

Los Días Pasados

Tales from Nineteenth-Century California

The genesis of Anglo fascination with the Spanish pasts of Southern California arguably was the publication of *Ramona* in 1884. Helen Hunt Jackson's melodramatic romance about an Indian Cinderella painted the region's past as a sublime historical narrative—tragic, breathtaking, luxurious, and intimate. Readers were enthralled. *Ramona* became the most famous fiction work about Southern California and a national bestseller, inspiring countless fans to visit the book's picturesque setting. In the 1880s and 1890s California tourists carried their copies of *Ramona* along with their Baedeker travel guides. With the New Englander Jackson as a guide, wealthy easterners spent many a winter tramping up and down the landscape looking for the sites and characters of the story.¹ With the onslaught of these *Ramona* seekers, the transformation of Southern California's memory began. The romance-starved Americans from the East set about resurrecting the forgotten past and refashioning Southern California's history and landscape. Or so goes the conventional wisdom.²

However potent, *Ramona* was neither the first attempt to romanticize Southern California nor the last word on the region. Anglos did not have the first claim on an idyllic vision of the Spanish past, nor was this past an abandoned idea they suddenly rediscovered. In fact, Jackson herself relied upon earlier retellings by Californios, whose own idealized construction of *los días pasados*, bygone days, was an altered interpretation of the past.³ These Spanish speakers' nostalgia for pregringo

times was itself a response to witnessing their own decline and dispossession since the loss of the Mexican-American War, with Anglos treating their presence and past on the land largely as obstacles to onrushing progress. In a swirl of alternative stories that sought to define the nineteenth century, Anglo desire for a Spanish idyll arose late and did so only as Californios' ability to represent such a society began to fade in the face of American migration and the rising market economy. At this time, the purposes to which Anglos and Californios put their memories could not have been more different. *Ramona* represented a bold first strike for Anglo mining of these memories, but for reasons I discuss later, the book was at best an awkward vehicle that could not alone have spawned the transformation of Southern California's built environment. Nevertheless, understanding where *Ramona* came from and what captivated its early readers can help us understand how Spanish fantasies emerged and why they had a strong impact on regional culture and politics for decades to come.

"A PICTURESQUE LIFE"

Ramona opens with a lush description of a Spanish rancho and its matriarch, Señora Moreno, set in the recent past. Moreno is struggling to keep her family's estate afloat in a new world of American rule. Both author and subject reminisce about the old days, before the gringos came. "It was a picturesque life, with more of sentiment and gayety in it, more also that was truly dramatic, more romance, than will ever be seen again on those shores. The aroma of it all lingers there still; industries and inventions have not yet slain it; it will last out its century—in fact, it can never be quite lost, so long as there is standing one such house as the Señora Moreno's."⁴ Enter the heroine, Ramona, an orphan born to a Scotsman and a California Indian woman. She comes to live on the Moreno ranch through the Señora's sister, who had once been the Scotsman's fiancée, and thus is unaware of her ignoble birth. Like Cinderella, Ramona finds maltreatment at the hands of her adoptive stepmother despite gathering the adoration of all the other characters. She is supremely beautiful, innately good, and generous to a fault. To Señora Moreno's dismay, her only son, Felipe, heir to the rancho and the personification of American stereotypes of indolent Spaniards, worships Ramona from afar. Both the story and Jackson's rich description of the setting drew in her nineteenth-century readers. The opening chapters chronicle daily life: the colors of the sunset, the goings-on of the

servants, the mysterious Catholic devotions, and preparation for the annual sheep shearing. Among the loyal Indian band of shepherds that arrive to perform this work is Alessandro, the young, handsome leader. Alessandro earns nothing but praise from the author and from his fellow characters for his deference and work ethic, yet the relations between the various groups on the rancho—the Spanish Morenos, the mestizo servants, and the Indian shearers—betray a complicated ethnic milieu.

To many people in the nineteenth century, a claim of Spanish heritage spoke to European roots and pure blood, whereas Mexican heritage connoted mixed-race ancestry. Few Californios could prove that their families contained purely Spanish bloodlines, though the term carried that connotation at the time. In this sense, an assertion of Spanish heritage staked claim to class as much as race, aiming to recall noble birth and elite station. The Morenos who owned the ranch were Spanish; their servants were Mexican. *Ramona*'s readers came to see this ethnic divide as a class distinction, having encountered in Texas and other parts of the Southwest a view of Mexicans as dirty and degraded.⁵ For Southern California Anglos, the Mexican label also marked a person as an immigrant, no matter his or her nativity. If Mexicans were marked as outsiders, Spanish Californios appeared to have some claim on the region's history; and indeed they often invoked their past in their late nineteenth-century struggle for inclusion in white California society.

The racial factor that purportedly differentiated those who called themselves Spanish from Mexicans was Indian blood. Señora Moreno, though she employed Indians on her ranch, judged them to be an inferior race: "Of what is it that these noble lords of villages are so proud? their ancestors—naked savages less than one hundred years ago? Naked savages they themselves too, today, if we had not come here to teach and civilize them. The race was never meant for anything but servants." Southern California Anglos largely shared this view that the region's Indians were among the least civilized people of the world and had been only partially redeemed by Spanish missionaries. Readers of sentimental fiction may have joined the chorus, but following Jackson's portrait of Moreno as meanly prejudiced, they could also have read Alessandro as a "noble" if "naked" savage.⁶

The racial dynamics in the book make for much of its drama, as *Ramona* falls head over heels for Alessandro. The possibility of romance between the lowly Indian laborer and the apparently high-born Spanish maiden titillated readers, though such cross-race love was not an uncommon device among Jackson's counterparts in the dime-novel industry.

The señora tries to dissuade Ramona from marrying Alessandro, first by stressing the nobility of her Spanish name and then by shaming her with her Indian parentage. Moreno eventually forbids the marriage and locks Ramona in her room. Ramona makes a daring escape, and she and Alessandro elope. Shorn of her elite comforts, Ramona at first enjoys the Indian outdoor life, as Jackson takes the lovers on a spectacular journey through a lush and beauteous countryside that, for all of California's charms, has no earthly location. Yet the pair's life at a series of Indian villages holds few pleasures and little time for love. The couple is desperately poor, and every effort Alessandro makes to become a good farmer fails. American squatters menace Ramona's and Alessandro's tenuous land claims, and the couple's first child dies due to the negligence of an Anglo doctor. Ramona somehow retains a sunny outlook, but Alessandro becomes distraught and begins to lose his mind. During one of his delusions, he accidentally rides home on the wrong horse. The only true villain in the book, a drunk American cowboy, accuses him of being a horse thief and shoots him dead. Ramona collapses and lies for weeks perilously close to death, and readers prepare themselves for a maudlin Victorian deathbed scene. At the last moment, however, Moreno's son, Felipe, arrives to rescue Ramona from an anonymous death and brings her back to health and to the Moreno ranch, where the señora has conveniently passed away herself. Felipe marries Ramona and restores her honor, yet the two are unable to keep the family's ranch in the face of a determined American onslaught. Seeing no place for Ramona and Felipe in Southern California, Jackson sends them off to Mexico, where Ramona becomes the belle of the city despite a broken heart.

This romantic drama drew heavily on the historical tensions of nineteenth-century California and nearly a century of colonial settlement. Whether this history was familiar or foreign to American readers, Jackson used the successive conquests of California as the background for many of the characters' motivations: Señora Moreno's resentment of the Americans, Ramona's mixed parentage, Alessandro's despair. The author projected her view of Indians' and Californios' feelings about Anglo-Americans' arrival and subsequent power grab. Novelist Albion Tourgée spent much of his career criticizing Southern romantic myth-making for blurring the emancipationist goals of the Civil War, yet in an 1886 review, he applauded Jackson for putting romance to good use: "The story is laid in California, but it is not altogether our California. . . . Hitherto, fiction has treated California only as the seat of a new civilization . . . gold diggers paradise, adventurers' Eden, speculators'

El Dorado. *Ramona* pictures it as the Indian's lost inheritance and the Spaniard's desolated home."⁷ Indeed it was.

"WHAT MISERY!"

The Indian population of Southern California was numerous and diverse before the Spanish arrived to attempt permanent settlements in the eighteenth century. Though the coastal plains and valleys were not as thickly settled as the northern section was, Kumeyaay, Ipai/Tipai, Cahuilla, Acjachemem, Tongva, and Chumash tribal groups (often known later as Diegueño, Cupeño, Luiseño, Juaneño, Gabrielino, Fernandeño, and Barbareño, according to their association with certain Spanish missions) could be found living there in small seasonal villages. Farther inland, Coahilla, Mohave, and other bands peopled the mountains and deserts, if a bit more sparsely. Language, social relations, and political organization separated these groups culturally despite their geographical proximity. Estimates put the total number of Indian residents in the southern region prior to European colonization at thirty-five thousand to forty thousand.⁸ These numbers began to decline when European explorers arrived and brought disease with them: European contact had come as early as the mid-sixteenth century, when a few early explorers happened upon San Diego Bay and traded with local inhabitants. The Spanish did not arrive in force, however, until 1769, nearly 250 years after their conquest of Mexico. Southern California represented the far northern frontier of colonial New Spain, and unlike wealthy Mexico, it was poor and inaccessible. When rivals such as Russia and England began to investigate the neglected colony, Spain decided to establish its claim on Alta California more securely. Missionaries and soldiers were dispatched from Baja California to convert native populations and establish governance in the region. San Diego became the site of the first mission and presidio (garrison), and more outposts quickly followed.⁹

Missionaries were a key part of Spanish colonization strategy, because they attempted to gain Indian loyalty through religious conversion rather than brute force, lessening the need for a major military presence. In California, this job fell to the Franciscan order and its local leader, Junípero Serra. The missionaries' aim was to transform Indians into Christian worshippers and skilled laborers for the colony. The padres established mission communities wherever they encountered abundant Indian settlements. By 1792 they had founded six missions in the southern portion of Alta California: from south to north, they were

San Diego, San Luis Rey, San Juan Capistrano, San Gabriel, San Fernando, and San Buenaventura. Attracting Indians with food and European goods, missionaries housed anywhere from hundreds to thousands of “neophytes,” as they called their followers. These converted Indians lived in sex-segregated, dormitory housing and performed mandatory labor; once they came to live at the mission, their lives were under strict surveillance by the missionaries; escape was punishable, and discipline, in keeping with early modern standards, was often severe. Because of, or perhaps despite, the harsh regime, mission Indians became the primary productive force for the Spanish colony, as they tilled fields, herded cattle, made olive oil and wine, constructed buildings, designed furniture, produced leather, cooked meals, forged iron, sewed clothing, and accomplished all manner of work on these extensive plantations. Southern California missions produced greater wealth than those in the central or northern portions of the chain, which eventually numbered twenty-one and ended in Sonoma, just north of San Francisco.¹⁰

Unfortunately, as fast as the Franciscans could recruit Indians, disease decimated their communities, both inside and outside of the missions. In the seventy-five years following Spanish settlement, California Indian populations dropped to one-third of their precontact numbers. The crowded nature of mission life, which brought together several thousands of people used to living in groups of several dozen, accelerated the effects that plagued Native American populations throughout the New World. European-borne diseases devastated political structures, family networks, village life, and religious traditions. In weathering this onslaught, California Indians alternately adapted to Spanish culture and resisted it. They continued to serve as an indispensable labor force for the colony and found ways to express themselves in European forms of artwork and music. But neophytes periodically fomented rebellion, sometimes killing priests and burning buildings. Others returned to home villages and launched raids on mission establishments, absconding with livestock and produce. Indians’ consistent resistance and inconsistent state support hampered Spain’s efforts to gain complete control over the native populations of California.¹¹ A dearth of colonists from Spain and Mexico made matters worse. Few people were willing to live in the rude and remote northern outposts, despite enticements of land, money, and tax exemptions. Spanish population, capital, and trade grew slowly.

When Mexico won its independence in 1821, it stepped up economic development in its province of Alta California with a more liberal distribution of land grants. While colonists took the offers, the enormous

size of these ranchos and their mammoth cattle herds increased production more than population. More land became available in the 1830s, as Mexico embarked on a plan to “secularize” the missions, essentially putting them out of business. The Franciscans’ agricultural enterprises reverted to the government, which sold off the lands and stock for profit, reducing missions to parish churches. Secularization freed Indians from forced labor but nothing more. Some tried to return to their villages, while others now hired out their labor on the ranchos, often with conditions no better than those at the mission.¹²

Indian labor helped produce a class of Californio rancheros who commanded vast cattle empires and became a closely intermarried oligarchy that had far more power in the region than any arm of the Mexican government. This local sway caused constant tension between the California landed classes and the governors imposed on the area by Mexico City. Californios’ wealth depended entirely on the hide and tallow trade, with some sheep raising, grape growing, and grain production for local consumption. While this limited focus left Californios vulnerable when the California economy diversified in later decades, the social organization of this economy, with the Indian peon as the primary laborer, allowed the *patrón* to live in relative luxury. Rancheros did not live as leisured a lifestyle as one might assume, however; Californianas, especially, worked hard to keep the large rancho households running. Still, the social expectations included frequent festivities for marriages, saints’ days, rodeos, and other sporting contests. The fiestas and *bailes* that became so popular in cultural memories were gay occasions to be sure, yet they surely required labor by both Californios and Indians. These social events revolved around the extended family, the essential unit of ranchero life.¹³

Almost as soon as Mexican rancho society set down roots, Anglo-Americans began to arrive and insinuate themselves into the Californio elite. Ambitious young men from Massachusetts and elsewhere married into Californio families by converting to Catholicism and becoming Mexican citizens, as Mexican law required. They adapted to local customs and often Hispanicized their first names, as Liverpool-born John Forster did when he assumed the moniker of Don Juan Forster upon his 1837 marriage to Doña Ysidora Pico, sister of the governor. Typically, however, these American “dons” grafted such acculturation onto American-style economic practices. Anglo-Californio family alliances were thus also economic partnerships, widening trade with the United States. For example, when Bostonian Alfred Robinson arrived in the

1830s as a junior agent for the powerful Bryant, Sturgis and Company, he asked for the hand of thirteen-year-old Doña Anita de la Guerra, daughter of one of the most powerful *ranchero* families. When the two married, Robinson joined the California gentry while the De la Guerras netted an inside track for the trade of their hides and tallow. While such unions were not the automatic tickets to economic success and membership in the social gentry that they seemed, the image of a beautiful Californiana happily marrying an ambitious American endured among Anglos as an evocative metaphor for the natural cession of land and power. The view of California as a “child bride” appeared to confirm the rightful custody of an American protector.¹⁴

Other visitors found in Southern California a national opportunity more than a personal one. Falling back on stereotypes of lazy Mexicans, many people believed that Mexico had failed to develop California to its fullest potential. When American travelers saw adobe buildings where they thought wood houses and brick banks should be, they judged California towns to be utterly backward. Richard Henry Dana visited in this era and loved the landscape but not the people; his famous lament in 1843 reflected many Anglo-Americans’ sentiment: “In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be!”¹⁵ Such beliefs spurred incipient faith in America’s Manifest Destiny to span the continent. The Mexican-American War, begun in Texas, quickly focused on California, which Americans saw as a possible trophy. Few in number and mixed in political leanings, Southern California *rancheros* mounted only scattered resistance and one pitched battle against the invaders. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded California along with the area that would become the Southwest to the United States in February 1848 and incorporated promises to honor the rights of former Mexican citizens.

However, these promises fell by the wayside, and the discovery of gold the following month in the Sierra Nevada foothills of California altered the state’s social geography nearly overnight. Ethnic tensions between Anglos, Mexicans, and Chinese flowed out of the mines and throughout the state. The hunt for the legendary bandit Joaquín Murieta virtually gave license to assault Spanish speakers, whether they were citizens or not. In the north, Anglo-Americans overwhelmed the existing population; most of the one hundred thousand to two hundred thousand new people who arrived in California by 1852 landed in San Francisco. Californios quickly found themselves to be a small minority in the state that had recently been theirs, but in Southern California the process of attrition was more gradual.¹⁶ Anglos steadily trickled into

the region and looked hungrily at the large lands owned by Californios. Squatters first became a nuisance and then a major threat to rancheros, who were forced to defend their ownership to the U.S. government with little documentation that the courts would respect. The high costs of the litigation and significant tax burden compelled landowners to sell off much of their ranches piece by piece. For example, Mariano G. Vallejo, one of the most prominent Californios both before and after the war, saw his Northern California holdings gradually shrink from 175,000 acres to the grounds of his heavily mortgaged Sonoma home by 1874. Overproduction of beef for gold miners in the 1850s magnified financial difficulties, and an extended drought in the 1860s pushed many rancheros to the brink of financial ruin. The rancho economy disintegrated, Anglo entrepreneurs converted small pieces of the giant cattle ranches to agricultural uses, and merchants, bankers, and a small number of manufacturers moved in to service these ventures.¹⁷ When the Southern Pacific Railroad arrived in Los Angeles from the north in 1876, Anglo urban and economic fortunes seemed to be on the rise.

For Californios, however, these events created tough times. The rancho families that had weathered the early years of American rule became increasingly outnumbered and surrounded in Southern California. As early as the 1870s, they held a mere fraction of the political sway and political clout that they had had only a decade before. Elite Californios in particular experienced the defeat largely in terms of this dispossession. Where before they had been at the pinnacle of California society as members of landed classes, they saw their land eroded and their culture engulfed by the Anglo-Americans they had once welcomed. Not surprisingly, many Californios felt this disjunction personally, as the war ruptured the continuity of their life expectations. As Mariano Vallejo wrote to his wife in 1877, "What a difference between the present time and those that preceded the usurpation by the Americans. If the Californios could all gather together to breathe a lament, it would reach Heaven as a moving sight which would cause fear and consternation in the universe. What misery!" Californios were resentful and disillusioned, painfully aware of their status as social exiles, and constantly reminded of their linguistic, ethnic, and political displacement.¹⁸

Contributing to the melancholy was a communal fear of eradication, if not from California itself, from the pages of its past. Not only were Californios losing out by measure of population, but they also found themselves at the short end of the historical record as Anglos began to write them out of significance. Exhortations appeared in the Spanish-

language press in the 1870s prodding Californios to defend themselves from erasure.¹⁹ Stronger than their frustration with Anglo attempts to silence them, however, was their anger at the increasing misrepresentation of their social history. The 1860s and 1870s witnessed a hardening of anti-Mexican views and group stereotypes, and Californios often had a difficult time extricating themselves from Anglos' blanket indictments. Late nineteenth-century popular culture also contained portrayals of Californios as "lazy, cowardly, and incompetent."²⁰

With a common desire to counter such mean Anglo depictions and to keep their own stories alive, Californios developed a strategy that one historian has called an "autobiographical impulse." Yet they had few mainstream media outlets in which to air their refutations. The likeliest way for Californio expressions to reach the Anglo majority in the 1870s was through a project started by the prolific compiler of state history Hubert Howe Bancroft. In commissioning research for his volumes on Spanish and Mexican California, Bancroft sent emissaries to interview as many Californios as they could locate and persuade to talk. While many Californios remained suspicious of this project, others, like Mariano Vallejo, became convinced that it offered a strategic opportunity to inject Californios into public history. He and other Californios hoped to maneuver their contributions in a way that countered the dominant discourse and hedged against oblivion. Their narratives were "no less than warfare waged within the text of California history. . . . The Californios, who had lost the war and with it their lands and social position, must not lose their papers or their memories of a way of life increasingly maligned by others." So, one by one, they either composed their memoirs or consented to be interviewed by Bancroft's agents.²¹

Intriguingly, however, Californios' testimonials betray little anger on the surface. Their social critique is embedded within otherwise largely nostalgic texts that are reminiscent of Jackson's dreamy portrait. Many, if not all, Californios romanticized the rancho society they had lost. They imagined prewar California as an idyllic, harmonious world, and their descriptions reached longingly back to it. However exaggerated these memories might have been, they offered a clear rebuke to Anglos' malicious characterizations—unlike Jackson's view of the past, which in some ways relied upon the stereotypes. Californios' nostalgia became a mode through which to respond and oppose their displacement. Their past may have been an invented one, perhaps created out of defeat, but it was also a strategic one. Their romantic remembrance offered a method of dealing with the miserable present. Their past was oppositional as

well as nostalgic: it countered prevailing Anglo theory and contemporary California experiences.²²

While Californio reminiscences ranged from discussions of important political events to descriptions of popular dances, three key recurring topics—class, gender, and Indians—gave their memories an oppositional impulse. To take the first issue, much nostalgia centered around a desire to reclaim class position. Rancheros' narratives often excluded California residents who were not land grantees, except to fondly recall the control rancho owners wielded over their large labor forces and extended families. Rancheros' lament was for the loss of the property relations in which they had held sway. This take on the past was not undifferentiated nostalgia for the old days but a very specific one. As scholar Rosaura Sánchez writes, "The world of Alta California was not an idyllic 'pastoral' society; on the contrary, it was a cattle-raising, labor-intensive, tallow-and-hide producing economy with a largely 'unfree' labor force made up of Indian men and women."²³ Indians or mestizos who never had land to begin with found themselves in even more difficult straits than did Californios. Few areas of American towns welcomed them as neighbors, so segregated barrios began to arise in Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Diego. Non-Anglos confronted a dual wage system, earning less than their Anglo counterparts for the same labor.²⁴ In a sense, Californios protested their reduction in circumstances by pointing to their former high position as landed patriarchs.

Gender, too, offered a clear barometer of the fall from grace in many male Californio memories. Women's behavior—then "cheerfully ensconced in the home" and now loosening their morals at the dance hall—seemed good evidence with which to condemn Anglos' low character and its corruption of their culture. Women's testimonials, though fewer in number than men's, recall instead their own efforts to subvert patriarchal control well before the American takeover and openly declare their disappointment with men's inability to defend against it. This view, however, gained little credit in male memories, either in Anglo or Californio narratives, which were more alike on this topic than one might assume. As Antonia Castañeda suggests, Anglo writers like Dana set up the same dichotomy between good and bad Californianas that Californio men suggested. In this view, elite women managed to be paragons of virtue and social butterflies, but without proper control, they would fall victim to their natural sexuality and promiscuity.²⁵

Nor did Californios' portrayal of Indian people differ much from Anglo views. Indian people often figure into Californio nostalgia as

markers of ethnic difference, at times serving as villains in stories of raids on ranchos and at times appearing as children in need of guidance from superiors. Here was a way to claim a margin of ethnic superiority that Anglos were attempting to monopolize. Californios could not be Anglo, but by separating themselves from Indian blood, they might share European ancestry. Former rancheros expressed pride in their ability to control vast numbers of Indian workers through “natural” dominance. Moreover, they characterized the Indians under their charge much as Anglos did, remembering them as “indolent, ignorant, and reluctant to work.” According to Sánchez, such representations were perhaps “doubly ironic, not only because the Indians had carried out all the work, . . . but also because in 1875 the criticism of indolence and derogatory portrayals were being proffered against” Californios themselves.²⁶

Perhaps these interpretations appear to be malicious, suggesting that Californios were somehow complicit in the Anglo pursuit of racial hierarchy. However, their options, were severely restricted; their decision to claim a genteel Spanish heritage was logical in the face of daunting cultural change. Moreover, their stance was not simply a way to pick on the lower class, women, and Indians; by responding specifically to conditions in the postwar present, it called attention to the oppositional character of Californios’ nostalgia and the origin of that nostalgia in the trauma of displacement. Anglos’ rendering of this nostalgia echoed some Californio portrayals of the past. The emphasis on gentility, even aristocratic privilege; the split view of women as honorably pure or dangerously sensual; and the denigration of Indian people all carried over into the *Ramona*-inspired picture of the region’s past. But, in the new version, these narratives were shorn of their implied social critique. Importantly, Anglos envisioned few of the present-day applications of these memories that were Californios’ reason for telling them. While Jackson gained fame for employing Californio informants, Anglos’ use of Californios’ material told a different story altogether.

“TO MOVE PEOPLE’S HEARTS”

If Anglos read *Ramona* primarily for its intoxicating descriptions of the past, Jackson meant for her novel to serve a pressing public cause, although not that of the Californios. She hoped to expose both Anglo and Californio residents for their maltreatment of mission Indians. For California Indians, the late nineteenth century marked a nadir in population. American laws suggested a loose-constructionist approach to identifying

“hostile” Indians and exterminating them; Indians who appeared to be mere vagrants faced sentences of forced labor. Meanwhile, the federal government alternately negotiated and reneged on a series of treaties that squeezed tribes into constricted reservations and frequently evicted them not only from ancestral lands but even from reservations that had been established only a few years before. Furthermore, the lands that the Mexican government granted to Indians in the secularization era, small and tenuous already, were as susceptible to American squatters as the ranchos were. While many Indian communities persisted at the missions, such as at San Juan Capistrano, they did so largely as Spanish-speaking groups that were rarely recognized for their native ancestry.²⁷

Woven in with Jackson’s tale of romance was reproach for Californians’ behavior and attitudes toward Indian people. Jackson, heretofore a writer of sentimental prose and poetry, had become a patron of Indian causes in 1881 while writing *A Century of Dishonor*, a nonfictional account of the abysmal record of the United States’ relations with American Indians past and present.²⁸ When sales were slow, she sent a copy to every member of Congress at personal expense. While the volume caused nary a ripple in the Capitol, she accepted a government offer to prepare a report on the condition of the California mission Indians. Traveling around Southern California with fellow appointee and Los Angeles real-estate promoter Abbot Kinney, she visited Indian villages and crumbling missions as well as a few of the still-working ranchos. At the old Californio homesteads, she found material she would later exploit for the romantic backdrop and charming characters she needed to tempt readers into her remonstrations. After filing her official report, Jackson decided to present her protests directly to the public in novel form. In a tale more personal than *Century of Dishonor*, she hoped to “set forth some Indian experiences in a way to move people’s hearts.” As she remarked a number of times, she hoped that *Ramona* would become the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of Indian reform.²⁹

Yet despite such intentions, the novel did not turn out to be the lightning rod that Harriet Beecher Stowe’s work had been for an earlier generation—at least not for its intended purpose. Her audience was primed to respond to the romantic angle more than the social critique. Jackson’s style placed *Ramona* less in the company of a protest novel like Stowe’s than in the genre of “regional fiction,” a popular literary trend in the latter half of the nineteenth century most famously practiced by Mark Twain. Regional novels incorporated, as *Ramona* scholar Dydia DeLyser suggests, “colorful characters speaking in dialects, lavish

and loving place descriptions and nostalgic depictions of picturesque folkways” presumed to be fast disappearing.³⁰ Although Anglo readers might have sympathized with Ramona’s and Alessandro’s difficulties and cursed their American tormenters, the book’s major appeal lay in Jackson’s sun-kissed landscape and the quixotic figures that inhabited it. Her portrayal of the Spanish era in California as a happy, leisured existence instead of a lazy, backward past was new and intriguing. Nineteenth-century readers’ expectations of and emphasis on these features seemed to distract them from Jackson’s message; so did her inexplicably happy ending, in which Ramona and Felipe reconstitute the rancho family, and the tragedy of Alessandro’s death is all but forgotten. The couple’s retreat to Mexico can be read as a final defeat, but it signals the loss of the romantic Californio rather than the grievances of mission Indians.³¹ Unfortunately for the author, who died ten months after the novel’s release, her romantic regional fiction trumped her social protest.

By choosing to drench her novel in nostalgia, Jackson not only smothered her own critique but also led the effort to package Californios’ memories for Anglo consumption. In addition to visiting Indian *rancherías*, Jackson visited several prominent Californio ranchos and families, starting with the home of Antonio Coronel. In Coronel’s adobe house in Los Angeles, the author listened with rapt attention to Coronel’s wistful remembrances of the old days as well as his theories about the deterioration of treatment of mission Indians. He blamed Americans for the Indians’ fate, a perspective that *Ramona* echoed. Yet Coronel interspersed such diatribes with guitar serenades, dance demonstrations with his wife, Mariana, and anecdotes about colorful characters from an earlier age. Coronel had long been a champion of Californio traditions and sought to preserve their prominence in public life well into the American period. He joined the Historical Society of Southern California in its first year (1883) as one of the few non-Anglo members, hoping to perpetuate this Hispanic influence.³² Apparently, Jackson was so taken with Coronel and his home that she proposed centering her novel around his household, but he suggested she visit some of the more traditional, rural ranchos. He sent Jackson to Rancho Camulos in Ventura County in January 1882, where, he reportedly said, “the original life of a California hacendado could still be studied in all its poetry and importance.”³³ Jackson followed half of Coronel’s advice, preferring poetry over politics.

Jackson’s visit to Camulos comprised only one morning, in which, as she wrote to her partner, Abbot Kinney, the matriarch “Mrs. Del Valle was away from home, unluckily . . . ; but it was a most interesting place,

and the daughters, cousins, sons and daughters all as Mexican and un-American as heart could wish." The Del Valle family established Camulos in 1839, through a Mexican land grant of forty-eight thousand acres. Camulos contained grazing lands for cattle and sheep and hills full of citrus groves and vineyards, as well as a settlement of close to two hundred family members and workers, of both Mexican and Indian descent. Despite a decline to fewer than two thousand acres in the later part of the century, the Del Valles managed to maintain their rancho more or less intact, an unusual fact that drew Jackson there.³⁴ In search of more such exotic atmosphere, however, Jackson again consulted Coronel, who suggested she try Rancho Guajome in northern San Diego County. Whether Jackson actually visited Guajome remains in some dispute, but the legend grew that instead of taking a brief tour, the author overstayed her welcome, taking advantage of the Bandini-Couts family's hospitality, interfering with ranch business, and reportedly trying to set the Indian workers against their Californio employers.³⁵ Guajome also originated from a postsecularization Mexican land grant, deeded in 1845 to Abel Stearns, an American migrant who had married into the prominent Bandini family of Los Angeles and become a successful merchant and rancher in his own right. Six years later Stearns gave the 2,200-acre tract to his sister-in-law Ysidora Bandini and her Tennessee-born beau, Cave Coutts, as a wedding present. Coutts steered Guajome through the postwar financial dangers by diversifying along the lines of Camulos. Sheep, wine, and citrus kept the ranch afloat.³⁶ Jackson took notes, inquired about colorful incidents, and sketched personalities. These visits probably led her to depict Californio resentment at loss of their homeland to Anglo control in her novel, but she used the visits more to gather evidence for descriptions of the ranchos' faded romantic atmosphere (see figure 1).

With Coronel as her guide, Jackson viewed Camulos and Guajome as representations of a colorful past that persisted only in small pockets of Southern California. In fictionalizing these people and places, she put the emphasis on past rather than persistence. While Coronel and other Californios often used nostalgia to claim a voice in the present, Jackson saw little future for the Californios; packing Ramona and Felipe off to Mexico confirmed the point. She emphasized how out of place and out of time the Morenos were, even as she seemed to regret their ill fortune. Moreover, Jackson anticipated how Anglos would choose to remember Californios when she made the Morenos the prototypical Californios, though the stories she drew upon were in fact often atypical. The Del Valle and Coutts



Figure 1. “On the Veranda. Camulos Ranch, *Ramona* Scenes,” ca. 1900. In this unusual image, members of the Del Valle family (Josefa del Valle Forster, James del Valle, Nina del Valle Cram, and Alexander Harmer, an Anglo artist who was related by marriage) pose as characters from *Ramona*. They are staging a scene from the novel on the famed south veranda of their Rancho Camulos home, which tourists soon insisted on seeing as the home of *Ramona*. Though the purpose of the tableau is unknown, it evokes the Del Valles’ ambivalence about being so closely linked to *Ramona*. Family members found tourists inconvenient and often rude, yet they astutely realized that the novel’s popularity offered an opportunity for profit. The photograph captures the tension that many Californios felt: Would they capitalize on *Ramona* mania, or would they share the heroine’s fate and be forced to leave California to the Anglos? Courtesy Seaver Center for Western History Research, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History.

families, not to mention Antonio Coronel, were unusual in their ability to maintain their fabled picture of wealth and opulence and a modicum of political influence. As Leonard Pitt writes, the Del Valles “exuded a deceptive air of well-being in the 1880’s, considering its [Rancho Camulos’s] financial condition” and continued to host elaborate fiestas into the new century. They did so by adapting to new conditions and diversifying the ranch’s holdings. Two of the younger Del Valle sons got out of the flagging cattle- and sheep-grazing business, which *Ramona* highlighted, and turned to cultivating citrus and grapes, part of the California agricultural vanguard in the 1880s and 1890s. Coutts, a Californio by marriage, actually added to his land holdings in the postwar years, expanding Guajome nearly tenfold and controlling over twenty thousand acres at the time of his death in 1874. Neither was Coronel native to California; he arrived

from Mexico at the age of seventeen in 1834 and after the American conquest, assertively joined the new cultural and economic context. He shrewdly manipulated his finances and real estate, invested in urban enterprises, and became a railroad and civic booster like many Anglos in Los Angeles.³⁷ All three families had significant but uncommon postwar biographies among Californios, for whom loss of wealth and stature was the more common experience.

Atypicality was a hallmark of Anglo memories. Among the Californios to whom Anglos most liked to pay tribute were Arcadia Bandini Stearns and her husband, Abel, who were as atypical as they were legendary in Los Angeles. As a city dweller who was unable to bear children, Arcadia did not share with many of her fellow Californianas the duties of mothering and managing a rancho household. Her life, instead, “literally revolved around entertaining and socializing amongst the new Los Angeles elite” and thus gave credence to the view of Californio culture as a continual round of fiestas. Anglos viewed her life as a kind of “idealized existence” that stood in for the whole of Californio history.³⁸ Jackson took such surface appearances for the substance of Californio life. Anecdotes, gossip, recollections of weeklong fiestas, beautiful dresses, and romances, became the center of Anglos’ fascination with Californio lifestyle. Even if Jackson allowed Señora Moreno some indignation at the American takeover, many of her readers glossed over that aspect of the señora’s life to revel in the seeming exoticisms of daily life on the rancho. Anglos missed Californios’ original object in recalling these activities: to promote their own history as a lever for future advancement. For all “their old-fashioned fiestas at Camulos,” for example, the Del Valles “aspired toward and in most respects attained the status of the new ‘better classes.’” In a sense, their “traditional” events, such as the annual Fourth of July fiesta, whose attendees were predominantly Anglo, served as an entrée into Anglo public respectability.³⁹ But in the end, Anglos focused on the fiestas, the dazzling social life, and the opulence in Californio society, not on Californios’ struggles against financial ruin, cultural oblivion, and ethnocentrism in the late nineteenth century.

“QUAFF YE THE WATERS OF RAMONA’S WELL”

Helen Hunt Jackson’s novel neither wholly invented nor clearly stole Californio nostalgia. For her, Californio life was scenery, and her story was not about Californios’ real lives or troubles but about Indian

pathos. Readers followed her lead, coming to California in droves in search of the romantic setting she so breathtakingly advertised. This stampede of *Ramona* fans was possible only because Southern California had begun over the previous decade to make itself more amenable and enticing to tourists. A new set of Anglo-Americans began to discover Southern California, not as a place for business and labor but, as one 1876 book stated, for “Health, Pleasure, and Residence.” Consumptives came to recuperate in the region’s mild climate, which some ambitious boosters gave the scientific-sounding label of “subtropical.” Lavish hotels cropped up to cater to the vanguard of rail tourists. An elite set of white Americans began to “winter” in Southern California. When, in 1887, the Santa Fe Railway broke the Southern Pacific Railroad’s California monopoly and established a direct link between Los Angeles and the eastern United States, these tourists multiplied and became thousands of potential residents. A rate war between the two railroads dropped the price of a one-way ticket from Kansas City to the West from \$125 to \$1. Wild speculation in real estate led to a boom in prices, as hundreds of new towns were platted and sold. The boom collapsed nearly as quickly as it had begun, but in its wake was new incentive to promote the region to tourists.

Southern California Anglos quickly learned to capitalize on *Ramona*’s runaway popularity. Some clever entrepreneurs built the Hotel Ramona in 1890 in San Luis Obispo. Though the hotel looked nothing like the Spanish architecture described in great detail in the book, the owners advertised it in Jacksonian terms: “How pleasantly mellifluous is the name, Hotel Ramona; how suggestive of the dolce far niente of the venerable old San Luis Obispo.” Yet readers demanded more than vague references. They wanted to see the actual places and people from the book. A pilgrimage circuit grew up around shrines that consisted of Ramona’s “real home,” Ramona’s Marriage Place, and the “real” Ramona herself, though no one could conclusively pinpoint the identity or location of these destinations. The Santa Fe and Southern Pacific promoted different locations for the Moreno ranch, according to which one lay closer to its own line.⁴⁰

Where Ramona got married was hotly debated, but when Thomas P. Getz opened Ramona’s Marriage Place at the newly restored Estudillo house in Old Town, San Diego, in 1910, other contenders were forgotten. Getz’s establishment included a souvenir shop, an extensive array of postcard views, its own post office with custom cancellation, lantern-slide lectures on the history of the missions, and rooms decorated in



Figure 2. "The Court, Ramona's Marriage Place, San Diego, California," ca. 1915. Postcard from author's collection.

period style. Visitors could lounge in the picturesque interior patio and drink a cup from the wishing well (see figure 2). How could they not linger? The sign's invitation was irresistible:

Quaff ye the waters of Ramona's Well,
Good luck they bring and secrets tell,
Blest were they by the sandaled friar,
So drink and wish for thy desire.⁴¹

Getz promised that visitors would leave "the romantic old adobe with a sense of peace and harmony" and a remembrance of "long warm moonlight nights when filmy mantillas dropped coyly over velvet eyes and gallant caballeros played serenades outside grilled windows; days when everything was *Mañana*, when love and beauty, toil and bitter struggles, mixed in a kaleidoscope of real and unreal."⁴² *Ramona* tourists willingly mixed fact and fantasy in their pursuit of such a feeling. Proliferating souvenir bric-a-brac offered a chance to take a piece of that atmosphere home. Ramona baskets and pincushions were popular, but only the rare visitor went home without, as historian Carey McWilliams noted, a little replica of the bells that rang to celebrate Ramona's wedding. Many people even chose to hold their own weddings at Ramona's Marriage Place, transforming a space that recalled a purely fictional occasion into a site of significant social activity and personal meaning.⁴³



Figure 3. "The Real Ramona," ca. 1900. Though the postcard fails to note this woman's identity, she is Ramona Lubo, a Cahuilla whose husband, like Alessandro, was shot for accidentally taking a white man's horse. This coincidence later earned her minor fame and extra income. Postcard from author's collection.

An increasing number of guidebooks and feature articles catered to *Ramona* tourists and heightened tourist expectations of romance. At the same time, they reinforced the assumption that the book was factual. One chronicler insisted that, "Every incident in the story has fact for its foundation, even down to the minutest detail."⁴⁴ A glimpse of the "real" Ramona was frequently offered as proof of the novel's veracity (see figure 3). Some promoters cloaked these Indian visits in romantic prose, suggesting where tourists might go to "look upon the dreamy and lazy life of the Indians." Yet most travel guides warned visitors that actual Indians would fall short of Jackson's picture of their beauty and goodness and indeed prompt contempt. One travel writer, claiming that he had located the legendary Ramona, lamented in 1900 that "she is now like all the other Indian women become as they grow older, *greasy* and *slovenly*, . . . She is just as haggard looking and lazy as the other squaws." McWilliams brought this inconsistency between the "real" and imagined Ramona into sharp focus: "The region accepted the charming Ramona, as a folk figure, but completely rejected the Indians still living in the area."⁴⁵ Once again, *Ramona* proved to be an ineffective vehicle for prompting recognition of the injustice Indian people had

suffered. Far more Anglo tourists visited “Spanish” *Ramona* sites than Indian ones; many were more interested in experiencing the romantic past than in pursuing redress in the present.⁴⁶

Many of the hosts of *Ramona* sites were initially less than pleased. The Del Valles and the Coutts were among the people most perturbed at the hordes of tourists that descended upon their homes demanding to see “Ramony.” Rancho Camulos became known as *Ramona*’s home less than two years after the novel appeared in print, when a *San Francisco Chronicle* article identified it as such. When this piece was reprinted as an appendix in new editions of the book, readers found encouragement not only to regard the story as true but to tour its real-life sites.⁴⁷ Reginaldo del Valle found that these uninvited guests increased the financial burden on his ranch, which was still under pressure from taxes and squatters. He wrote to his sister in 1888 that, despite the family’s tradition of hospitality, “the expenses are tremendous and if we continue in the same manner we will go bankrupt. . . . The strangers that come to see *Ramona* out of curiosity will have to be advised that we do not have a hotel here and that we cannot provide [for] them.” Visitors continued to overrun the estate; a newspaper reported one occasion in 1896 when “a mob of 300 of both sexes took advantage of the opportunity to raid the orchards . . . steal[ing] as many oranges as the time would permit, even invading the private grounds and apartments of the house.” Such actions caused the Del Valles to close Camulos to all unknown visitors.⁴⁸

At Guajome, fans encountered the following sign near the entrance: “Notice. Ladies and gentlemen calling here, in my absence, will kindly refrain from assuming liberties in and about these premises that would be objectionable to you if exercised by strangers in your homes. This is private property and must be respected. Sightseers are only tolerated NEVER WANTED!!” Whether the tourist onslaught or Jackson’s characterization of Señora Moreno got to her more, Ysidora Bandini Coutts was incensed enough to file a defamation suit against the author in Los Angeles County. The case was dismissed when Jackson died, but the resentment lingered. So too did Antonio Coronel’s regret; despite his enthusiastic cooperation with Jackson, he found himself deeply remorseful for having unwittingly allowed Anglos to lay siege to Camulos and Guajome.⁴⁹

Neither did all Southern California Anglos jump on the *Ramona* bandwagon immediately. In the late nineteenth century, while many Southern Californians did want sightseers, they agreed with the Coutts

and Del Valles that *Ramona* had brought a flood of tourists ready to impose their ill-founded preconceptions on the region. *Ramona* dismayed many Anglos and Californios for its wild romantic embellishments and its critiques, which they thought were unfounded. A review in the California literary journal *Overland Monthly* denounced Jackson's depiction, claiming that "somehow, by some impalpable quality put in it or left out . . . [it] misses being *our* California. The truth is that it is probably no one's California; that while every description is true to nature, the story is really laid out in the poet's land, which can never be exactly the same as any region of the realistic earth." Southern Californians felt the sting of Jackson's reproach for their treatment of Indian people and worked to change this impression by disproving her romantic portrayals of native tribes. A San Diego-area newspaper article entitled "Real Ramona and Ramona of Romance" argued that "There is nothing about the squalid adobe of the original character of Ramona connecting her with the lovely creation of Helen Hunt Jackson." Other local commentators decried the "hucksters" that sold the novel's fantasy as fact. Charles Fletcher Lummis, who often promoted Southern California's Spanish motifs, stated that "'Ramona' is pure fiction. Not one of its characters lived. Among all the falsehoods told to tourists perhaps none are more petty than those of people who 'knew Ramona,' who 'knew Alessandro,' and so forth."⁵⁰

In the 1880s and 1890s many Southern California tourist promoters and boosters were eager to prove that the region contained modern amenities and civilized society. And to many, this task meant separating the place as much as possible from its Mexican past. According to this strand of public opinion, the region was hampered by its association with Mexican people, adobe buildings, and social organization and thus was on a slower path to civilization than the Anglo-dominated northern region.⁵¹ *Ramona* did not help rid potential visitors of the belief that Southern California remained in a rude frontier stage of life. Locally produced guides often included less *Ramona* material than those authored by eastern tour companies. A Boston-based tour company's booklet in 1900 advertised a guided tour of California and guaranteed that customers would see real *Ramona* sights: "On the way we pass Camulos, the home of Ramona, whose stormy love story, in its frame work of mountain and range, spring and desert is so vividly painted by Helen Hunt Jackson. The house in which Ramona lived is pointed out to the traveler, and an ancient and wrinkled Indian woman, living in the vicinity, is said to be the romancist's original." In comparison, an 1894

hotel directory for the Los Angeles area contains no mention of the popular novel, choosing instead to inform its readers that "To-day Southern California has all the material signs of a high civilization. Her population is not rich, hence it is progressive and hopes to become rich, living in the meantime as they could not do in a less favored country."⁵² Before Jackson's work, markers of East Coast-style civilization, like hotels, railroads, and city blocks or natural features like the climate, the Sierras, and redwood trees contained the most appeal. Southern California Anglos emphasized these features at least as much as they tapped into the new passion for Spanish romance.

"A STRANGE MIXTURE OF FACT AND FANCY"

In the late nineteenth century, many Anglo-Californians remembered the region's recent past differently than *Ramona* rendered it. Their view of mission and rancho California supposed a dirty and primitive place populated by lazy people that emerged from this backward state only with the arrival of Anglo-Americans. Many people believed, as did one of California's earliest American historians, John S. Hittell, that California was born in the gold rush, rising "as if at one bound from the stagnation of semi-barbarous pastoral life to the . . . restless activity of a refined civilization."⁵³ We must remember too that the 1880s and 1890s were productive decades for western history and for the mythmaking business in general, as Buffalo Bill, Theodore Roosevelt, and Frederick Jackson Turner each hawked their own versions of the American frontier enterprise. Together these men provided an inescapable context for Anglo-American accounts of California history during this era.

Here we return to Hubert Howe Bancroft, who had collected in the 1870s those significant Californio memoirs that captured the nascent nostalgia of the time. Bancroft's volume on the Mexican era, *California Pastoral*, finally appeared in 1888 and included the Californio narratives merely as props for his argument about the inevitable and proper ascent of Anglo-Americans to dominance in the state. From the thousands of pages of testimonials in his library, Bancroft culled elements of romantic detail but virtually repeated Dana's portrayal of Californios from four decades before. Mexicans, as he unfailingly called California's Spanish speakers, were a people of "inherent indolence," with no patience for farming. Instead, they enjoyed the easier life of ranching, with its attendant dominion over animals and "Indian serfs." Bancroft praised Mexicans for their "chivalrous courtesy" and acknowledged

that they wanted for little, but he still accused them of damnable laziness: "Lazy some of them might be, and were, day after day, at morning and at night, lazily they told their rosary, lazily attended mass, and lazily ate and slept." That their memories, nostalgic and idealized though they might be, could fuel such an indictment of their society, appalled Californios who read Bancroft's version. In one case, the author called Mariano Vallejo's recollection of a key event a "strange mixture of fact and fancy" and thus cast doubt on Californios' entire cultural memory. As scholar Genaro Padilla has remarked, at that moment, Vallejo and his compatriots realized that their attempt to broadcast their message through Bancroft's histories "was another Californio mistake, since the Anglo-American historian proved to be as imperialistic as the land grabbers. . . . The Historian had spoken. Vallejo must have stared at the pages before him, stunned and humiliated."⁵⁴

Anglos, with little access to Californio-authored nostalgia except that filtered through Helen Hunt Jackson, presumably read Bancroft's argument differently. In a telling statement that seemed to pervert the old Yankee proverb "Never put off to tomorrow what you can do today," Bancroft claimed that the Californio motto was "Divertirse hoy que ya mañana es otro día" ("Enjoy yourself today because tomorrow is just another day.") This version both contained *Ramona* fans' picture of a leisured good life and blamed Californio indolence for the American conquest of California. As Bancroft records the successions, Californios "were not a strong community in any sense, either morally, physically, or politically; hence it was that as the savages faded before the superior Mexicans, so faded the Mexicans before the superior Americans."⁵⁵ Southern California Anglos would come to romanticize this idleness in much the same way that *Ramona* fans did, but in so doing, they did not reject Bancroft's belief that Anglo-Americans were the rightful possessors of California. *Ramona* did not so much counter this logic as put a softer face on it. Jackson's tale saw much to regret in the American takeover, not least the plight of California Indians. Yet she, like Bancroft, painted the conquest as inevitable and depicted rancho society as flawed in all the same ways: authoritarian, lazy, backward, and prejudiced.

A few local Anglo depictions of Southern California began to appear in print in the 1880s, and they too did not stray far from Bancroft's formula, despite often exhibiting greater generosity toward their predecessors. Horace Bell's 1881 memoir, *Reminiscences of a Ranger; or, Early Times in Southern California*, describes a good deal of amicability

between Anglos and Californios in the rough frontier society he recalled. The Los Angeles Rangers to which Bell refers were an organized vigilante squad that pursued ruffians and criminals in the 1850s and wore uniforms that resembled the garb of California caballeros (cowboys). Bell admitted that he had always been “an ardent and enthusiastic student of Spanish history, and was a great admirer of the chivalry of the race” and was dismayed that the “California Spaniard” lost his land and inheritance. But he insisted that the fault lay not at the feet of the government or enterprising Americans; Californios had only themselves to blame. “There is not a squatter in all California that ever got one acre of an honest Mexican grant, unless he purchased and paid for it; while the truth is that squatters, or more properly speaking, American settlers on the public domain, were defrauded, by millions of acres” because of spurious Mexican land claims. Moreover, he explicitly rejected the political objects of Californio nostalgia in offering “a parting word to the young men of Spanish blood: Pine not over grandeur gone, of misfortunes past” but instead join Anglos and successful Californios “on a new race of progress” and take a “stand in the ranks of American progression resolved to carve their way onward and upward. . . . [M]uchachos, emulate their virtues, their determined efforts, their industry, and let your own brave hearts be your future fortune.” While less dismissive of the Spanish-Mexican presence in the region, Bell’s story remains, as Kevin Starr has suggested, one “of conquest: of how order was brought to the frontier. . . . [T]he movement is from anarchy to civilization, and the end result is the founding of Southern California.”⁵⁶ Californios might become members of this new civilization, but only if they were to shed their past and become like Americans.

Ironically, however, Anglos were the ones who imagined Californios as representative only of the past. Californios’ nostalgia spoke to their present condition; Anglo versions, whether romantic or reproachful, consigned them entirely to a bygone era. These perspectives presented two different motives and forms for nostalgia. Where Californios asserted narratives of decline in the desire to assert their continuing presence, Anglos conceived of the Californio lifestyle as a brief but colorful chapter in a larger story of progress. Anglos did not experience the Californio trauma of displacement that gave the original nostalgia its purpose. Their wistful reminiscence had more to do with marking a poignant comparison of “relics of another age” and “spared pillars of the past” with their “enterprising Yankee nation,” as Richard Henry Dana

said upon his return to California in the postwar years. Converted to the romantic view, Dana composed a eulogy for the Californio past: "How softening is the effect of time. I almost feel as if I were lamenting the passing away of something loving and dear."⁵⁷

For Southern California Anglos at the turn of the twentieth century, *los días pasados* had come to suggest two key images, besides the possibility for tourist profit: a colorful past and the good life. Despite the exaggerations in the *Ramona*-style portrayal of California's rancho society, Californios themselves seemed to be bona fide remnants of a departed time. To quaff the waters of Ramona's well was to drink of the past itself. Some Californios learned to capitalize upon this value-added quality. A later generation of Del Valles affixed a Home of Ramona label to their orchard products, and Cave Coutts, Jr., set about remodeling Guajome to fit tourist expectations. Styling himself as "the last of the dons," Coutts clearly understood that a good deal of Anglos' fascination lay with Californios' supposed disappearing act. Nothing could have been farther from the Californio agenda in the 1870s than disappearing yet the less headway that Californios made in Anglo society, the more they appeared in Anglo nostalgia.⁵⁸

Ramona's version of the past also seemed to harmonize nicely with the possibility of a graciously civilized and definitively Anglo future in Southern California. Boosters like Charles Nordhoff, Benjamin Cummings Truman, and Charles Dudley Warner offered the region's bounteous climate and landscape as a domestic Mediterranean. More than drawing health seekers, however, Southern California as "Our Italy" suggested a fulfillment of Americans' dreams of a genteel Arcadian society. In this other Southern California self-image, the possibility that a new center of civilization might germinate in the friendly sunshine held great appeal for Anglo residents. As Warner wrote in 1891,

The picture in my mind for the future of the Land of the Sun, of the mountains, of the sea—which is only an enlargement of the picture of the present—is one of great beauty. The picture I see is of a land of small farms and gardens, highly cultivated, in all the valleys and on the foot-hills; a land, therefore, of luxuriance and great productiveness and agreeable homes. I see everywhere the gardens, the vineyards, the orchards, with the various greens of the olive, the fig, and the orange. . . . It is the fairest field for the experiment of a contented community, without any poverty and without excessive wealth.⁵⁹

This image of the Southern California good life was not so far from *Ramona's* halcyon days. Though fusion of the Spanish metaphor with

Anglo lifestyles would wait for another day, Jackson's renderings vibrantly evoked the bucolic and genteel landscapes that local Anglo promoters foresaw. Eventually, even many Anglo skeptics caught on to the possibilities of envisioning and promoting the region in these Jacksonian terms.

CONCLUSION

The parallel development of California's image of the good life in past and present, along with the steady proliferation of *Ramona* guides and venues, have led many historians to see *Ramona* as a watershed in the region's "self-consciousness" and obsession with its Spanish past. *Ramona* appears in many accounts to have single-handedly overturned earlier versions of local history and inaugurated the romantic turn that continued unabated.⁶⁰ Indeed, the Anglo turn to Spanish romance is difficult to imagine without Helen Hunt Jackson's assistance. Yet *Ramona* has received too much credit. First, the book's nostalgic mood and style were not original. Jackson and her readers subsumed the Californio version under an Anglo imprimatur, but the Del Valles and Coronels and their compatriots were both her ghostwriters and protagonists. As Rosaura Sánchez remarked evocatively, "In a war of position . . . one does not turn over one's weapons to the enemy for safekeeping, unless, perhaps, it is the only way of ensuring their storage and survival." Faced with the danger of erasure, Californios chose to tell their stories, even if they could not control the way Anglos would read their stories. They did not "disappear, ignored of the world," as Mariano Vallejo had feared, but rather their legacy began to appear across the Southern California landscape. And, however difficult to access, their narratives remain in play, as scholars like Sánchez and others have brought to light.⁶¹

Loaning one's history, however, can be a perilous gamble. Mistranslation can have lasting effects, as Santa Barbara matron Doña Maria de las Angustias de la Guerra was horrified to learn. Genaro Padilla revealed that English translations, down to recent decades, have consistently mutilated a key statement she made to Bancroft's interviewer. Her argument that "The taking of the country did not please the Californios at all, and least of all the women" became "the conquest of California did not bother the Californians, least of all the women." The erroneous translation provided fodder for generations of Anglos, who believed that Californios were receptive to conquest and lackadaisical in their

resistance.⁶² This unfortunate example offers a revealing metaphor for the way Anglos used Californio memories. Southern California Anglos continued to rely upon Spanish speakers as authenticators, but mostly for the surface details of an idealized lifestyle rather than the substance of their lives.

For example, Antonio Coronel's words appeared in print in local English publications for decades after his death. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce's promotional magazine *Land of Sunshine* published interviews with him in 1895 to validate the locations of both Ramona's home and the Camino Real, and a number of *Ramona* tourist guides quoted him as a reference for Jackson's assiduous on-the-ground research. As late as 1929, a portion of his Bancroft interview was translated for *Touring Topics*, the auto-club monthly. Titled "Things Past: Remembrances of sports, dances, diversions and other domestic and social customs of old California," the excerpt was entirely descriptive and betrayed little of his perspective on either Mexican or American times.⁶³ Anglo versions like *Ramona* were often light diversions that presented life in isolation, apart from Californio experiences as a whole.

But there are other reasons that *Ramona* could not have been the lone muse for Southern California Anglos' fascination with the Spanish past. As an eastern transplant and tourist rendering, the *Ramona* myth did not wipe away competing local memories, Californio or Anglo. Nor could it independently consolidate the romance into the inescapable marker of regional identity that its version of the past would later become for Anglo residents. No doubt, it was an important catalyst. The book and tourist pilgrimage provided a springboard for newfound nostalgia. More important, perhaps, it gave the Spanish past an Anglo author. Like Bancroft, Jackson transcribed and translated *los días pasados* for Anglo audiences. Just as she made Indian people both central to and invisible in the process, she allowed romantic details to smooth over political agendas. Yet had *Ramona* remained the sole expression of this nostalgia, no matter how popular, Anglo cultural memories of the Spanish past would not have achieved the regional magnitude that they did. Only by assembling homegrown fantasies—divested of Jackson's strident, if ignored, social critique—and installing them in the built environment did Southern California Anglos integrate the Spanish past into their regional memory and sense of place. *Ramona* represented the Anglo deed to the Spanish past. The next question is how Anglos built upon this acquired landscape.