chapter Two
Great Central Valley:
Haslam's "Debunker" of Stereotypes

As noted in Part One, the contemporary Western writer must debunk the mythical West, clear it of its fog and mist, in order for his works to achieve universal significance. This is a prerequisite necessary in establishing the commonality of experience that awakens the readers' sensibilities to their oneness with all mankind; in short, affording them the vision to see all of Haslam's bears. Here the Great Central Valley, Haslam's locale, takes on an additional responsibility, one which it adequately fulfills by the very nature of the place. Hence, it becomes not only Haslam's means to write about that which he knows, but an effective contemporary Western writer's debunking tool as well.

For example, as Haslam notes, the Valley "defies the state's flashy stereotype . . . . Scuffed boots, not Gucci loafers characterize it" (Voices 2). He attributes this to his Valley's retention of cultural values unglossed by the sudden sophistication of urban life. "Turn on the radio," he says, "and you'll hear music not apt to be piped into an elevator." What's more, "you'll see more dark faces with white foreheads--or dark faces with dark foreheads--than stylish tans" (Voices 13-14).
Thus, the Valley offers Haslam the direct no-frills- to-the-point approach so necessary to the contemporary Western writer, and in particular to Haslam the man. His preference is revealed in an interview with his contemporary Gerald Locklin in which he is quoted as saying, "'I abhor the racism and xenophobia of my home area . . . . But I nevertheless prefer the frontal approach of life, the lack of trendiness, and the potential for effective change I find in Kern County'" (Gerald Haslam 16). This same attitude was conveyed in a private conversation in February 1988; though not in direct response to his works, it was equally revealing. Speaking on his views on Catholicism, Haslam recalled a time in his life when he was thought to have a serious illness. Seeking the solace of his faith, he found most comfort in an "empty church." Stripped of the man-made artifices of spirituality, it was direct communication which he obviously sought, one that is synonymous with the no-nonsense, frontal approach afforded by his locale. The compatibility of the man and artist with his "blood country" does indeed give credibility to the late author Mary Austin's belief in the shaping influences of one's place (Lectures, Spring 1988). Indeed, Haslam would be an ideal candidate for academic study of this cause and effect relationship.
The result is that Haslam's locale, by its very nature provides his stories and their readers, a setting and characters atypical to the formula Western, horse opera, and dime paperbacks. There are, instead, along with those previously noted, such unglamorous places as the men's room of his "Walls" (The Wages); the oil site of his "Widder Maker" (Hawk Flight); the sleazy hotel room of his "Smile"; and the bunkhouse of his "Silver Bullet" (Okies). What's more, the men listen to country music, drive pickup trucks, don tattoos, and, as already noted, constantly engage in "pissin contests." Likewise, the women are equally non-stereotypical: independent, rough, and, as one of Haslam's male characters noted, "'meaner than cat shit'" (Okies 90).

In addition, Haslam has provided through his locale, characters who are both honest and dishonest, insightful and naive, generous and unkind. One need only to compare the uppity Mrs. Hollis of "The Doll" (Okies) with the kindly protagonist in "Sweet Reason," to obtain a glimpse of Haslam's diversity in providing his reader both the good and bad of mankind, the "Siamese twins" of "His Ways are Mysterious" (Snapshots). As aptly stated by historian and biographer W. H. Hutchinson, "They [Haslam's characters] are very human lives and stripped of the artifices and pretences of so-called polite society . . . (Haslam, Snapshots x).
Obviously, Haslam's new West is devoid of the mythical Western heroes portrayed by Hollywood's Lone Ranger, Roy Rogers, and Hopalong. His locale, as previously noted, simply does not permit this, nor does Haslam the writer. The non-mythical new West requires instead real people: good, bad, insecure, confident, discontented and happy. In fact, more often than not, when the so-called classic heroes appear in his stories, they are portrayed by Haslam with tongue-in-cheek. They are revealed as pseudo-heroes, men who have assumed their laurels or performed their heroic deeds through either a misunderstanding or accident.

This pseudo or mock hero is best seen in Haslam's "Man of the Year" (Wages of Sin). In this story the laurels of heroism are being bestowed upon a thug for saving another man's life when, in actuality, it was a man he almost murdered. The story that led to his heroic status was, in fact, made up by a friend. Thus, with the last scene of the story, the real man behind the hero's mask, the "lifeblood of the community," is comically seen surfacing as he flirts with "Miss Kern County," one of the participants of his award ceremony. With his final words in the story, the man behind the mask is completely revealed: "What'd you say, sumbitch?" (36).

This "hero-by-accident" is also referred to in an incident in Haslam's "His Ways are Mysterious" (Snapshots)
when the story's naive protagonist, Glendon Leroy Stone, inadvertently saves a man from choking to death. In reality, however, he was trying to hold the victim down so as to prevent him from hitting the bunkhouse kitchen cook, an act that, if successful, would probably have killed the choking man.

Rather than give his reader the "glorified Western hero," Haslam has chosen instead to use his no-nonsense West to explore the challenges and difficulties of being a man and the universal consequences of people living their lives according to stereotyped expectations.

For example, in his "Before Dishonor" (Okies), the stereotype male expectations are represented by the tattooed narrator and lead character, Jerrell. His tattoo, with its macho proclamation "Death Before Dishonor," is permanently affixed to him; hence, as critic Gerald Locklin noted, "he is marked as a self-styled tough guy who will spend the rest of his life having to prove it" (13).

The humor and irony of our protagonist's predicament is made evident at the conclusion of the story when he interrupts a roller derby to "whup" a black player who has flirted with his date. However, the racist, his manly tattoo intact, ironically ends up being stomped on
by a black woman. This final irony even the character himself seems to recognize in the self-mockery of his final comments:

I noticed that tattoo and commenced chucklin . . . . Then I giggled, then laughed, then I just roared. Death Before Dishonor, and me layin on that track with a little nigger gal straddlin me spittin in my face. Boy howdy! (67)

Haslam also focuses on the trials and tribulations of trying to be a man in his "Ace Low" (Okies). In this story it is the "young bucks," high school-aged boys, who exemplify the machoism associated with the barroom lifestyle. The narrator, one of the young bucks, for example, has nicknamed his car "Studwacker."

Ace, the owner of the bar, on the other hand, is different than the rest of the "guys." This is established early on in the story through the narrator's description of Ace's out-dated clothes, including the way he liked to sit, "his legs crossed funny, right next to each other, not ankle-to-knee." In other words, his dress and behavior did not conform to the narrator's stereotyped expectations: "If you didn't know him you'd swear he was half on his ass" (80). It is Ace, however, who ends up proving to the boys the futility of their macho lifestyle, as he produces for them the "souvenir" of the "barroom
hero," the ear of one "Badass" Milsap, the prototype of what the boys could/would become (88).

The "Great Vast-ectomy Escapade" (Snapshots) is similar to the preceding story in that the reader is once again exposed to the same barroom crowd, only the names, ages and place have changed, i.e., the adult "Big Dunc" of this story, the younger Merle Duncan of "Ace's Low." In short, the same macho behavior, so fundamental to Haslam's male characters, dictates as the story opens with the men sitting around the bar (in this story the Tejon Club) reminiscing about various sexual conquests, their memories replete with the descriptions of the sizes of the women's breasts.

Big Dunc is the most obnoxious braggart of the crowd. Therefore, when Bob Don, a fellow patron, expresses his fears about getting a "vast-ectomy" or, as stated in the character's male lingo, "getting his balls carved" (73), it is Big Dunc who braggingly, unsympathetically, and repeatedly says, "'Nothing to it'" (73). What's more, to prove he is "not chickenshit," he makes a pact to get a "vast-ectomy" "'if a little peckerhead like you [Bob Don] gets one'" (76). Of course, his true colors are revealed when Bob Don, the patient turned trickster, reveals Dunc's bravado with the "piece of resistance," the bloody sheep testicles, the supposed souvenir of his "vast-ectomy" (78). With the last scene
Big Dunc is seen "fishtailing away." Hence, as with Haslam's "Ace's Low," the author both debunks the macho-myths and exposes the reader to the universalities behind the masks and, as with the other story, allows his characters to do it for him.

Interestingly, these same characters will reappear in Haslam's latest collection of short stories, The Man Who Cultivated Fire, in "The Attack of the Great Brandy Bear," their bravado now revealed through a hiking trip in the Sierras. Obviously, these characters are among Haslam's favorite exemplars of men-playing-men, ones he consistently likes to poke fun at in his debunking of the macho stereotypes of the mythical West.

Sometimes, however, Haslam's debunkings are painful, but it may be because the character's veneer is thicker. A case in point is the narrator of his "She's My Rock" (Okies). He is the barroom hero, the young stud taken to the extreme: a hoodlum, racist, woman chaser, braggart, and moral coward. Haslam even has him steal Lucky cigarettes, the advertised man's brand; hence, cleverly heightening the effect of the character-playing-man, or at least the media-hyped stereotyped version of a man.

However, by the end of the story our "man" is blind and dependent on Nola Sue, a harelip, the very one he had so unkindly rejected in his youth, and the one,
even in blindness, he verbally rejects as he insists, "'I don't need no goddam harelip'" (100). It is Nola Sue who speaks the truth with her response, "'No, buy nyou need a woman'" (100). As Haslam notes at the story's conclusion, "And she was right," for his men are not the independent, "holier than thou" heroes of the mythical West, but human beings wanting/needling another human being for their completeness.

The universals of Haslam's debunking are further revealed in his themes dealing with the consequences resulting when stereotypes dominate the actions of his characters. This is most evident in his "Sin Flicks" (Snapshots) when the lead character finds his perfect mate in the least expected guise, a woman dwarf. But his comprehension is too late, his insight thwarted by the stereotypes that dictate how a woman of his affection should look.

In typical Haslam fashion, the expectation versus the reality motif is given humorous treatment as well as in his "The Last Roundup" (Hawk Flights). In this story, the myth is debunked at The Last Roundup Saloon during a wet T-shirt contest during which the narrator learns that appearances do not make the man. Likewise, his uncles learn that all "young folk" do not look alike. In the uncles' case, the lesson is humorously learned when they
are told to look at the different sizes of the women's breasts at the contest:

'Do you still think all young folks look alike?'

Fud broke out laughin'. 'Judas Priest, I's talkin' 'bout faces, not knockers. I bet if there's a way to put braces on 'em they'd do'er, but for now there's still somethin' to be said for the way they are. There's still a little variety left, by damn! (33)

Finally, Haslam has made available to his readers the very lessons utilized by today's Western writers, and those made available to Haslam by his nonstereotypical locale: It is when the writer limits his vision to the mythical West that his readers are denied the truth, hence a victim of his sham. On the other hand, the new West, Haslam's "other California," does not "undercut" the reader but provides him, instead, the realities of truth. The positive versus the myth is the understated theme of Haslam's "Jimmy Eight" ([Wages]). In this story the two truck drivers emerge from the dope-peddling, girl-in-every-port, media-hyped stereotypes as hard working family men who are only as tough as they have to be. In short, they are real human beings. The universal application of this theme can be seen when the stereotypes that dictate one's prejudices are proven false; he/she is, in turn, afforded the brotherhood of his fellow man. Hence, the contemporary Western writer's new West is certainly a step toward this morality.
Chapter Three
The Great Central Valley:
Haslam's Window to the World's
Varied Voices and its Darker Side

In the true spirit of the regional writer, i.e., the Thoreaus, the Mary Austins, the Faulkners, Haslam is keenly aware of the bigger world and his responsibility to convey the universalities of his locale. As he states in his Voices,
"... all writing is finally set in some place at some time. The question of universality of power hinges more on an artist's talent and craft than on an area's limitations." Haslam's Valley does not fail him. It is his "window to the universe, the archetypal, the significant. Its subjects are more than sufficient and its people embody for [him] the human condition" (20-21). He expounded upon this statement in a letter to his contemporary Gerald Locklin, in which he wrote, "'I don't write about the valley, I use—or try to use the valley to write about the world'" (Locklin 5).

As a microcosm of the world, the Great Central Valley does in many ways fill the bill. Its people consist of a multi-ethnic cast, resulting not from the lure of gold nuggets or movie careers, but the availability of hard physical labor. "Chinese, Japanese,
Southern European, East Indian, Mexican, Filipino, Okie, Black--wave after wave of people," Haslam notes, "have migrated to this flat territory; the result is a rigorously heterogeneous culture . . ." (Voices 12). This characteristic of his locale enables Haslam to provide his stories with a wide variety of ethnic characters such as the Chicano boys in "Companeros" (Okies); the Swede in "Wages of Sin" (Wages); the Japanese family in "Home to America" (Hawk Flights); the Chinese, Wing Nu, and the Irish, Mr. Reilly, in "Sojourner" (Hawk Flights), and, of course, the Okies of so many of his stories.

What's more, Haslam uses these "varied voices" in poetic fashion in two of his works. One is the essay, aptly entitled "Voices of a Place," contained in a book of the same title. In this work, Haslam interjects his discussion of the geographical, social and economical backgrounds of the Valley with various discourses ranging from the recollections of a farmer, a housewife, and an oil driller, to a prayer of a Yokuts Indian, the ballads of Merle Haggard, and an excerpt from John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath (1-17). The second example in which Haslam has employed this artistic technique is a fictional story entitled "Sojourner," contained in his collection Hawk Flights. The interspersed discourses in this piece are passages lifted from nonfiction records such as letters, newspapers, and political speeches (1-7).
both works Haslam uses these "varied voices" to add credibility to the discussion or story, and to fill-in-the-blanks in much the same way as did the chorus of an ancient Greek play.

Furthermore, Haslam has at times based his ethnic characters on specific ethnic personages from his area. Most identifiable is the Armenian, Samuelian, in "The Man Who Cultivated Fire," a story in Haslam's newest collection of the same title. The character, Samuelian, is obviously based on the character of the Great Central Valley writer, William Saroyan, as the fictional "mad Armenian" is very much like the author as described by Haslam in his biographical essay entitled "William Saroyan" in A Literary History of the American West.

For example, Haslam's depiction of the author as a "great favorite of neighborhood children" (478) mirrors Haslam's depiction of the fictional Samuelian as "one in whose yard most of the kids played, and who seemed to delight in their company" (12). There are other similarities: the character in the story is portrayed as a people-person who "always tried to be friendly" (11); Haslam in his essay describes Saroyan as "powerfully pro-human" (476). Likewise, according to Haslam, Saroyan was "a prime candidate for literary ostracism" by those who could not understand the author's complexity. This statement is reminiscent of the story's grandmother's
prejudicial treatment of the "mad Armenian": "A singing madman," she called him, because "he is cultivating weeds into a fire hazard." Hence, the character's "weeds" were a "fire hazard" in much the same way as were Saroyan's probing themes that revealed the artificiality, the "weeds," of the human experience. What's more, the character's zest for life, his fear of growing old, as evidenced in his "Ah, to be young" (15), are typical of the author who, according to Haslam, also loved life and bemoaned growing old.

As implied in this story, Haslam's Valley, in spite of the area's heterogeneity, was by no means integrated, a fact which Haslam abhors but shares with his readers in his nonfiction "Oildale." In this essay he notes the typical resentment of the area's underclass whites toward the gains of nonwhites: "'This is white country but a damn Mescan's bossin' me. Shee-it!'" (Voices 59).

Haslam has shared this darker side of his Valley in his fiction as well. For example, in his "Flesh and Blood" (Snapshots), the story opens with the narrator boldly calling the reader's attention to a tree with its engraved date "Mar-3-27" (98). The reader soon learns that the tree and its markings are the site and date of "the big lynching," one that was prevented by the
narrator's "book learning and turn your other cheek Christian" uncle (100). Indeed, as the reader sees, Uncle A.J. was the one civilized voice among the mob eager for a "stringing."

However, more importantly, though in a very tragic sense, the proposed lynching was to be carried out for the simple reason that "the one jigaboo in town . . . turns out to be uppity" (98). "Uppity," the reader learns, is the black Mr. Moses Moore's ridding his shoe shine business of the young ruffian whose physical confrontation with one of his customers threatened to disrupt, if not destroy, his source of livelihood. But as the narrator so coldly states "Still, you have to draw the line on coloreds somewhere . . ." (99).

With the conclusion of the story, the narrator explains to the reader why he has not scratched out the infamous date of the attempted lynching with his "Nothing important ever happens around here" (104). The matter-of-factness of this statement juxtaposed with the horrible thing that almost happened gives the story an edge of horror. Hence, Haslam's title "Flesh and Blood" and the brotherhood it implies takes on an added irony.

Racism toward the Chicanos is revealed in his "Companeros" (Okies). At the start of this story a bunch of high school boys with diverse ethnic backgrounds set out on a summer adventure; their goal, to pick cotton.
However, finding the job harder than they expected, several of the boys, with the exception of Chava, a Chicano boy, cheat by loading their sacks with rocks. Inevitably they are fired and forced to walk the fifteen miles back home. Chava refuses his ride back home, choosing instead to walk with his "companeros." However, from that point on, the summer adventure takes on serious overtones. The boys are stopped by the sheriff's deputies and asked to show their papers. Chava, frustrated, aware of the prejudicial nature of the deputies' interrogation, fights with the lawmen and is consequently taken to jail. It is with the conclusion of the story that their racism is most blatant. The father of Chava learns that while in jail his son fell down the steps and broke his ribs: "At least that's what the official report said, and Chava's father didn't bother to question the report" (47). Through the father's acceptance of the explanation, the reader learns so much more. Simply stated, the explanation was accepted because the officials' prejudice toward the Chicanos had come to be expected.

Haslam's honesty in his portrayal of his "other California," is not limited to his fictionalization of the more negative side of its bigotry. Instead, his recognition of his area's racism includes his awareness that this is a manifestation of hostility typical of all
the world's, when, as he says in his essay "Oildale,"
desperate people battle each other "in lieu of opponents
they could neither see nor understand" (Voices 59). He
further notes:

As is true of people foundering at the bottom,
these young and old, women and men, tend not
to see over the rim to reality, so they remain
frustrated by and angry at a world that offers
them only blue-light specials. And when
things go wrong as they so persistently do,
someone must be blamed . . . . (60)

Thus, in conveying the universals of his locale, Haslam
has chosen to give emphasis to those motives behind his
locale's racism, and much of the world's, the fear of the
unknown.

For example, in the story "Smile" (Okies), this
hostility vented on the invisible enemy is visually
demonstrated. The old wino in the story and his neighbor
combat each other, one pounding on the wall of their hotel
rooms, while the other, in retaliation, turns up the
volume of his T.V. They are literally invisible to one
another, separated by the shabby hotel room wall. Roberta
Kalechovsk's objection to the "flip irony" and "obvious
symbolism" of "Smile" could really be seen as a tribute to
Haslam's carefully selected symbols (Locklin 10). In
short, the "too obvious" may be that Haslam's story is too
realistic, its action too much like the headlines
announcing at-random highway killings, mass slaying of
MacDonald's patrons, and hijacked airplanes.
Haslam will use his wall again as symbolic of such isolation in his story appropriately entitled "Walls" (Wages). In this story the walls are given even more tragic connotations in that they are covered with names and phone numbers written by obviously lonely people to other lonely people such as the story's protagonist. It is his only means to the outside world and in his desperation, he chooses several numbers and calls. Finally he does make contact when one girl accepts his offer of a date. However, Haslam effectively shows the results of alienation when the protagonist chooses instead to return to the men's restroom where there are written threats he can see and written promises he can at least visually count on. With the last scene of the story, the deviant is seen embracing the wall "which he knew so well," and "that knew him" (68). Obviously he is imbalanced, but the loneliness of the man caressing the cold impersonal wall causes one to think about the causes of "walls" that separate human beings from one another.

In Haslam's "Silver Bullet" (Okies), on the other hand, the invisible enemy is strictly symbolic. In this story, the main character, "Slim," hates everybody who is not "True Americans," meaning anyone of a different race, color, creed, or nationality. He conveniently groups them together as "Red" or as part of the "International Communist Anti-Christ Conspiracy." His is a belief turned
gospel with which he tries to save everyone, including his bunkmate, the narrator of the story. Finally, it is his fear of the unknown that causes his eventual downfall. Slim makes fun of an Old Mexican's belief in the tule fog ghosts because, as he states,

'Ain't nobody by a Mexican or a nigger'd take devils and ghosts and shit like that serious. White folks know better, that's why they're white.' (105)

The humor and irony of this statement is seen at the conclusion of the story when it is Slim's fear of the tule fog spirits that snags him literally when the tail of his nightshirt gets caught in the hasp of the gate; Slim, however, is convinced it is the spirit of the tule fog that has caught him. Thus, with the end of the story, the supposed non-ghost-fearing man is found running down the highway. With this story, Haslam has humorously, in tall-tale fashion, presented metaphorically the tragic consequences of man's fear of the unknown.

On the other hand, his "Sweet Reason" (Wages) is about a man who bases his beliefs totally on reason to the point, as humorously revealed at the start of the story, that he is suspicious of anything or anybody that defies it. Therefore, according to him, the talented Shirley Temple must be "a shrunk growed-up woman" (50) and the fancy garnished eggs served at the Palace Hotel "ain't
eggs" (51). However, more importantly, this same clear logic eventually dictates to him that the black wrestler Rufus Tuhnuh "weren't no nigra ... He was champeen a Taylor County" (54). Hence, the protagonist's reputation for sweet reason and the title of the story take on added significance.

In the "Killing Pen" (Hawk Flights), the reader, through the narrator's reminiscing, meets "Grandaddy," a man whose character is similar to the man's in "Sweet Reason." Grandaddy, for example, is to have advised his grandson, "'If you're a-gonna run a ranch you need the best vaqueros, not the whitest or the purtiest!'" (67). It is interesting to note that this advice is similar to that given to Haslam by his father as revealed in his essay "Oildale": "My Dad's dictum, for example, was 'Is he a good guy?', not 'Is he colored!'" (Voices 61) Likewise, it is similar to the advice Haslam shared with his high school coach, Babe, as noted in his essay "Growing up at Babe's": "He acknowledged that I had been correct when I'd urged him to judge each nonwhite as he would each white, individually. I'm glad that I was able to return some small slip of wisdom" (Voices 45).

The story primarily focuses on Grandaddy's friend, Sam Dawkins, a former slave who is dearly loved by everyone and whose death in the story causes great sorrow to the family, especially Grandaddy. In fact, the story
ends with the grandfather passing on to his grandson, Sam's "greasy old hat" with the poignant advice, "'Grow into this boy'" (70). In these last lines Haslam pays his greatest tribute to the black man, so often the victim of bigotry in his fiction and in the real world. What's more, it is interesting to note that in this story, as well as in the preceding one, the black and white characters were not strangers to one another. In "Sweet Reason," for example, this relationship evolved literally from the face to face contact of their wrestling contest. Thus, both give evidence to taleteller Haslam's implied moral: Knowing your "brother" eliminates the fear of the unknown.

With "Home to America" (Hawk Flights) Haslam expands the scope of the "lessons" of his locale. The misplaced fears of men are put in historical context as this story deals with the World War II relocation of Japanese-Americans. Hence, the reader is given a concrete example of the consequences of man's fears when the Japanese family in "Home to America" become the scapegoats. In this story Haslam focuses on the little girl in the family. Terrified, she keeps her eyes closed during the entire trip to the camp. However, her closed eyes do not eliminate the sounds of the threatening insults nor those of the rocks thrown at the truck in which they were being transported. Hence, her sightless
experience is not the experience one sees in newspaper headlines; hers was that unreported and unreportable. With the conclusion of the story, Haslam tugs at our conscience with the little girl's question, "Mommy, when are we going home to America?" (57)

Thus Haslam has taken the events of his locale and his awareness of its people to explore the greater psychological themes of man's bigotry. Once again his "other California" is the springboard to these universal themes, or as he would state, it is his window.
Chapter Four
Great Central Valley:
Haslam's Window to a Changing World

Haslam's Great Central Valley has historically been one associated with change. As he notes in his essay "Voices of a Place," it literally developed from a shallow sea to a desert to "one of the most productive richest agricultural regions on earth" (Voices 11). Its most recent changes have been accelerated by man's advancements in agricultural technology, which Haslam feels we should be proud of as he pays tribute through his citation of author William Saroyan's poetically expressed observation that

'Standing at the edge of our city, a man could feel that we had made this place of street and dwelling in the stillness and loneliness of the desert, and we had done a brave thing...'. (Voices 11)

However, the area's development is not without its "Catch 22s," as noted by Haslam in his explanation which reveals the downward spiral direction that such changes may take. Haslam's "formula" is one that bears repeating:

American settlement has accelerated and directed change, and that settlement has itself been a response to the world's and nation's population explosion: agricultural technology leading to greater and more efficient use of land, so that the valley's apparently inexhaustible larder makes population growth possible which, in turn,
creates the demand for more produce. The affluence produced by that cycle then attracts urban dwellers, leading to the paving of farmland as well as both the agricultural conversion of the little remaining virgin soil and chemically intense cultivation of existing farms, what has been described as land being used to convert petroleum into produce. (Voices 3)

Haslam's anxiety, expressed here because of the uncertainty of the Valley's future, is made further understandable with his bold assertion that "the greatest agricultural region on earth may stand as a paradigm for the planet" (Voices 4). What's more, his concern is represented in his stories by his repeated and varied references to families and individuals who are displaced by modernization, changing times, and the loss of their land, including its psychological effects, the loss of one's identification or self-worth.

In his collection Snapshots (the title itself perhaps an expression of Haslam's desire to halt changing times), the story entitled "Crossing the Valley" is a particularly poignant representation of one such theme. For example, in this story the "victim" is the narrator's grandfather. The store he had owned and labored in for most of his life is now, like him, out of step with the times. As the narrator recalls, "The town had long since outgrown him and the store. Stylish shops now surrounded his unchanging dry goods emporium that had years ago exchanged goods for farm produce" (80). What's more, the
grandfather is now an embarrassment to some members of the family because of his daily antiquated sweeping of the floor, its green sawdust a vestige of another era. Modern times now dictated that the family liquidate the store and retire "Grandpa." The result is, of course, Grandpa's death, and so he becomes one of Haslam's victims of changing times.

In "The Horned Toad" (Hawk Flights), a semi-autobiographical piece, the narrator's great-grandmother is the victim. In this story, Haslam has symbolically paralleled the fate of the narrator's childhood pet toad with that of the great-grandmother's. The toad is crushed by an automobile as it tries to return to his place, the desert. The indifference of modernization is exemplified by the driver of the car that passes the little boy as he suffers the loss of his pet. As the narrator recollects: "I stood rooted there in the street, my face imploding, tears swarming my cheeks, and a car honked its horn as it passed, the driver shouting at me" (22).

The great-grandmother meets her fate in much the same way. She trips over a curb and breaks her hip, an injury from which she was never to recover. Just as the toad, she too had been trying to visit her "home." Having lived "over half-a-century in country away from the noise, away from clutter, away from people" (19), she was
attempting to visit the closest thing to this in Oildale where she now resided with her granddaughter's family: a patch of virgin desert referred to as the "vacant lot," the only acre within distance without houses and sidewalks. Haslam has used the concrete curb as his symbol for the encroachment of modernization, its symbolic significance in this story is modernization that impedes.

In his "Dust" (Hawk Flights), the loss of the land and man's struggle to reclaim it are portrayed by an Okie family who are driven to desperation as dust and rabbits consume their land and food supply. In "rebuttal," Roy, the head of the family, organizes a rabbit drive using an Indian method from the past, an understated irony. The frenzy of the drive as "the men's passionate breath exploded from them and the "Whap! Bump! Whap! of their clubs ..." and the panting of the "wild-eyed men" convey the frustration and anger incited by their need to provide for their families (48). It is with the story's conclusion that the reader is witness to Haslam's most dramatic example of man's territorial needs as Roy swings his stick and declares, "'This is my land, damn it! . . . My land! . . . Mine, goddamnit! My land!'" (49). He makes this declaration with the most primal of all expressions as he urinates on the boundary stones, staking out his territory in animal-like fashion.
In "King of Skateland" (*Wages of Sin*), Haslam delves deeper into the psychological basis for man's territorial needs as he speaks to one of the more dramatic consequences of modernization. In this story, for example, it is a means for personal identity, a need to be somebody. In the adolescent world, as is the case of the story's protagonist, this identification is sought through the approval of one's peers.

The territory to which the teenager, Rex Roy Maytubby, has made claim is the skating rink. He was "the King of Skateland," his rights augmented by the adulation of his peers, including "over stringy shitkickers cuddling song-leaders" who otherwise ignored him at school (25). Thus, it is when Rex's territory is threatened by a retarded Chicano boy that he defends his rights in the only way he knows; he bullies the boy. As it should be, the bully gets what he deserves when the Chicano's older brother comes to his rescue.

However, despite the obnoxious showoffish behavior of the bully, Haslam never allows him to receive the reader's full wrath with the recognition that this was not a personal vendetta, but the result of one human being's need to be somebody. Thus, it is with mixed emotions that the reader witnesses the dethronement of "the King of Skateland," the result of the writer's skillfully written word picture of the displaced "hero,"
with "his empty body . . . slowly slump[ing] away toward his wheels" (30). David Peck speaks to the effect in his article "Gerald Haslam, the Heartland's Voice," when he says:

[Haslam] never shows just the racial hatred, just the ignorance or just anger, but always gives the antidote as well. The end is defeated or transcended by something else, by love, by learning, by human change. (49)

In "Predators" (Wages), Haslam takes his theme of the alienated man one step further as he exposes the reader to the sometimes violent repercussions. In this story the protagonist, Ferril, is already a nobody, a fact that is revealed through his confused monologue at the story's start. Here the parallel between Ferril and the hawk that he kills begins, in that like the bird he is an "endangered species"; both are victims of changing times.

He stalks and kills the hawk because he considers it "a damned killer," an attitude of by-gone times. When Ferril is cited by the game warden for shooting the bird, he is confused: "'What the hell's this country comin' to'" (73). Out of synch, his distorted vision interprets his citation as symptomatic of "not letting folks live the American way," an opinion echoed later by the bartender of the Dew Drop Inn whose "spirits" the protagonist seeks "to cool his boiling innards" (74).

However, Ferril's anger and frustration eventually become more violently displaced; his
scapegoats, the wrestler, Karl Hitler, and his manager Fritz Von Liebendorf, or as Ferril refers to him, "the lousy Kraut faggot" (75). The result is that Ferril resorts to violence and the hunter becomes the hunted; Ferril becomes the potential "damned killer." The parallel between Ferril and the bird is most obvious at the conclusion of the story when he suffers the same fate, impaled on the same barbed wire fence to which he had earlier fastened the bird. Hence, "endangered species" is given further meaning: he is endangered because there is no place for his bigotry.

Interestingly, Ferril's vengeance is very much like that referred to by Haslam in his essay "Every Man A Sheriff," in which he speaks of the vigilante group known as "Posse Comitatus" and their leader Mike Beach. As he states in this essay,

"Combining their anger with the frontier tradition of direct citizen action, a tradition with which they strongly identify, posse members symbolize a more general mood among those Americans who feel they 'foot the bills' and 'take it in the ass from everyone.'" (Voices 74)

These words are reminiscent of those expressed by Ferril: "'This here's a free country and us free men're gonna take it back! You just wait!'" (74) It is fair to surmise that this is still another example of the influence of Haslam's locale, one of many that have been integrated into the making of the new West.
In "The World Sucks," a story contained in his newest collection, The Man Who Cultivated Fire, Haslam has given his readers a more contemporary version of the protagonist in "Predator" through his portrayal of four veterans who returned from Viet Nam, only to find that the United States has nothing to offer them. This is revealed in one of their caustic and bitter remarks:

Join the army and learn a fuckin' trade, man.
All I did was shoot at people and smoke dope
and try not to get my own ass shot. Not much
call for those trades in Sacramento, man.
(26)

Like Ferril, the protagonist of "Predators," they are nobodies, society's rejects. Like Ferril, they feel alienated from the mainstream of society, victims of war, modernization taken to the extreme. Hence, as society's rejects, they live under a freeway, wandering the streets at night in search of trouble. Their isolation results in a spectator-like view of their world and, as the title indicates, they don't like what they see because they know they can't have it.

In "Someone Else's Life" (Wages), Haslam has offered still another thematic variation of the cause and effect of modernization. For example, this story contains Haslam's poetic tribute to the land and his personal angst at his Great Central Valley's loss to progress manifested in its growing cities. As "the old vaquero," Arnold
Rojas, noted, "'Some day we will have to plow up the malls to plant something we can eat'" (Haslam, *Voices* 17).

In this story the focus is on the narrator's childhood relationship with his father's foreman, Wade. Initially, Wade is just a fishing partner—someone to take him fishing—a surrogate for a too busy father. However, as the relationship develops, Wade awakens the boy to more than the mere pleasures of nature. This fact is poetically conveyed to the reader by the narrator himself:

Wade taught me far more than how to catch fish... he had shown me how the wildness, the privacy of the canyon could strip—as from an ancient exfoliating stone—layer after layer of civilized complexity from us while we stood, stiff-legged and vulnerable, urinating dark, moving shadow shapes on boulders. (14)

The eloquence of this passage is a far cry from that conveyed by the "pissin contests" of other stories, revealing Haslam's versatility and skill with the language.

Haslam has obviously made Wade his exemplar of man in communion with nature, the antithesis of the tenets of modernization. This is vividly portrayed in his description of the man fishing:

He stood as though rooted, unmoving from the waist down... Wade appeared intent on some secret communion, standing slightly bent forward from the waist, holding his rod where it mated with the reel in his right hand while his left hand tested the tense line... He slowly raised, then lowered the rod's tip, moving his left arm away from his body in a long, careful arc, pulling the line as he did so... all the while he leaned forward,
shoulders hunched, head thrust out on his long, powerful neck like a threatening viper's. (17)

What's more, he is almost Wordsworthian in his advice to the boy to

'. . . remember what's real--if ya remember that water up there, and them rocks and fish--don't get caught in all this--' he gestured at the honky tonks and flashing signs by which we now drove '--you'll be O.K. Just remember what's real and keep a tight hold on it.' (19)

The significance of this message becomes even more poignant when the suicidal death of Wade is juxtaposed with the narrator's revelation that "The Corps of Engineers dammed the canyon" and replaced it with supermarkets, trailer parks, honky tonks, and neon lights (20).

It is in Haslam's "Earthquake Summer" (Hawk Flights), that he is most declaratory in his tribute to the land. It is made sacred when, in the story, the narrator's Uncle Pedro's field is found to be a former Indian village and burial ground. What's more, its violation is treated more dramatically as when the Indian woman, La Bruja (or witch), warns, if the land is tilled, of the consequences of "disturbing Earth Mother" (42). Ignoring the prophecy, the boy, at his Uncle's instruction, continues plowing the land and, as he does, the prophecy comes true: "The land was shuddering me off itself like a fly-plagued mare" (44). The result is that
Uncle Pedro gives up the Indian field and "there weren't any more major shakes that summer" (45). Uncle Pedro had learned to respect the land, an attitude in conflict or in contrast to the characteristic indifference of modernization.

Once again Haslam has moved from the lessons of his locale to explore and encompass the more universal themes of man's dislocation, his loss of identity and its sometimes violent consequences, and a tribute to the land itself. His artistic virtuosity gives credence to his belief that "the question of universality of power hinges more on an artist's talent and craft than on an area's limitation . . . . While grandest human dramas can happen any place, they must happen some place . . . . What matters finally is a writer's genius in the use of material" (Voices 19,21).
Chapter Five

Great Central Valley:

Haslam's Means to Making The Connection

Once the Western writer has cleared his pages of the fog and mist of the mythical West, debunking old stereotypes, he may proceed to the second phase of his rediscovery. This involves, as noted in Part One, Chapter Three, reconnecting the real past with the present, and is what Stegner referred to as "rigging the lines."

Haslam has chosen as his real past and present "The Great Depression to the Great Expression," the latter a term coined by him to indicate "today's burst of creative activity" (Voices 24). Having been born on March 18, 1937, this period spans Haslam's lifetime. Thus, his choice, as with his locale, is one about which he knows.

It is no coincidence that this period coincides with the so-called Dust Bowl migration of the 30s when large numbers of Southwesterners settled in the Great Central Valley to be forever referred to as "Okies," their plight immortalized in Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath. Indeed, they were an integral part of Haslam's locale's history. What's more, and equally important to Haslam the writer, they were to play an integral part in his childhood experiences. Haslam reveals this in a letter to Gerald Locklin in which he states:
"Everyone from Oildale was called an Okie when I was a kid... and most of my friends... were from migrant families."

(Locklin 6).

The result of Haslam's first-hand experience is an insight and understanding of the Okies, both of which are evident in his essay "The Okies: Forty Years Later" (Voices 16-34). In this piece, Haslam not only gives an academic account of the Okies' history, he traces their political views and explains their cultural mores as well. He also voices his respect for their mobility based on their willingness to do hard work and in doing so, pays a special tribute to the progeny of the original migrants, Haslam's generation and childhood companions. It is this generation that has had to bear the scars "from those painful sometimes desperate days" replete with their labels of "parasites" and "idlers." However, though "'them thangs hurt,'" recalls one of Haslam's Okie contemporaries, "'but they helped too.'" He further adds, "'I know they made me sore and I just determined we'd make'er.'" And, as Haslam comments, "Make'er the Okies have..." (26). In short, his Valley's Okies are exemplars of the successful integration of a past and present.

This integration Haslam identifies as their having sifted through their past, taking not its uglier parts, but those which enable them to face the present
with what he refers to as a "blues-like" ability to accept it. He identifies that which they took as rural values, which manifest themselves in strong family ties, traditional sex roles, and dedication to hard work (32). It is these values, according to Haslam, which gave their lives stability. It is the glue of their lives which enables them to confront the adversities of the present. Hence, they become his "rigging lines" between the past and present, filling the chasm created by the rejection of the mythical heroes of formula Westerns. They provide his stories with characters who represent a real past and present.

Furthermore, the Valley's Okies' grit and guts have afforded Haslam the insight into what it takes to make it and, in turn, what happens when you don't. These lessons from his locale are evident in his stories in which the "good-guys" are the ones who have made the necessary integration, whereas his least likeable characters are those who are unwilling/unable to accept their past or to confront their present and future. Hence, they experience no growth, but remain, instead, stagnant, frustrated, and alienated; in short, imbalanced. Thus, typically, Haslam has used the stability of the Okies as a springboard to the universal themes which deal with both the positive and negative shaping influences of
one's past, including those that reveal the rewards of a successful integration of one's past and present.

For example, in the very first story of his first collection of short stories entitled, no less, Okies, Haslam has not only given tribute to the Okies, but has incorporated these more universal themes. The story is called "The Doll," and at its beginning we meet Haslam's character, Mrs. Hollis, who embodies the middle-class hostility so often expressed toward the Okies. What's more, she, because of her prejudices, is representative of the antithesis to a successful integration, her prejudices an ugly carry-over from the past. This is immediately evident as the story opens with her expression of contempt at seeing in the distance "two little ragged boys."

"'Okies,'" she thought, "'... Something really ought to be done about them'" (1).

When the two Okies come to her door looking for work, her prejudices take on a more personal hostility: "She didn't want them drippy nosed Okies near her any longer than necessary" (1). Her imbalance limits her vision as symbolized by the closed screen door through which she speaks to them. What's more, her narrow vision manifests itself in her suspicion because, as she notes, "'they'll steal anything if a person isn't careful'" (2). Her attitude is not surprising. Her vision dictates that
Okies are "like animals," non-persons, an attitude echoed by the members of her bridge club.

Even Mrs. Hollis' association of the Okie "idyet" boy with her childhood's wetting doll is indicative of the non-person identity with which she labels them. This association will take on a bitter irony at the conclusion of the story when the Okie wets his pants, signaling a bodily function that graphically identifies him as a fellow human being. This reality, however, was one that Mrs. Hollis' narrow-mindedness had not allowed for. Hence, she vomits, her final statement so indicative of her warped imbalance: "'Jesus didn't mean them . . . . He didn't. He wouldn't. He didn't!'" (12). Haslam has skillfully used the vomit on her "pink rug" to represent the ugliness that stains the lives of so-called "polite society."

In the second story of this same collection, entitled "California Christmas," Haslam allows his reader to see the other side of the picture, debunking the myth that Okies settled in California because of its liberal welfare programs. Instead, through his Okie narrator, he gives the reader the "ain't how it was" and, in turn, the realities of how it was: the sun hadn't "shone all year round out west" and jobs were not "a-begging"; "Daddy" was forced to do day labor and "momma" was sick; the weather
was "just cold and terrible foggy"; and they were forced to live in a cardboard shanty (13-14).

What's more, Haslam uses this story to pay tribute not only to the Okies' physical means of survival, but also to their psychological ones, as well. This he identifies as their ability to maintain their dignity even though they know they cannot send their shabbily dressed children to school for fear of ridicule, and cannot attend the church of their choice for fear of ostracism. Hence, Haslam attributes this dignity to the Okies' ability to accept their plight while meeting head-on the realities of the present.

The latter is literally portrayed in the story when the Okies confront the church people who come to the Okie camp to give them their handouts. The Okies, recognizing their hypocrisy, refuse them. On the other hand, the do-gooders fail to understand. Their insight, in contrast to the Okies', has been dwarfed by the dictates of their bigotry, their imbalance revealed in their confused reactions to the Okies' rejection: "Here we are trying to help you people... and this is the thanks we receive" (14). Even the preacher exhibits this imbalance as he "sputtered," unable to see his church members' hypocrisy (15).

Later, as the Okies share the day's experiences/realsities, one of the members insightfully says, "These
ain't bad folks out here. They're just skeered, skeered as they can be'" (17). The clarity of this insight, its absence of bitterness, is indicative of a balance that Haslam believes comes when one faces reality, the trademark of his Okies and the antithesis to the closed-screen-door-vision of the preceding story's Mrs. Hollis.

Haslam repeatedly throughout his works extends this insight to those characters who have experienced both the good and bad of life. The implication is that this is a criterion necessary for wholeness. Though Blakean in its inherent message that without contraries there is no progression, it is obviously a tenet derived from Haslam's associations with the Okies of his locale.

In his "Sojourner" (Hawk Flights), this message is again implied through the character Wing Nu, a Chinese typical of the many who saw, through their recruitment by American companies, an opportunity to find the American dream. Wing Nu, instead, finds prejudice, exploitation, thievery, and physical abuse. What's more, he is witness to the corruption of Western commercial practices as represented by gambling houses, whorehouses, and opium dens. However, amidst this disillusionment and, as Haslam would note, because of it, Wing Nu is able to recognize that "'These Americans . . . [are] so immature, so uncertain, so frightened'" (2). This recognition in the
face of adversity mirrors the earlier noted Okie comment "'them thangs hurt but they helped too.'"

Haslam's "Hawk Flights An American Fable" (Hawk), reveals the writer's versatility in that he makes his narrator an Indian who has been captured by the white men. Hence, the whites are "savages," the chaplain the "shaman," and the calvary "blue warriors." Furthermore, by doing so, Haslam has skillfully given literal connotation to the insightfulness displayed by the Indian who, amidst his captives, recognizes, and pities them as "hopeless creatures who possessed no magic at all, no union with Earth or Sky, only the ability to hurt and kill." What's more, they were beneath his hate, "sad and dangerous like a broken rattlesnake thrashing around wildly to kill whatever neared it because it could not save itself" (16).

Interestingly, it is the result of a dream that he kills and in turn is killed. However, his dream was not cowardly escapism, but his Indian way of freeing the spirit and assuming the broader bird's-eye vantage of the hawk. It is such an all-encompassing view which Haslam professes in his stories, one that encompasses the good and bad of life, not the fog and mist shrouded vision of the mythical West. Haslam does, as evidenced in his expose of the New West, practice what he preaches.
Haslam's versatility is also seen in his story "Joaquin" (Hawk Flights), a story involving the filming of a script based on the legendary bandit Joaquin Murrieta. The female lead is named Mae and, as her name implies, she is a Mae West caricature. Contained within this story is Haslam's tribute to the power of the past, a universal theme rooted in the experience of his Valley's Okies. In this story, the past is, of course, the legendary Joaquin, one that will entice, enthrall, and sensitize the vamp, Mae.

With the story's end, Haslam hints of this seduction with his description of Mae as if in the final throes of lovemaking:

"Mae Lamont laid back in her chair under the oak and puffed air over her warm face. She felt languid, she felt good, and she closed her eyes, drifting into easy repose where she heard those hints of sound in the breeze, those memories, as she felt its warm breath press her." (76)

The wind is representative of the seducer from the past, the legendary Joaquin. It is also symbolic of living memories, influences of the past.

"Mad Stone", in this same collection, is still another variation of this tribute. What's more, the past in this story is also given mythical connotation. The "mad stone," hence the title, is a primitive belief in magic, specifically the curative powers of "a funny lookin' rock" belonging to the old Mexican "witch" doctor
named Cruz. Initially, the narrator of the story is skeptical of these powers, referring to them as a "damn Mexican trick" and to Cruz as "loco." However, at end of the story, the narrator is cured by the stone; hence, the paradox: Who is really "loco"? Furthermore, it is Haslam's recognition of those vestiges from the past that are integral to the continued existence of man, those that often are mythical because they are unexplainable. Unlike the myths of prejudice, they address the spiritual needs of man.

Gerald Locklin has noted that Haslam, like his contemporary, Rudolfo Anaya, has a respect for "magic, the intuition, native intelligence and shared wisdom of people not yet alienated from their ethnic heritage" (31). Indeed, Haslam's respect is manifested in his interest in the Indian culture recorded in his nonfiction books, tapes, and essays on their traditions.

What's more, Haslam's own spirituality was evidenced in an April 1988 class discussion in which he related how his friends sometimes question his "anti-intellectual" church-going, considering he is "a university man." His response to them was that there are some things unexplainable; one just has to believe. Hence, Haslam does not negate the myths of the past, but only those that inhibit or restrict man's spiritual progress or growth.
In "Trophies" (Snapshots), on the other hand, Haslam has focused on those negative, restricting influences of the past through two of its characters. The first, a doctor in Oakland, California, pays a visit to his boyhood home of Oildale. It is during this visit that he becomes reunited with the second, Rodney, a boyhood associate he knew but never befriended, as revealed in his cynical comment:

... if anyone had told me then (in high school) that I'd one day share a civilized cup of coffee with Rodney Phelps, I'd have considered the speaker crazy. I didn't imagine Rodney would share anything in a civilized fashion, or that he could. (21)

Hence, the doctor is representative of the present in contrast to Rodney, whose 1950s "costume" has marked him "a walking time capsule" (23). The lure of the past is symbolized by the visit itself, as revealed in the passages that explain the doctor's meeting with Rodney:

In truth, I hadn't thought about him for years ... but when I spied the large man lurching up Oildale Drive toward the river that first evening home, I'd recognized him even in dusk ... sensing all the while an ancient discomfort lurching into my belly. I was driving by in heavy traffic, so I couldn't stop ... Briefly, I was swept back to my adolescent years and nearly allowed my car to drift into the wrong lane, into an accident of my own. (22)

These lines foreshadow the tragedy that evolves from this visit into the past, for it is through the reminiscent boasting of Rodney that the doctor learns that
one of Rodney's adolescent sexual "conquests" was the woman to whom he is now married. The effect is traumatic, even the setting of the "new McDonald's on North Chester Avenue" (23) did not sway the impact of this gossip from the past. The resulting imbalance incurred by the doctor capitulates into stagnation that is literally represented by the doctor's lack of action in assisting the drowning Rodney. In short, his inertia is a manifestation of his imbalance, the lack of a successful integration of past and present.

Rodney, too, is a victim of the past. Haunted by the memory of an accident which took the life of his steady girl, he consistently returns to the scene of the accident, the river. Its significance as a vestige of the past is noted with the site's description as unchanged, the lights of the traffic passing over its bridge "little different than they had been thirty years before . . . ." (27). The result is that Rodney drowns. Hence, both characters experience tragedy because of their imbalance arising from dwelling too much in the past, not the integration that is so necessary for their growth.

It is not a coincidence that Haslam has followed this story with "The Souvenir," for this too deals with the effects of remaining in the past. However, in contrast to the preceding story, Baldwin, the 40-year Shell Oil employee and his blue-haired wife, Myrtle, are
unsuspecting, naive, and thus, more true-to-life examples of people trapped by their past. Their adventure into the present is a mere trip into San Francisco during which they are curious and indignant spectators of the various ways the "younger folks" dress. What's more, their narrow vision is manifested in their comments about the "dark faces and strange costumes" they see out their bus window.

Once in the City, Baldwin sees a hippie and tries to take his picture. This is an ordinary enough event, one that is seemingly harmless except when viewed in Haslam's context: Baldwin is a spectator to the realities of life—a taker, not a giver—and will obviously remain so as the story concludes with him scurrying off to take a picture of a street person, another reality of their present. Hence, the double edged meaning of the title "Souvenir" as indicative of something taken, not given.

Through his story "Passages" (Okies), Haslam has given his reader an example of the growth that can be achieved when one learns from his past and takes with him its lessons versus the souvenir-mentality of the preceding story. The past here is represented by the boyhood dream of owning an air rifle. This dream is realized by the boy in the story, upon which he immediately starts to shoot at birds, eventually killing one. His joyful exclamations of "'I got it! . . . . I really got it!'" (58), however,
quickly dissipate with the reality of the moment: "Its orange breast seemed to have shrunk and it was smeared with bright blood. The bird was small and helpless, not the proud beast he had sighted in the tree" (59). His concluding lines, "'Oh, . . . oh no'" (59), signal the boy's painful passage into manhood replete with its hard realities, for "run as he might, and weep, the robin remained dead" (59). Painful as this experience was, the boy had grown, taking with him his lesson from the past, one, as the story reveals, he would remember for the rest of his days.

Sometimes the rites of passage and their inherent growth are physically painful as in "Rider" (Snapshots), when a young boy, Charles, suffers the satisfying pain of successfully riding a bull in the rodeo. The boy entering the rodeo was motivated by his grandfather's persuasive reminiscences of his days as a black rodeo rider, the latter representative of a world unexplored by the formula Western but here exposed by Haslam.

This is not a story applauding the old versus the new. The grandfather knows "them ol' days over" (44). This fact is made explicit when the boy tries to play cowboy in the city by "rustling a horse from the mounted police stable in Golden Gate Park," for which he is picked up by detectives, his crime: "ripping off a pig's horse" (45). Haslam's juxtaposition of the era's variety of
vernaculars reveals instead some of the inadequacies of both the past and present. However, this is a story that speaks to the necessity of taking from the past those ideas essential to survival in the present, ideas that, as Haslam implies, are sorely lacking in modern society's single-parent homes. The implication of this is revealed in the grandfather's lines to his daughter:

'You a good momma, baby, but you don't know what it like for a boy to grow. That boy goin' find him some way to be a man, and I reckon what I gives him a damn sight better'n what the street give him.' (44)

Also, therein lies the crux of the grandfather's "carry ons bout cowboys 'n Indians" (44).

The boy's integration of the old and new is represented by his successful bull ride at the rodeo. His award is the growth of the passage rite, signified at the story's end by his being offered to share a drink with the old black veteran cowboy, Boise Jones. This integration and the resulting growth mirrors that exemplified by the real life Okies of Haslam's Great Central Valley.

The attempt at this integration is the focus of Haslam's "Cowboys" (Okies). In this story, two oilfield workers make available to the summer replacement college kid referred to as "Cowboy," their world's rites of passage. He is obviously of a different, newer world, as evidenced by his red sports car, long hair, and love beads. The difference is humorously revealed by the
oilfielder's critical remarks, "'Is it a boy or a girl?'" (50), and "'Reckon we ought to buy him some ribbons to go with them beads?'" (51) However, the young man eventually earns their respect because, as noted by the narrator/oilfield worker, "The kid turned out to be one hell of a worker" (51). Hence, he earned the opportunity to be initiated into their world.

This rite, since it includes unbuttoning the fly and painting the genitals with "dope," on the surface appears to be emasculation of the newcomer (58). However, as revealed in Haslam's Master thesis The Language of the Oil Fields, this is a rite known to the men of the oilfield as "lifting." Haslam gives a detailed description of this rite in his thesis:

One important function of lifting is to show that the group cannot be easily entered; it says the profession is special and, in so doing, affirms the meaning of each individual roughneck's life, a very important point in the life of a blue-collar worker. (51)

What's more, Haslam explains the exposing of the newcomer's (the "weevil's") genitals and the application of "dope," (a semi-caustic sealing compound) is a practice that bears resemblance to the circumcision rites of primitive societies that played upon castration anxiety (48-54).

This is intentionally unexplained in the story, the consequences of which are violent as the young man
retaliates with a gunfight in which Shorty, one of the oilfield workers, is killed. It is not without irony that the young man's recourse, an imitation of the old Wild West gunfight of the formula Western, results in death versus the playfulness of the oilminer's "lifting" that asserted their rights. Hence, once again the reader is exposed to Haslam's statement on the inadequacies of the myths of the formula Western.

However, because Haslam had not included the explanation of lifting in the story, the full impact on the reader is lost. An explanation would have better uncovered the universality of its theme. As it is, the reader is left with mixed emotions: Did the oilminers ask for it? Was the young man justified in retaliating, though obviously his choice was much too violent? What's more, the nonfictional rite of passage has been lost to many of Haslam's contemporaries' analyses of the story.

The failure to make this transition is also revealed in Haslam's somewhat macabre tale entitled "Heat" (Wages). In this story, the scientist is unable to accept the reality of his wife's history of promiscuity, even though "he had known about her flaw before he'd known her" (81).

Once he was married to her, her past haunted him to the point that he suffered a nervous breakdown, a
manifestation of the imbalance of a man whose attention is too much on the past, a fact noted by his psychiatrist:

'Let the past be . . . you can't change it. Live for the present. Don't approach relationships with one eye on your wife's past problems and you won't rekindle them in her or in yourself.' (83)

However, as the story reveals, he does not heed this advice. Hence, the human spirit that requires the recognition of the realities of past and present, its good and bad intact, too long suppressed, literally explodes, not unlike the spontaneous combustion of his experiments. The necessity to recognize man's good and bad, Blake's two contrary states of the human soul, is subtly hinted at with Haslam's quote of a line from the poet's "Tyger": "What was that line he'd heard in his class? 'Did He who made the lamb make Thee?'" (82) Haslam's Okies, the product of such contraries, would nod affirmatively; so would Haslam.

The story "Happily Ever After" (The Wages), is a poignant tribute to the influences of the past through the narrator's recollections of those who had died prematurely. It is told in a second-person narrative, as the experiences related mirror the reader's experiences. Hence, the "yous" of the story are assimilated with the reader's own recollections of those deceased of our past who keep slipping in and out of our everyday present. As the story reveals, these are those visitors from yesterday
who are responsible for today's "If only's"; that enable "you" to relive a "once more"; remind "you" of your own immortality; or allow "you" to transcend time.

However, the most revealing line that speaks to the power of the past is spoken at the beginning of the story when the narrator recalls the death of one of his former girlfriends: "Rena's death," he says, "broke the chain of being; she had given you life, she had given you masculinity, now both were in jeopardy. Some essential balance was upset and you never fully right it" (69).

Haslam's "Snapshots," in the collection of the same name, is even more explicit in identifying the influences of the past on the present. The past in this story is represented by Velma Mae's photo album and the snapshots it contains. The story's action is confined to her looking through the album; hence, it is also her story, for "Velma and her snapshots were the sum of herself" (116). In this story, the influences of the past, her snapshots, are given the power to bring about both joy and/or sorrow in what we were, are, and could have become, the latter so poignantly revealed as the woman tenderly kisses the photo of a lost love "one last time."

It is in "Matinee" (Snapshots), that Haslam the poet and Haslam the prose writer join, as this story is one in which he has given structure and content equal
attention. For example, the myths of the movie screen are juxtaposed with realities of life and these are, in turn, separated by cinematic format such as "cut," "Scene I," "Take 1." What's more, it is an organic piece, in that myth and reality merge with the final "cut." It is a gradual process as the myth of the movie screen moves from the typical formula Western to those Western movies, such as the Misfits, that debunked, or, as Don Graham noted in his essay on Western cinema, "announced the end of the West" (1257). Coinciding with this movement is the progression of real life incidents as they move from those of the past to those of the present.

The merging of the two worlds, myth and reality, is revealed in the final lines in which the speaker's actions and words mirror those of the movie screen:

Suddenly one of the old men in the picture, the one standing, gasps and grabs his chest, swayin' in front of the bench, and my breath stops, my breath stops, my chest constricts.

'Oh,' he gasps, 
'Oh,' I gasp. 
'Oh,' we gasp.
(70)

The story's complexity does leave room for many interpretations, but it is obviously a tribute to reality versus the myth, while simultaneously Haslam's poetic statement on the evolutionary nature of life, its "scenes" evolving into the whole "show." Implied, of course, is interdependence of past and present exemplified by his Valley's Okies.
Chapter Six
Great Central Valley:
Haslam's Survivors,
His Means to Celebrate the Human Spirit

"The contemporary writers," Haslam notes in his introductory essay, "are discovering a new West that can face the threat and promise of the future . . . with a verve and belief that life is not only worth living but worth fighting for . . ." ("Rediscovering" 1024). This is literature of survival, a far cry from the mythical Western literature of escapism.

As noted in the preceding chapter, the Great Central Valley's Okies are Haslam's prototypes of survivors. "Today," he applauds, "they are state legislators and used car salesmen, waitresses and college professors . . . they are, in a word, Californians" (Voices 26).

Thus, the Okies of his Valley, his childhood associates and their long-time-hard-times-hard-work-do-for-yourself heritage, have undoubtedly shaped Haslam's own personal philosophy. The latter was revealed inadvertently by the author during an April 1988 class lecture, the subject of which was Haslam's favorite author, Robinson Jeffers. Haslam explained that Jeffers'
heroes were "always maimed but staggering," representative of the poet's belief that men must face their limitations, their transitoriness in the grander cyclical life-and-death scheme of the universe. To oppose this was to suffer the problems of disillusionment, to deny the enjoyment of man's limited time, and to shun our primordial ancestry. In short, it was Jeffers' belief, according to Haslam, that man's acceptance of his place in the universe was essential to liberating him to enjoy his moment of the larger scheme, and enabling him to face "the abyss" of the inevitable.

Haslam further stated that he does not doubt the possibility of the abyss, defined by him as the deceased mortal's loss of consciousness, the assimilation of his matter into the greater cosmos. Hence, it was Haslam's belief that because of this possibility, "the only thing important in life is love and sharing." It was this that, in turn, helped him to face the possibility of the "abyss."

Intrinsic to Haslam's comments is his definition of the human spirit, one easily transferrable to the Okies of his Valley. Obviously, they have provided him living proof of his philosophy, shaping it and, through their example, confirming it. The result is that the Okies' grit and guts have provided Haslam the author a catalyst for his stories' universal themes celebrating the human
spirit. This proof and/or confirmation would not have been available to him in the mythical West where the human spirit was dissipated by the formula that required the hero's victory. Hence, it was again Haslam's locale, his "other California," that afforded his writings a means to achieve universal significance.

This is demonstrated in his fiction by his consistent emphasis on the struggle and man's propensity to continue in spite of the odds. Even in those stories where the characters behave in an unorthodox manner, boasting, bragging, engaging in "pissin contests," Haslam never passes judgment. In turn, the reader never ridicules as he/she is aware, through the author's debunking, that they are only manifestations of men resorting to behavior patterns established by their codes necessary for survival. In short, they are who they are because of where they are: real people in a world in which they are struggling to survive. And there lies the message or their value; they are at least upright and making the attempt. There are no real villains in Haslam's fiction; there are just people trying to live out their lives.

Haslam has chosen specific stories to give emphasis to this human spirit. For example, in "So Slender a Splinter of Song" (Snapshots), the protagonist, Red Holmes, is a washed up seen-better-times country song
writer. His life was fraught with bad decisions: he drank too much, resulting in the loss of his first two wives; he forfeited his chance at Nashville when he wouldn't sign a contract; and he accepted a guitar in payment for a gambling debt even though, as his wife reminded him, "'You need another guitar like a sow needs a sidesaddle'" (40). More symbolic of the man's down-and-out state is the fact that, as he notes at the start of the story, his "songs don't come no more, not like they used to" (36). More revealing, however, are the contents of the song that he does compose:

GIVE ME (echo)
ANOTHER CHANCE TO START
WE CAN'T BE APART
YOUR SECOND STORY MAN
TELL ME ONE MORE STORY
TELL ME ONE MORE LIE
TELL ME ANYTHING YOU WANT
BUT
DON'T
TELL
ME
GOOD-
BYE (36)

Revealed in these lyrics is a testimony to man's wish to not give up the struggle; to be given another chance replete with its adversities. Red exhibits this tenacity in the story as he recognizes his mistakes, his lost loves and, in the end, even attempts to reconcile with one of his former wives: "'Couldn't we just meet once in a while?'" (41) As expected, she says, "'No,'"
and as a result, Red "got snot-flingin' drunk that night" (41). However, Haslam has skillfully ended the story with the song quoted at its beginning, its placement symbolic of the man's continuing the struggle even though "The music ain't there no more" (42).

In "Estero" (The Man Who Cultivated Fire), Haslam, in Robinson Jeffers' fashion, used nature to represent a greater power than man. It is the stream, the Estero, which incessantly wreaks havoc on the lives of the people who inhabit its territory. Haslam's tribute to the power and immortality of nature versus the vulnerability and transitoriness of man is revealed in his description of the stream, as its words elevate it to the awe-inspiring, the divine, and the organic:

The larger stream winding through our property --the Estero--reveals an oceanic link and it too was a continual source of wonder to my sister Suzie and me . . . its estuarial water ebbs and flows with the tides . . . it is a sleepy, secret filament of the sea, its channels full of dark water that reveals at unpredictable times the primal surging of its source . . . . (32)

In the story, the stream will eventually overflow, causing a flood that nearly destroys the narrator's farm and, most essential to Haslam's theme, the dog and long time companion of Manuel, a farmhand who had lived for many years "in a small cabin on the strange stream's bank . . . ." (33). Eventually, heartbroken, Manuel chooses to join his canine companion, and gets in
his canoe and drifts out to sea. Haslam's description of the old man in his boat conveys the transitoriness, but, more importantly, the grand caravan of life that links us with our primordial roots and the progeny to come: "... and there was the canoe with the old man lying in it like some ancient warrior consigned to the sea" (39).

Haslam will continue this life-and-death cyclical theme with the story's conclusion when the narrator, now old, reflectively says, "And mine, my spirit is traveling its own Estero, swimming toward Shep and Manuel and the freedom of that secret sea beyond hills or memories of the salty wind of coastal canyons" (39). It is also in this passage that Haslam makes explicit use of the stream, the Estero, as representative of man's moment in time, moving slowly but inevitably toward his mortality, "the secret sea." Hence, its unpredictable floods are symbolic of life's tribulations and man's incessant struggles.

In "Upstream," in the same collection of short stories, Haslam again uses nature to symbolize man's struggle. However, exhibiting his virtuosity as a writer, he has put it in humorous context. What's more, the emphasis in this story is less on the symbol and more on the struggle, specifically, as the title "upstream" implies, on man's tenacity. This is represented by the narrator's somewhat eccentric Uncle Arlo, who, at the start of the story, has jumped naked into the Kern River
where he remains for several days, not swimming, but keeping abreast of the current. When Uncle Arlo learns from his nephew, the narrator, that Aunt Mazie Bee has plans to capitalize on the publicity created by this "upstream swimmer" by having him declared "crazy" and thus qualified for a freak show, he escapes by swimming upstream into the rapids. He inevitably drowns and through Aunt Mazie Bee's response, "'He would'" (76), the reader learns that crazy Uncle Arlo has had the last word and is thus the winner. His victory, however, was implied throughout the story with its focus on the man's struggle in the water as he establishes a rhythm that enables him to stay afloat. Haslam has clothed in humor the universal struggle of man's fight and ability to adapt to life's trials and tribulations, its currents.

The "Constant Coyote" (Snapshots) is one of Haslam's most satisfying stories because the reader is given a 360 degree vantage point. We see the past, the present, and, because of its cyclical life-death-life motif, we have a good idea what to expect of the future. The story starts with a chant:

Agreed, water ouzels dance through the mad music of mountain stream . . . .
Agreed, quaking aspens disintegrate in wind . . . .
Agreed, I never was what I used to be . . .
Agreed. Agreed. Agreed.

(13)
The repetition of the word "agreed," contributes to the effect of its being an Indian chant. Hence, it is an ancestral chant, symbolically conveying a message which speaks of "in the beginning," in keeping with the story's celebration of the continuity of life. What's more, the repetition of the word "agreed" is in itself exemplary of the balance of the lead character, Clint, and his recognition of his past and the realities of his present, one of which is the fact that he is dying of cancer. However, the protagonist is Haslam's exemplar of a man who admittedly enjoys "the contest," his only regret at dying was its diminished quality.

The narrator/protagonist reveals his philosophy in comments made in reference to a coyote who has been killed by the state hunter, the very coyote who had "haunted his stock," but who had provided him the thrill of combat so necessary to a man whose zest for life does not permit him to be a mere spectator. However, the coyote has reappeared with her pups in his pain-killer-induced dream. She is his "multiplied nemesis" but he "welcomed the old scamp back even tripled" (13). He does so because that, at least, despite his impending death, verifies that "the eternal struggle would be renewed" (14). Hence, Haslam has used the coyote and her pups as representative of the interdependence of the past and the present as one that is organic, like the
grand caravan of William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis"—hence the story's title "The Constant Coyote."

This life-death motif is further conveyed by the spiritual visits of Clint's grandfather and father during which one of the spirits advises the narrator to "'Play out your hand . . . . The years don't mean one hell of a lot, but how you live does'" (18). This is not a statement that hints of finality, but one that implies that someone will always be around to continue the game, "the continuing contest." What's more, the spirit's advice mirrors Haslam's personal Jeffersian philosophy regarding the priorities of life and the necessity of making the best of one's moment in time.

The site of the story, the redwood grove, is still another symbol of the grand caravan of life, the interdependence of past and present and future. It had been the family's "shared secret," hence, the narrator's connection with past and future. Clint speaks to this significance when he says:

I had never met my dad, and hadn't ever seen my granddad either . . . . but we had all three shared knowledge of this grove of that bedding place within the hollowed goliath where my dad was built who built me on a feather bed who built Len in the backseat of an aging car, who built Timmy and Karen God knows where, all of us products of the same lightning that emptied the tree. (16)
With the story's ending Haslam pays a final tribute to man's tenacity when the narrator, though dying of cancer, makes love to his wife. In short, he is a participant of life to its very end, indicative of a man who loves "the contest," hence, Haslam's salute to the human spirit. The story appropriately ends with a chant similar to that with which it begins, the format itself conveying the life-death cycle of humanity. It is with this story that Haslam displays his versatility as a poet, short story writer, and lover of mankind.

Of course, Haslam's salute to his fellow human beings as fellow participants in life's struggle does include one which has an Okie as its lead character. The story is, in fact, called "Hey Okie!" (Hawk Flights). In this story, the Okie, Mr. Barnhill, is described by the narrator as "a clod" and a "leading contender" for the "sloppiest man in Kern County." However, it was from Mr. Barnhill that the narrator's father insisted upon buying his eggs, even though, unlike the all-white clean ones at the store, Mr. Barnhill's were notorious for being eggs from which you had to "wash chicken shit and straw and feathers" (58). However, as the narrator confesses, the old Okie did have some favorable attributes, one being his ability to tell stories.
As the story unfolds, the reader is to learn that, indeed, Mr. Barnhill contributes much more. This is revealed when the narrator's professor visits the Okie in order to continue his "ongoing examination of the agricultural proletariat," the goal of which was to "give [Dust Bowlers] pride in their heritage and a sense of accomplishment and worth" (59-60). As may be expected, the professor finds quite the opposite and all his book learning is negated. Haslam has used the professor as a foil for the old Okie, as was obvious by the description of the former that was the antithesis of that given to the latter, including the facts that the professor "used four-bit words" and drove a "fancy Datsun sports car" (60). However, with the conclusion of the story, the Okie comes away as the more educated with his debunking of the professor's book-learning, including the exposure of the failures of Roosevelt's Recovery Program; but, more importantly, with the confirmation that the Okies have pride in their heritage and accomplishments, and do indeed have feelings of self worth.

These "lessons" learned by the professor as a result of his visit, however, are symbolically stated by Haslam in the story's conclusion, as one of the Okie's broken eggs reveals "a greasy fingerprint on one edge of the yellow, smudged, but distinct" (65). This is Haslam's tribute to both men and to a people who have survived to
make their mark on the world. Hence, with this story, Haslam has joined his Okie with that which he represents in his stories: the celebration of all mankind's tenacity and struggles in the continuing greater contest. Haslam's favorite poet, Robinson Jeffers, speaks to this:

Stone-cutters fighting time with marble, you
foredefeated
Challengers of oblivion
Eat cynical earnings, knowing rock splits,
records fall down,
The square-limbed Roman letters
Scale in the thaws, wear in the rain.
The poet as well
Builds his monument mockingly;
For man will be blotted out, the blithe earth
die the brave sun
Die blind and blacken to the heart:
Yet stones have stood for a thousand years,
and pained thoughts found
The honey of peace in old poems.
("To the Stone-Cutters")

Haslam's Okies are his stoncutters, through whom he has found "the honey of peace."
Works Cited


---. Introduction "Recent Trends." Taylor 1162-1166.
---. Introduction "Rediscovering the West." Taylor 1017-1025.


Lavender, David. The Petrified West and the Writer." Haslam, Western Writing. 143-156.


Maguire, James H. "Encountering the West." Taylor 3-7.


Westbrook, Max. Preface. Taylor XV-XX.
Works Consulted


