Helen Hunt Jackson

Helen Hunt Jackson (1831–85), among the most successful American women writers of the nineteenth century, produced Ramona *in 1884. In* A Literary History of Southern California, *Franklin Walker calls it "the literary document most important in its influence on the growth of the Spanish tradition in Southern California." Having earlier written a nonfiction book detailing government injustice toward Indians,* A Century of Dishonor *(1881), she had hoped her novel would dramatize the plight of "mission Indians." Results disappointed her; after reading a prestigious—and quite favorable—review, she said, "Not one word for my Indians! I put my heart and soul in the book for them. It is a dead failure." Nevertheless, as Lawrence Clark Powell observed in* California Classics, *she produced "the best California book of its kind—an historical romance of a vanished way of life." The brief passage that follows offers a sense of why Jackson's version of the Hispanic past was so compelling to nineteenth-century readers.*

SHEEP-SHEARING TIME

It was sheep-shearing time in Southern California; but sheep-shearing was late at the Señora Moreno's. The Fates had seemed to combine to put it off. In the first place, Felipe Moreno had been ill. He was the Señora's eldest son, and since his father's death had been at the head of his mother's house. Without him, nothing could be done on the ranch, the Señora thought. It had been always, "Ask Señor Felipe," "Go to Señor Felipe," "Señor Felipe will attend to it," ever since Felipe had had the dawning of a beard on his handsome face.

In truth, it was not Felipe, but the Señora, who really decided all questions from greatest to least, and managed everything on the place, from the sheep-pastures to the artichoke-patch; but nobody except the Señora herself

knew this. An exceedingly clever woman for her day and generation was Señora Gonzaga Moreno,—as for that matter, exceedingly clever for any day and generation; but exceptionally clever for the day and generation to which she belonged. Her life, the mere surface of it, if it had been written, would have made a romance, to grow hot and cold over: sixty years of the best of old Spain and the wildest of New Spain, Bay of Biscay, Gulf of Mexico, Pacific Ocean,—the waves of them all had tossed destinies for the Señora. The Holy Catholic Church had had its arms round her from first to last; and that was what had brought her safe through, she would have said, if she had ever said anything about herself, which she never did,—one of her many wisdoms. So quiet, so reserved, so gentle an exterior never was known to veil such an imperious and passionate nature, brimful of storm, always passing through stress; never thwarted, except at peril of those who did it; adored and hated by turns, and each at the hottest. A tremendous force, wherever she appeared, was Señora Moreno; but no stranger would suspect it, to see her gliding about, in her scanty black gown, with her rosary hanging at her side, her soft dark eyes cast down, and an expression of mingled melancholy and devotion on her face. She looked simply like a sad, spiritual-minded old lady, amiable and indolent, like her race, but sweeter and more thoughtful than their wont. Her voice heightened this mistaken impression. She was never heard to speak either loud or fast. There was at times even a curious hesitancy in her speech, which came near being a stammer, or suggested the measured care with which people speak who have been cured of stammering. It made her often appear as if she did not know her own mind: at which people sometimes took heart; when, if they had only known the truth, they would have known that the speech hesitated solely because the Señora knew her mind so exactly that she was finding it hard to make the words convey it as she desired, or in a way to best attain her ends.

About this very sheep-shearing there had been, between her and the head shepherd, Juan Canito, called Juan Can for short, and to distinguish him from Juan Jose, the upper herdsman of the cattle, some discussions which would have been hot and angry ones in any other hands than the Señora's.

Juan Canito wanted the shearing to begin, even though Señor Felipe were ill in bed, and though that lazy shepherd Luigo had not yet got back with the flock that had been driven up the coast for pasture. "There were plenty of sheep on the place to begin with," he said one morning,—"at least a thousand;" and by the time they were done, Luigo would surely be back with the

rest; and as for Señor Felipe's being in bed, had not he, Juan Canito, stood at the packing bag, and handled the wool, when Señor Felipe was a boy? Why could he not do it again? The Señora did not realize how time was going; there would be no shearers to be hired presently, since the Señora was determined to have none but Indians. Of course, if she would employ Mexicans, as all the other ranches in the valley did, it would be different; but she was resolved upon having Indians,—"God knows why," he interpolated surlily, under his breath.

"I do not quite understand you, Juan," interrupted Señora Moreno at the precise instant the last syllable of this disrespectful ejaculation had escaped Juan's lips; "speak a little louder. I fear I am growing deaf in my old age."

What gentle, suave, courteous tones! and the calm dark eyes rested on Juan Canito with a look to the fathoming of which he was as unequal as one of his own sheep would have been. He could not have told why he instantly and involuntarily said, "Beg your pardon, Señora."

"Oh, you need not ask my pardon, Juan," the Señora replied with exquisite gentleness; "it is not you who are to blame, if I am deaf. I have fancied for a year I did not hear quite as well as I once did. But about the Indians, Juan; did not Señor Felipe tell you that he had positively engaged the same band of shearers we had last autumn, Alessandro's band from Temecula? They will wait until we are ready for them. Señor Felipe will send a messenger for them. He thinks them the best shearers in the country. He will be well enough in a week or two, he thinks, and the poor sheep must bear their loads a few days longer. Are they looking well, do you think, Juan? Will the crop be a good one? General Moreno used to say that you could reckon up the wool-crop to a pound, while it was on the sheep's backs."

"Yes, Señora," answered the mollified Juan; "the poor beasts look wonderfully well considering the scant feed they have had all winter. We'll not come many pounds short of our last year's crop, if any. Though, to be sure, there is no telling in what case that—Luigo will bring his flock back."

The Señora smiled, in spite of herself, at the pause and gulp with which Juan had filled in the hiatus where he had longed to set a contemptuous epithet before Luigo's name.

This was another of the instances where the Señora's will and Juan Canito's had clashed and he did not dream of it, having set it all down as usual to the score of young Señor Felipe.

Harry Leon Wilson

Harry Leon Wilson (1867–1939) was a small-town boy from Illinois who produced what many consider to be the first great Hollywood novel, Merton of the Movies *(1922). Once the editor of the humor weekly* Puck *(1896–1902), this longtime resident of Carmel was a Bohemian companion of Jack London, Mary Austin, and George Sterling. Nonetheless, it was an extended stay in the Southland, where he haunted movie studios, that produced his most famous California novel, from which the following is excerpted. He also produced another widely read novel with an alliterative title,* Ruggles of Red Gap *(1915).*

OUT THERE WHERE MEN ARE MEN

From the dressing room the following morning, arrayed in the Buck Benson outfit, unworn since that eventful day on the Gashwiler lot, Merton accompanied Baird to a new set where he would work that day. Baird was profuse in his admiration of the cowboy embellishments, the maroon chaps, the new boots, the hat, the checked shirt and gay neckerchief.

"I'm mighty glad to see you so sincere in your work," he assured Merton. "A lot of these hams I hire get to kidding on the set and spoil the atmosphere, but don't let it bother you. One earnest leading man, if he'll just stay earnest, will carry the piece. Remember that—you got a serious part."

"I'll certainly remember," Merton earnestly assured him.

"Here we are; this is where we begin the Western stuff," said Baird. Merton recognized the place. It was the High Gear Dance Hall where the Montague girl had worked. The name over the door was now "The Come All Ye," and there was a hitching rack in front to which were tethered half-a-dozen saddled horses.

Inside, the scene was set as he remembered it. Tables for drinking were about the floor, and there was a roulette wheel at one side. A red-shirted