

STORIES FROM THE NEW WEST: FRANK BERGON'S NEW WESTERN FICTION*

*Monika Madinabeitia
Mondragon University*

Frank Bergon's novel *The Temptations of St. Ed and Brother S* (1993) is the revision of core and periphery identities and cultures. This novel analyses some of strategies that are utilized in the configuration and self-definition of the *I*. The exercise of exclusion and self-alienation practices is part of the devices that are utilized by Bergon's characters. However, the role of the desert is of utmost relevance, for it constitutes the space where diverse cultures and identities clash with each other; in other words, the desert conveys the meeting point of the different representatives of mainstream and minority America. Bergon's arid and hostile desert mirrors the kaleidoscopic nature that characterizes the American West. Bergon's proposes, rather than impose, the federation of diverse identities and interests in order to establish the *I* in coexistence and dialogue with the Other.

Key words: Western American Literature, space, (re)location, identity, core/periphery, semi-core/semi-periphery, homogenisation, diversity.

Frank Bergon (b. 1943) is a critically acclaimed Nevada writer. In 1993 The Western Writers of America made Bergon a finalist for the best novel of the West in recognition of his second work, *The Temptations of St. Ed and Brother S* (1993). In 1998 he was inducted into the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame. The following paper reveals Frank Bergon as a writer of stories that deal with the New West of America. The snapshots and illustrations here provided

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reflect the possibility of considering Bergon's novels as New Western fiction. The adjective *New* implies disruption, novelty, while its combination with *Western* involves unity, bond, with the old American genre. The New Western fiction, as exemplified in Bergon's novels, creates a space of both union and separation, sameness and difference. These concepts of coexistence of diversity, as illustrated in the following pages, will be the key to understand how Bergon "[r]ewrites the Western" (Rosowski 1996:157).

Bergon was born in Ely, Nevada, but when he was very young he moved to the San Joaquin Valley, California, where he lived with his extended family in his grandfather's ranch house. Bergon's maternal grandparents moved to America from the Basque Country around the turn of the twentieth century. When he was young he was not aware of his Basque heritage; he then discovered that he was Basque, as well as American, and this awareness and experience as a Basque-American has significantly influenced his fiction. Bergon received his BA in English at Boston College and also attended Stanford University as a Wallace Stegner Fellow. He completed his PhD in English and American literature at Harvard University, and is now a professor in the English department at Vassar College (New York). Bergon has authored three novels so far, which are *Shoshone Mike* (1987), *The Temptations of St. Ed and Brother S* (1993), and *Wild Game* (1995). As a literary critic, Bergon wrote *Stephen Crane's Artistry* (1975), which was the final outcome of his Ph.D. His collection, *Looking Far West: The Search for the American West in History, Myth, and Literature* (1978), edited in collaboration with Zeese Papanikolas, emerged from the necessity they sensed for an anthology of the central works of western writing. *The Western Writings of Stephen Crane* (1979) is Bergon's continued critical consideration of the West. Bergon is also the editor of *The Wilderness Reader* (1980), the Penguin Classics edition of *The Journals of Lewis and Clark* (1989), and *A Sharp Lookout: Selected Nature Essays of John Burroughs* (1987), all of which mirror his interest in the natural ethos of America.

In relation to his fiction, Bergon based his novel *Shoshone Mike* on historical events and people that constitute the American West of today and yesterday. This novel recreates the last Indian massacre of 1911 in a way that gives space and voice to those who were caught in the story. *Shoshone Mike* is the result of an exhaustive and long research of the tragic event. Nonetheless, Bergon does not take the role of a researcher or historian, but that of a novelist. As he himself declares, "a distinction I made on my own mind is that the burden of the historian is verification, while that of the novelist is verisimilitude" (Río 2000:62). Bergon made up a few characters that participate in the novel, but most were based on people who actually lived the actual tragedy. He refused to

modify any hard, verifiable acts, but he did freely dramatize how historical events may have taken place. In order to create the different figures of *Shoshone Mike* he based the personalities of people on reports of witnesses, newspaper accounts, letters and diaries. These are the characters that dramatize how the tragic event may have occurred in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

The book tells us that in January 1911, in Little High Rock Canyon, northwest of Nevada, four stockmen, Harry Cambron, Peter Erramouspe, John Laxague and Bertrand Indiano –the last three were Basque shepherds– were killed as the consequence of a confrontation with a family, a Native American family. This family belonged to the tribe of the Shoshone and was led by “Mike” –a nickname that was given to him due to the whites’ carelessness for Indian names. This family had left the reservation in Fort Hall, southwestern Idaho, in 1910 and marched south, towards the Nevada desert to live the way their ancestors had lived until they were negated that possibility. After wandering for several months they decided to winter in Little High Rock Canyon. Because of the scarcity of food, Mike aimed to replenish with some local cattle. Unfortunately, the local shepherd from Eagleville, Bertrand Indiano, found the slaughtered cattle and called the other three stockmen. When the Shoshone saw the stockmen, the family thought they would be severely punished for the cattle, so they killed the four men. The dead bodies were found in the bottom of Little High Rock Canyon several days after.

The Shoshone band was pursued for nearly a month by a posse led by Captain J.P. Donnelley of the Nevada State Police. The rest of the posse was formed by a bunch of buckaroos. Sheriff Lamb, also participated in the search for the Indian family. Sheriff Lamb disagreed with Captain Donnelley’s methods and attitude, which is implied as a reason why the sheriff was misinformed about the exact location and the direction of the posse when the battle took place. The Shoshone family was found and attacked at Rabbit Creek. Eight Shoshone, out of the eleven that formed the family, were shot down; one posse member was also killed in the battle. Four Shoshone children survived the attack.

The inquest held in Golconda, where pictures of the so regarded heroic posse were taken, eventually concluded that the gunshot wounds inflicted by Captain Donnelley’s posse were unavoidable and well justified. The posse members, with the exception of Sheriff Lamb, were treated as real heroes. The four Shoshone children were imprisoned, then taken to the Carson Indian Training School, and requested to be taken back to Fort Hall with their relatives. One of Mike’s daughters, Henie, as opposed to all the stories that had been spread about her and her family, asserted that they had killed the four stockmen because they were frightened of them. The family believed that they were going

to punish them for having slaughtered some of their cattle. She declared that all they wanted was to be left alone, to go home and live as they had.

The novel's afterword documents the author's connection to the location where the Last Indian Battle took place. Bergon presents the novel as a possible interpretation of the story, or the different stories, that survived in the minds and words of people that Bergon met when pertaining his fieldwork. Although the event that became a hot issue in the early twentieth century was also gathered by other authors, such as Kenneth D. Scott's *Frozen Grass* (1960), Effi Mona Mack's *The Indian Massacre of 1911 at Little High Rock Canyon Nevada* (1968), or Dayton O. Hyde's *The Last Free Man: The True Story Behind the Massacre of Shoshone Mike and His Band of Indians in 1911* (1973), Bergon thought it was essential to provide a new text that counterbalanced and complemented the polarity and partial view of the previous narrations. As a matter of fact, some critics consider Bergon as "neorealist" and believe that, based on his actual reflection of the "Indian-white conflict of the early twentieth-century Nevada," Bergon places "an especially high value on authenticity" (Maguire 1991:461).

The novel *The Temptations of St. Ed and Brother S* is also set in Nevada, same as *Shoshone Mike*, but it recreates the last quarter of the twentieth century. This novel is also based on a true story. It recreates the tension provoked in the last decades in Nevada by the U.S. Congress, which passed into law the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. This tension concluded in the proposal to create a nuclear waste repository in Yucca Mountain, known as Shoshone Mountain in the novel. Yucca Mountain, a hundred miles northwest of Las Vegas, is the suggested site of a repository to hold the nation's nuclear waste. The U.S. Department of Energy wants to use the mountain to bury 77,000 tons of radioactive waste. In 2002 Yucca Mountain was recommended as the spot for nuclear waste storage. Bush accepted this recommendation, and, although Nevada opposed and campaigned against it, it was eventually approved by the U.S. Senate on July 11, 2002.

The novel is situated in the precise geographical location of the Nevada Nuclear Test Site and the desert-mountain landscape that surrounds it. At the centre of this location, and on the edge of the NTS, we encounter The Hermitage of Solitude in the Desert, a monastery founded by Father Edward St. John Arrizabalaga –an American of Basque heritage. St. Ed, as he is referred to in the novel, is later joined by Brother Simeon, or Brother S. They both long for a mystical experience amidst the desert. St. Ed is entangled in the pursuit of creating his dreamt monastic order for the modern world. This desert is also inhabited by other eccentric characters, exiles and outcasts, who also see the

desert as a possibility to refuge themselves from what they believe as the encroaching mainstream America.

This novel merges different inhabitants of the New West and it represents the multiplicity of interests and energies that characterize it: Amy Chávez, a Mexican-American Bureau of Land Management ranger; the war veteran Straightgut Leo; the old Basque desert rat and prospector Peter Ylarregui; the Las Vegas talk-show host, Nathan Spock; Gilbert Davis, the Bishop that favours the government plans; the government bureaucrats; and the contemporary Shoshone Indians are some of the characters that populate and feature the clashing energies that are located in the very same scenario. This difference is represented in the battle between the nuclear and the spiritual energy, where the federal government represents the evil force versus the spiritual life that the inhabitants of the desert claim for.

This novel, same as *Shoshone Mike*, is also marked by tragedy, by the tragic lack of negotiation of the two poles, by the tragedy of devastating land, by the tragedy of Brother S's suicide. The hermits believe that this tragic decline will be transformed into a new energy that will lead the spirit of the hermitage. They are induced by the necessity to counterforce the energies of the present time and place so as to construct a safer future. They feel that this new energy needs to be filled by the energy of community, rather than by the energy of selfishness and greed.

This novel is thus a scenario for confrontation and juxtaposition. It lacks monologues and creates spaces for dialogue so as to present the complexity of the West, so as to deal with it, rather than avoid it or reduce it to simplifications. Chaos, disorder, instability and conflict are the main characters.

Reviewers have termed the novel *Wild Game* as "eco-thriller" and as a "post-modern tale of crime and punishment" (Morris 1997:37). This novel is also located in Nevada, in the 1980s, although part of the action takes place in southern Idaho. The story that Bergon recreates is based on the true story of Claude Dallas, who was released in 2005 after twenty-two years of prison. He killed two Idaho State fish and game wardens in the 1980s and was pursued throughout the West for fifteen months. He was eventually captured and accused of manslaughter. Nevertheless, Dallas was celebrated as one of the last free and independent men in the West among certain fringe fractions. Dallas is still remembered in Idaho, where some think of him as a murderer and others still consider him as a vestige of the nostalgic Old West. The figure Billy Crockett, who reminds us of two of the Wild West and frontier prototypes –Billy the Kid and Davy Crockett–, represents Claude Dallas in Bergon's novel.

This novel complements the view of the previous two by picturing the diversity of the American West and by raising the conflict that derives from

different Westerners sharing the same space and the same history, both in the Old and in the New West. The author has captured the essence of the Myth of the West that is still latent in New Westerners, primarily featured in the character of Billy Crockett, or in the insight dilemmas that Jack Irigaray presents. Irigaray is a biologist for the Wildlife Division. He is presented as Crockett's "opponent", for he has arduously committed himself to avenge his mate's murder. He also shows relentless concern for the protection of wilderness against poachers like Crockett. However, the similarities and dreams he shares with Crockett declare him as an undefined hero that keeps crossing the line that divides the good and the bad, and also the dimensions of myth and reality. Bergon has created a hybrid being that is featured by multiple and diverse personalities. Some of the personalities that populate him are certain masculine myths and mythologies of the West, as well as his Basque heritage.

The novel starts with the death of two people in the hands of Billy Crockett. Jack Irigaray is in the murder scene, for he has agreed to back up a routine arrest of a poacher in the Black Rock Desert. This "eco-thriller" mirrors Irigaray's obsession to hunt Crockett to the extreme of losing his family, his job, and himself in violence, drinking and smoking. This novel is the initiation journey that Irigaray goes through, where the reader shares with him his outrage, his illusory dreams, his chaos in life, his self-destruction and his eventual recovery and awakening. This character is also a means that the writer uses to reveal other concerns that affect the New West, such as the use of violence, the actual glorification of it, ecology, feminism and ecofeminism. The controversy between the pursued and the pursuer, the victim and the villain, is also a fresh view of traditional sensitivities.

Bergon's three stories relevantly differ among each other at first sight, but these three novels should be considered as a whole, as a trilogy that complements and reinforces each other. This trilogy is a reflection of the complexity that emerges from the past, which is still very latent in the present, and which will significantly affect the future. Besides, despite Bergon's special concern over Nevada, where he was born and spent his first childhood years, the writer moves beyond any type of sectionalism and regionalism, and crosses national, international and time boundaries; that is, this is a nationless and timeless fiction, since the issues that emerge from these readings are applicable here and there; now, yesterday and tomorrow.

Bergon's narrative style is touched by the lack of elaborate and sophisticated long descriptions or speeches. This simplicity makes Bergon's fiction straight-forward and clear. That is, Bergon's unsophistication and simplicity are not to be understood as synonyms of artless fiction or laconic and dry. The novels often raise from the complexity that derives from the New West

and part of its concerning issues. Bergon is not interested in creating a refined narrative; he is interested in stirring the mind of the reader so as to create some social effect. This thus leads to considering Bergon as a socially and politically involved writer who makes use of these stories in order to contribute to society. He feels a sense of duty and commitment as a writer, scholar and individual to extend his involvement "in political and social affairs beyond the reach of [his] scholarship and art" (Bergon in Rio 2001:71). He feels obliged to include in his fiction characters with "a political and social awareness of their citizenship in local and global communities, both human and nonhuman" (ibid.). Bergon lived the era of the 60s, a decade marked by the anxiety of war, the draft, civil rights, racism and feminism. The counterculture movements that framed this decade are visible in these three novels. Bergon's new stories have created a space for revision and intellectual debate so as to create a social environment of interrogation and discussion. Some of the values that this narrative aims to revise are individualism, masculinity, success at the expense of the others, and possessive attitudes towards land. In other words, these stories constitute the social and cultural criticism of the powerful identity monomyth that has featured America and its West for a long time, for too long a time.

Bergon proclaims a New West that cannot be reduced and simplified in totalitarian terms and significations, as the Old West often was. The New West that the writer presents is a West that embodies complex patterns of interwoven discourses, of diverse voices, that despite often contradictory, constitute part of the multicoloured ideologies that need to collide and coexist within the same physical and time space. Bergon discloses a West that outstrips the "monumental [,]... epic and fixated" (Campbell 2000:99) views and landscapes. These three novels provide that space that has often been negated or omitted as the possibility for encounter between difference and diversity. Bergon's narrative thus suggests new perceptions of the West, of the world. Bergon does not aim to deconstruct or debunk previous stories. His endeavour to create a new space of discussion does not lie on the resolution to discredit other stories; on the contrary, he proposes, rather than impose, his fiction as another possibility that needs to be taken into account in order to "win the West again" (Marsden 1980:60). However, this time, the aim is to conquer it with "respect for human dignity and human rights" (ibid.).

Bergon uses old and new elements of the West. His narrative is characterized by ingredients of the Western genre. The presence of a sheriff, cowboys, Native Americans, the desert land, psychologies of prosperity and wealth, the supremacy of the whites, the use of violence as a means to solve problems, the dichotomy of the good and the evil, rural spaces, and the secondary role of women are some of the resources that Bergon has used from the DNA of more traditional and classical Westerns, such as, for instance, Owen

Wister's *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* (1902). Some of the new elements, as opposed to traditional Westerns, that furnish his stories are the presence of first-generation Basques, Basque-Americans, diverse religious authorities, Vietnam veterans, game wardens, Bureau of Land Management rangers and children. However, it is not only the use of elements of convention and invention[†] that distinguish these novels from the more typical Western, but the way he combines them. Bergon distances himself from the Western formula that enabled the reader to foresee the story and its final resolution. Bergon's fiction is characterized by the lack of a single formula. That is, the open-endedness of his stories, the inconclusiveness and non-completion of them are part of the formula he has utilized in order to fictionalise and recreate true stories of the American West. When reading any of the three novels, the reader cannot predict what is about to happen. This is not simply a strategy used by the writer to attract the reader and drag him or her to the end of the story, but part of the flexibility of its fiction versus the rigid script that many traditional Westerns followed. Once the reader has completed the novels, the feeling of unmapped stories, the feeling of characters and plots that are undefinable is a significant constituent. The reader no longer knows what to expect from writers such as Bergon. Bergon reflects the unexpectedness and the lack of definition of life itself, not just in the West, but in a more global dimension.

Bergon should therefore be included among those Western writers that passionately talk about their West, but who fail to limit themselves to restraining and reductionist formulae. Bergon is not the outcome of a sudden change; he is part of the process of reflection through which earlier representations have been revisited and new texts eventually written. Bergon follows the tradition of those such as Stephen Crane, or Wallace Stegner. Bergon also shows many similarities with other contemporary writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko, Larry McMurtry, Terry Tempest Williams, James Welch, Ivan Doig and many others who are embedded and associated in the attempt not to encapsulate the undefinable. Fortunately, there are more and more voices that write about the West from various perspectives and from different experiences. "They write of the West because it is their West ... and recognize the significance of that landscape to both the artistic and the national imaginations" (Morris 1994:xii). However, these writers "also write problematically of the West, a land caught up in the anguish of its own transition ... They stand in a new and tense relation to the place of which they write, and to the writers who

[†] "Conventions represent familiar shared images and meanings and they assert an ongoing continuity of values; inventions confront us with a new perception or meaning which we have not realized before" (Cawelti 1984: 55).

have written of that place before them” (ibid.). The interpretation of their work as constituting a New Western fiction suggests relevant similarities among them; nevertheless, the good news is that they also significantly differ from each other in style and content, which highlights the richness and complexity of the West. That is, there is not a single formula that works for these narrations. As opposed to the traditional Western, the New Western writers do not imitate formulae, but they continually reinvent them so as to create a West that compels a broader and more realistic and inclusive perspective. The New Western fiction, as manifested in Bergon’s novels, creates a context of inclusion for, not only the multiple contemporary voices, but also for voices of the past and the future. In other words, it is a fiction of inclusion, rather than of exclusion. Bergon’s narrative is not aimed as a counternarrative of the Old West, but as a counterbalance of it. Rather than creating a relationship of exclusion, Bergon’s three novels declare that other stories are feasible too.

The New Western, as we can witness in Bergon’s novels, is marked by change, diversity and revision. As reflected in Bergon, partial visions become distortions of the reality; that is why he believes that our storytelling and truth-telling will significantly determine the larger histories, the histories of the peoples. Novelists can choose the stories to hand down to those coming after, which implies that writers are very responsible for the selection they make. This concern is very present in *The Temptations of St. Ed and Brother S*, especially in St. Ed. The abbot is engulfed in the aim to write a book, called *The Death of Time*. This is a project he started after seeing a clock recovered from rubble after the atomic blast at Hiroshima and whose hands stopped at the moment that time had stopped for humankind (Bergon 1993:77). He regards this book as the legacy for those coming after, versus the inheritance they will get with the Shoshone Mountain Nuclear Waste Dump –which is thought to be a majestic creation that will last ten thousand years. St. Ed believes this is a monument to nuclear decay and death. His battle to fight nuclear energy with spiritual reform needs to cherish a new model of moral perfection. He feels highly responsible for the book that he wants to write, which produces him anxiety and anguish. St. Ed is lost in the world, which would represent how the vast majority of the citizens feel in the globe. He is also confused for he does not know what to write in the book; he is not sure about the selection of stories and words he should make so as to create a sacred text that will counterforce and henceforth counterbalance the contemporary evil energies in order to construct a safer future. Nonetheless, St. Ed eventually learns that he cannot alienate himself from the world and impose his story. He realises that competition leads to destruction and that binary relationships need to mutate to overlapping interconnections.

Bergon's fiction reveals both simultaneous union and disruption with the Old West narrative and it presents itself as the revised continuation of its legacy. As displayed in St. Ed's concern for the selection of more appropriate stories and words, Bergon has wisely selected stories of the New West, a New West that he is part of and that he feels hugely responsible for. The stories he has chosen are not just random stories or stories that he felt would be dramatic enough to create an interest in the audience. Bergon has written about events that occurred either close to places where he lived or were somehow connected to people he knew. He is not just interested in writing, or in simply creating a best-seller; he is interested in transmitting a message that is based on maxims of understanding and cooperation. Besides, as previously claimed, his narrative is not just limited to a restricted area of the West, but it moves beyond limited horizons; it is limitless. Bergon, as already indicated, also crosses the boundary of time by creating stories that convey elements that are valid for the past, present and the future. The idea of timelessness that is perceived in his stories is clearly reflected in his novel *The Temptations of St. Ed and Brother S*, especially with the character St. Ed, who is obsessed with the idea of timelessness, eternity, versus human time. Bergon is worried with the past and the ways in which the past moves troublingly and problematically into the present; he emphasizes the way the past and the old myths shape the present and the way the present recreates the past and spawns new myths. Bergon is considerably concerned, for this new mythology will mark the foundations of the Future West. Consequently, he avoids creating extreme characters and perspectives that may continue and expand the legacy of polarity. The writer is looking for possibilities that can consolidate balance, and not conflict. The initiation journeys of Jean Erramouspe, St. Ed and Jack Irigaray manifest the need to operate within maxims of hybridity and flexibility, rather than polarity and rigidity. Bergon has henceforth manifested considerable sensitivity and sensibility to pass down to those coming after his own version of *The Death of Time*.

In his further attempt to revise the foundations of the Future West, Bergon combines elements of convention and invention and revisits characters that are typical of classical Westerns by attaching them attributes that are not common in the Old West narrative. The lack of heroes, the presence of heroes that lack self-confidence or heroes that convey images of monks or priests are some of the instances. Besides, none of those figures who could be interpreted as possible heroes evoke the role of archetypes. They are not conceived as rigid beings that display a model morality to follow and learn from. These figures are ordinary human beings, with the need to make a difference in order to feel valid in the world; these characters are portrayed with their need to succeed, with their thirst for glory, but their failures, pain and exasperation educe the

simplicity of a person escaping from himself. If compared to typical Old West heroes, this example of lack of uniformity, of predictability, is part of Bergon's manifestation of the multilayered and multifaceted *human* beings, versus *heroic* beings, that inhabit the heterogeneous American West.

This deficiency of predictability and homogeneity is also canvassed in the diverse characters that convey Bergon's novels. A clear example of this is the combination of different opinions that constitute *Shoshone Mike*. The author has included a broader western gallery that goes beyond the typical sheriff versus villain or white Anglo-Saxon versus Native American relationship. This broader scope has been extrapolated in the strategy of rotating views and voices that the writer has included. The same event is viewed and described by different participants, which means that we can witness how different people lived the same event. Sheriff Lamb, his wife Nellie, Father Enright, Jean Erramouspe, Shoshone Mike, and Henie, are some of the voices that let us see the same story from different eyes. This stylistic strategy is resultantly a vivid example of the need to create dialogic spaces; of the need to create polyphonic bonds; of the need to confront *the same* and *the different* in order to operate within paradigms of community, rather than selfish individualism.

Another ingredient that disassociates Bergon from the traditional Western is that he moves away from rigid maxims that evoke reminiscences of the Myth of the Frontier or Frederick Jackson Turner's landmark essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1894). Topics such as the poor conditions workers have in the so often mythologized perfect West are raised. This is an ingredient that can be seen, for example, in the way Irigaray criticises the system to have a job transfer in the Wildlife Division. Likewise, Amy Chavéz is also aware of how the BLM uses, or abuses, its workers so as to ultimately achieve its greedy aim. The eagerness of those who marched West, their determination, the self-sustainability, the individualism, and the conception of the self-made man that has often been glorified, are contrasted with many characters that suffer from endless frustration. Bergon has provided the space to represent the reality of a society that feels is trapped in the machine, far away from the epic that Turner's frontier thesis evokes.

Another feature that disengages Bergon from Turner's thesis is the fact that the latter saw a West marked by the absence of the unwanted, while Bergon's stories are characterized by their presence. The ethnic plurality of these three novels is a contemplation of the fact that, for example, Native Americans remain people, versus the often present idea of considering them an analytical subject or homogeneous unit that is awaiting a definition—a definition that has for long been thought should be provided by the dominant party. Native Americans (un)define themselves without the assistance of others; their experience and significance occurs in multiple variations and combinations

every day. As illustrated in these novels, Basque-Americans have been able to achieve this meaningful significance in a variety of ways too. St. Ed and Jack Irigaray represent the choice that the Basque diaspora has made to feel part of one or of multiple identities.

An Old West element that is also revised in Bergon's stories is the resolution and redemption of problems through violence, which recalls what Slotkin defines as "the myth of regeneration through violence" (1973:5). Bergon does not disguise the characters' aggressive impulses; he does not legitimize or justify them. The three novels reflect the ambiguity towards violence in the American society. Figures such as Nellie Lamb represent the ambivalent society that presents itself as pacifist, as rejecting all forms of violence. Nonetheless, as conceived in *Shoshone Mike*, and as reflected in Nellie's words, violence is even glorified if it means the supposedly safety and comfort of the white community:

Winnemucca looked peaceful in the evening light ... She didn't blame the Indian children for what had happened, they had no choice in the matter, but she felt threatened by what they stood for. Killing people was terrible, but a fearful world was worse. If decent people started getting sentimental about a barbaric past, she knew that her sons would never know what it meant to live in a civilized and peaceful world. It was to have evenings like this one, she realized, that Graham and the state police had to go after those savages ... She now had to think about her own children and their future (Bergon 1994:279).

The Shoshone Mountain project is another constituent of the ambivalence towards violence. While America views itself as ideologically pacifist, the Nuclear Test Site of Nevada and the nuclear waste repository are manifestations of the view of violence and nuclear power as essential in order to deter others from attacking Americans.

The interaction of human powers in the non-human landscape is also an interesting insight of the urge to revise this relationship. The greed for expansion, "the go-getter values" (Slotkin 1994:65), or the necessity to make use of nature as a spiritual need are revisited so as to alert the audience of abusive and egocentric radical exploitation. Bergon articulates the notion that nature has become the conception of a world which can serve as the elaborated plan of humans in order to achieve prosperity or to combat chaos and ultimately find a direction. As reflected, nature is manipulated and transformed by the different human perceptions and powers, which, as exemplified in the three stories, clash among each other. Those who see nature as the source of continuous wealth, as for instance the federal government and its view of the Nevada desert, and those who love nature, as Irigaray, are both extreme options

that can lead to the total annihilation of nature, and hence human beings. The greed for material prosperity and the environmental concern and passion for nature are both examples of anthropocentric selfishness that culminate in the extermination and death of nature. They convey the reflection of an “overweening ego, [and] a sense of superiority within an ecosystem...” (Bredahl 1989:147); in other words, they proclaim different forms of “quest[s] for salvation in the wilderness...” (Slotkin 1973:39). Bergon proclaims a sustainable balance between powers, a balance that is carried out with wisdom, rather than with mere impulse. These novels are henceforth part of the new stories that aim to revive and reinvent a more balanced human interconnection or interference with nature, since “this may be the last generation even given the opportunity to try” (Davis 1998:71).

To sum up, Bergon’s novels convey a New Western fiction that deals with the revisionist, multicultural, environmental, social, psychological, historical and urban West. These themes are not isolated fragments, but interconnected articulations of a whole. As opposed to more traditional Westerns, which often fragmented and mirrored the West as it was thought it should be, Bergon depicts the West as it is, devoid of a mythology of community, compassion, forgiveness and care. The New West needs a new mythology, new stories. Bergon is henceforth one of the voices of these new stories. He refuses to map or spatialize the West and the Westerners at all; the focus lies on multidisciplinary endeavours to avoid rigid patterns that obstruct communication and coexistence.

These three novels create an atmosphere of intellectual debate and discussion, that is, communication. The critical and self-reflexive tendencies of these stories create this space for dialogue. Bergon’s fiction is a caption of the semantic open-endedness and the still-evolving contemporary reality of the West. His three novels consequently significantly contribute in the elaboration of more mature Westerns. They are superb exemplifications of transformations that keep mutating within a West which is still in conflict with itself. Bergon is thus a committed scholar that writes stories, versus a single story, of the West that he feels so attached to. His commitment to provoke change, to stir the audience and cause reactions that result from rethinking, revisiting and self-reflecting is very latent in his words. He wants the reader to read his novels carefully and to take the matters that are raised in them seriously. The long quotation by the author of the *The Cloud of Unknowing* that he has included at the very beginning of his second novel is an evident expression of the message Bergon and his three novels proclaim:

I am very serious when I ask you not to share this book with anyone else unless you are convinced they are people who will understand and appreciate it ..., please impress upon them the importance of reading it all the way

through. Certain chapters ... require the explanation given in other chapters to complete their meanings. If people read only one section of the book and not those parts which complement and complete it, they may easily be led into great error.

... I never intended to write for these folk [worldly gossips, flatterers, faultfinders, talebearers, busybodies, and hypocrites] ... This applies also to the merely curious, educated or not.

There are some, however, presently engaged in the active life who are being prepared by grace to grasp the message of this book. (Opening page)

As implied by the Great Energy Principle of the First Law of Thermodynamics that the author also includes in this opening page, Bergon does not plan to destroy energies; he does not aim to debunk other stories, but he does seek to change and transform resistance and negation into acceptance and negotiation. Bergon defies “The Wild Individualistic West” (Wright 2001:186), monopolized by rigid images and caricatures, and seeks a more vibrant and mosaic West. The coexistence of its diversity is, as indicated, a central element in the configuration of the “Re-envisioned West” (Hyde & Deverell 1996:300) that Bergon’s rebellious and defiant New Western proclaims.

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