

RUIZ DE BURTON, MARÍA AMPARO (1832–1895)

“And now we have to beg for what we had the right to demand.” *The Squatter and the Don: A Novel Descriptive of Contemporary Occurrences in California* (1885).

María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1832-1895), a resident of Monterey, California, chronicled her experiences in the novel, *The Squatter and the Don* (1885). The novel tells the story of a Californio family who lost their immense landholdings to taxes and litigation in efforts to reclaim their property from American squatters. Based on Ruiz de Burton's own familiarity with the loss of property, the book offers a scathing indictment of the American government, industrialists, and their complicity in the displacement and destruction of centuries old Mexican way of life. María Amparo Ruiz married Lieutenant Colonel Henry S. Burton in 1849. The couple owned Rancho Jamul, a 500,000 acres estate. Upon Burton's death in 1869, the ownership of the ranch came into question. A series of court hearings over seven years resulted in an award to Ruiz de Burton of a mere 8,926 acres. Perhaps the first novelist to describe the bitter resentment of the declining landed class in California, Ruiz de Burton also wrote another novel, *Who Would Have Thought It* (1872) an account of hypocrisy and racism set during the American Civil War. Along with a collection of her letters, Ruiz de Burton's invaluable work offers insights into her own complicated life and to our understanding a critical period in Latina history.