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Sermons in Stones: Discovering the Nation

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Sermons in Stones: Discovering the Nation

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Colorado in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
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This thesis entitled:

Sermons in Stones: Discovering the Nation

written by Ann Emmons

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
ABSTRACT

Emmons, Ann (PhD., English)
Sermons in Stones: Discovering the Nation
Thesis directed by Professor Nan Goodman

If there is a leitmotif to American literary criticism of the past fifty years it is that America, exceptionally, was not discovered but constructed. Those in a new world void of self-evident tradition or the conventional markers of history, the story goes, invented an organic truth to their past experience, current interests, and future intentions. They constructed cultural memory. Fiction from the early national period, critics argue, variously reflects, exposes, challenges, and participates in this hegemonic process.

This project is dedicated to another group of American writers who insisted that the land did speak: Mormon and Gentile immigrants who walked west the breadth of a new nation and in their journals described haunted rock cities and uncanny Indian massacres. In these descriptions, poetic patterns—how things feel—prove more powerful than manifest appearances—how things are. These rock cities and these massacre stories prompt reassessment of nineteenth-century Euro-American settlers’ relationship with the land and the land’s inhabitants and alternate interpretations of the seminal texts of American Romanticism.

In Chapter 1, I consider Idaho’s City of Rock’s Almo Massacre in the context of Mormon prophecy, theology, and history. In this reading, I am centrally concerned with the effects of the story’s poetics: how does the Almo-Massacre story invent and perform the nation? The Mountain Meadows Massacre, and its translation from its authentic site to the site of its mythical reenactment in the Almo Massacre, is my central concern in Chapter 2. Chapter 2 reminds us that trauma narratives are never about authentic specifics of place, time, or experience but about synesthetic sense: how things feel. This revelation informs my readings of the journals of America’s nineteenth-century overland immigrants who walked west and described not the virgin land of American myth but contested space. In Chapter 4, I turn to three of America’s canonical nineteenth-century nation stories: Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle,” James Fenimore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans, and Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. In these stories, the world-as-felt matters as fully as the world-as-seen.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project spans two decades. I have many people to thank. In 1994 Gretchen Luxenberg of the Columbia Cascade System Support Office, National Park Service, agreed that the Almo Massacre warranted more than a footnote in a federal environmental compliance document. Twelve years later, University of Montana Professor Eric Reimer agreed and helped craft the initial questions and methodological approach; watching me doodle the massacre he said: “you’ve drawn a story and a map.” This is that story and that map. The University of Colorado Boulder provided generous funding, in the form of teaching relief, the Center for Humanities and the Arts “Faith Reason Doubt” Seminar Fellowship, the Edward P. Nolan Scholarship, and English Department Travel Grants. Jan Shipps, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Sally Gordon, and Richard Turley, all participants in the McNeil Center for Early American Studies’ Bloody Days Conference, helped me with an early version of Chapter 2. My Aunt Ginna and Uncle Rex made me cry Year 2 with a generous check; the support continued with perfect questions and perfectly timed encouragement. My Aunt Chris and Uncle Denny provided a lovely loving home during transitions and the holidays. My teenage sons tolerated a move to Boulder when they were not of an age to easily tolerate moving. I remain grateful for and awed by their support and good humor. I am also grateful for my practical mother who against all odds did not think my return to school foolish and for my historian father who supported my translation from history to literature (while also reminding me that my questions would find a ready audience and an effective methodology in a history department). My husband, who appeared during long stretches of this even longer project to have stopped paying attention, would show up suddenly with a perfect reference – Ortiz, Basso – and remind me silently that he’d been paying attention all along. My dear friend and writing collaborator Fran always believed I’d finish; I love her too much to ever make her wrong. Finally, I would not have begun the dissertation without Professor Nan Goodman’s persuasive arguments to commit to the University of Colorado and I would never have finished without her brilliant insight, wise guidance, and good friendship. I could not have asked for a better dissertation chair.
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A French friend of mine speaks English with a strong French accent. He once described a Kansas storm. “There were lambs flying through the air.” “Lambs?” “Yes,” he confirmed. “Lambs of wool.” “Lambs of wool?” This, I was learning, was a storm of mythical proportions. “Yes, lambs of wool flying vertically.” “Vertically?” I asked, my visions of Oz replaced by visions of Revelation. “Yes,” he insisted. “Literally. It was a macro-bust.” His insistence on the literal unveiled the mystery: he spoke materially not metaphorically of the wonder and rapture of limbs of wood flying horizontally through the air during one of the microbursts that punctuate western American summers. What began as a simple error of pronunciation became a more profound error of misreading. “Lamb,” so close to limb in sound and yet so far in sense, established my expectations of the metaphorical. I heard “wool” only because “wood” didn’t fit these expectations. I failed to recognize “vertical” as a simple lexical error only because it did.

Similar misunderstandings are at the heart of this project. What happens when we assume metaphorical content and mythological intentions of those who instead write of the material? How badly do we misread?
**INTRODUCTION: DISCOVERING THE NATION**

“As to the jottings and analyses / of politicians and newspapermen / … / who proved upon their pulses / ‘escalate’, / ‘Backlash’ and ‘crack down’, ‘the provisional wing’, / polarization’ and ‘long-standing hate’ / Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing.” Seamus Heaney

“I hold for the pertinence and relevance of how things feel to us.” Elisa New

If there is a leitmotif to American criticism of the past fifty years it is that America, exceptionally, was not discovered but constructed. In his monumental history of the layers of memory carried by landscape, for example, British art historian Simon Schama takes as a given that “especially in the United States, where the interplay of men and habitat has long been at the heart of national history, … writers have accomplished the feat of making inanimate topography into historical agents in their own right” (13, my emphasis). Those in a new world void of self-evident tradition or the conventional markers of history, the story goes, invented an organic truth to their past experience, current interests, and future intentions. They constructed cultural memory: placed substrates of tradition as they professed to expose these substrates, wrote on the rocks as they professed to read the word of God writ on rock, read a prophecy of progress in the West’s open prospect as they manipulated the boundaries of this prospect. Thus they produced a national space. Fiction from the early national period, critics argue, variously reflects, exposes, challenges, and participates in this hegemonic process of boundary construction.

And so American literary criticism of the past 50 years proceeds from Henry Nash Smith’s powerful close readings of the myths and symbols that constituted a new man; to Richard Slotkin’s examination of the violently willful construction of a manifest birth right; to Sacvan Bercovitch’s collapse of Romance symbol in Puritan type; to Annette Kolodny’s report of the laying of and the lying about the land that pays little attention to the lay of the land. It continues in the late twentieth to early twenty-first century with Angela Miller’s analysis of a
landscape school where local prospects fade to Destiny’s door and Myra Jehlen’s more-recent insistence in *American Incarnation* that European settlers self-consciously incarnated—assumed the concrete and definitive form of—liberal individualism in New World and Nascent Nation geography. Thus, these critics argue, American writers made the world speak and speak itself as a story in which the end is known from the very beginning. Thus, historian Hayden White argues, fiction hides in history.

This project is dedicated to another group of American writers who insisted that the land *did* speak: Mormon and Gentile immigrants who walked west the breadth of a new nation and in their journals described haunted rock cities and uncanny Indian massacres. In these descriptions, poetic patterns prove more powerful than the manifest “appearances of the world” (Frow 125). The complex and simultaneous erosion and accretion of these rock cities and these massacre stories—from lived experience, to oral tradition, to written text, to stones that bear witness—prompts reassessment of nineteenth-century Euro-American settlers’ relationship with the land and the land’s inhabitants and alternate interpretations of the seminal texts of American Romanticism.

Myra Jehlen’s persuasive demonstration of the primacy of the land to American nineteenth-century national experience provides my project’s broadest prospect and its starting point. She writes that American pragmatists’ “embrace of the factual” is an impulse from the heart of … American identity” (2) and argues that “the decisive factor shaping the founding conceptions of ‘America’ and of ‘the American’ was material rather than conceptual; rather than a set of abstract ideas, the physical fact of the continent” (3). The idea of the country took visible shape. (Immigrants’ journals suggest that she’s right. Their story lines map to contour line, though both story and contour are weird, the Gothic made flesh.) Yet what follows this
persuasive demonstration, in *American Incarnation* and elsewhere, is more concept than matter, not description of the effects of the land on experience, but rather description of contrived imposition: the creation of metaphor by those who imagined they saw the land clearly. In land either or both mindfully invented and mindlessly misread as vacant Americans contrived a “transcendent clarity” to their identity.

This analysis insists on the opposition of the sensory real to textual fiction and supposes that American experience is a construction imposed upon the past and upon land/landscape: “more calculated than spontaneous, more opaque than transparent” (Shipps 178). This analysis both exaggerates American exceptionalism and offers little sense of the *interdependence* of observation-based and sense-based empiricism. In this project, I consider that interdependence in the form of the encountered landscape and the lived experience of the nascent nationals, what the Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture calls “the ground beneath their feet.”

“Ground beneath feet” suggests “given and inevitable” land rather than culturally mediated landscape and in doing so threatens to dismiss twentieth-century philosophy’s ‘linguistic turn’ and the ‘problem of the subject.” It suggests the positivist pragmatism of the authentic rather than the inauthentic, the literal rather than figural, the material rather than conceptual. Yet, spend enough time with immigrant journals from the mid- to late-nineteenth century and the distinction between the two collapses: positivism and poetics collide in metaphoric representations that are also inherently experiential. Thus when John Wood “put his shoulder to the [wagon] wheel” and “pushed on and on” through the deep sand of the corpse-strewn “field of desolation” of Utah’s 100-Mile Desert, the positive and the poetic corresponded in all but mileage. The 100-Mile Desert is in fact only 93 miles long. I imagine those added seven miles not as a lie about the land but as the authentic measure of desolation, what Jean-
François Lyotard calls the “something” in the world that “does not allow itself to be made present” (81). Thus Margaret Frink understood plains as the generic ground of a long journey: on the steep western slope of the Sierra Mountains she ended her journal, “This is our last day on the plains” (115). For America’s nineteenth-century migrants, *ground-type* (simultaneously real ground and representative type) anchors the migrant subject to the something not-present but known.

The ground beneath the immigrants’ feet evokes not only the moccasins of James Fenimore Cooper’s last Mohican, moccasins that famously leave no material trace on New World ground, but also Martin Heidegger’s famous representative thing: shoes, ostensibly pure object yet revealed as equal part poetic subjectivity. Heidegger’s shoes, Jonathon Frow writes, in a description as easily applied to the last-Mohican’s moccasins, are not simply “shoes in their nonrepresentational reality, nor simply the representation of the shoes, but something which is both and neither, something which partakes both of [their wearer’s] intuitive knowledge of Being and of philosophical reflection” (139). Shoes inhabit a figural space in which they cannot be reduced to pure reality or pure representation. Noah Heringman, writing not of America and of Americans but of the affinity between Europe’s Romantic poets and its geologists, describes this process. At Wordsworth’s Simplon Pass (*The Prelude* VI) and Shelley’s eponymous Mont Blanc, “the erratic boulder anchors the initial, hallucinatory appearance of the subject to something real [and] figures the reality of the body as against the ideality of the mind” (55): subject and object, real and hallucinatory, body and mind, simultaneously at stake and at play.

The Mohican’s moccasins, Heidegger’s imagery, and Heringman’s insight shifts the focus from *feet*—that cover/smother, that impose cultural memory—to feet in relationship to *ground*—that carries, contains, and reveals cultural memory. In the pages that follow, I look at how
migrants read the land. I ask by what chain of associations ground was imagined, constructed, and reconstructed as narrative. I am concerned with the cultural meaning that nineteenth–century Americans-in-motion found in the landscape. I am arguing that finding meaning reflects a different relationship with the land and with the stranger than imposing meaning.

This is historian Benedict Anderson’s argument when he cautions us to distinguish between the nation as an imagined fantastical community and the nation as an invented, or “fabricated” and “falsified,” community. Anderson’s distinction has given rise to a new generation of scholars of the nation. I want to similarly shift critical focus in the interpretation of imagined national(ized) landscapes. When the focus shifts, finding meaning in American rock proves unexceptional. Schama’s “especially in America” notwithstanding, the ancient Greek topoi, the Latin loci, translate as both place and place to find something—as site and as process: thus the interdependence of men and women who search and habitat that reveals stands at the heart of history. Romance-language heirs to the Latin tradition follow suit. Spanish speakers understand ir as the verb communicating physical movement (from here to there) as well as personal evolution (I was to I will be), personal affect (I am today), and personal effect (I am for always). Willa Cather’s French-Canadian solitaire similarly reports physical place as personal essence: “ma chambre est mon paradis terrestres; c’est mon centre; c’est mon élément” (136). When we move, place moves with us and the distinction between the conceptual and the material collapses. There are no new worlds, vacant and exceptional.

These are not merely abstract concern. United States federal law dictates the boundaries and authenticity criteria of those historic places preserved in public memory—and provides the funding necessary to this preservation. The National Park Service defines the National Register of Historic Places as
the Nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect our historic and archeological resources. Properties listed in the Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service, which is part of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Or: a codified hierarchy that asks the world to speak itself as a story and that spans governmental, educational, private, and public realms.

Properties are eligible for listing in the National Register if they: A) are associated with a significant event in local, regional, or national history; B) are associated with persons significant in local, regional, or national, history; C) are outstanding representative examples of architecture or engineering (at the local, regional, or national level); or, D) have yielded or are likely to yield information important to “our” national history or prehistory.

The register is not to include religious properties (except for those with architectural significance), cemeteries, properties “commemorative in nature,” or properties that have been moved; the sacred, the dead, the wholly representational, and the transient all raise the specter of the conceptual and inauthentic rather than the material and authentic. These, looking forward to Chapter 2, are Susan Stewart’s “souvenirs of death” that mark “the horrible transformation of meaning into materiality … [rather] than materiality into meaning” (140). In protection against this move toward inauthenticity, laws governing integrity are designed to assure that the material instead founds the conceptual. So, for example, the burial site of the five immigrants killed in southern Idaho in 1862 in “several related clashes” (perpetrated by either or both Shoshone
Indians or white men disguised as Indians), a site christened “Massacre Rocks” by later settlers for whom the “narrow defile between the rocky cliffs” evoked condensed images of both ambush and headstone, is not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The killings, the National Park Services notes, took place on other ground and metaphoric condensation of memory and experience in ground-type lacks authenticity (Haines, “Inventory”).

Most importantly to this study, the NPS insists on integrity of location, explaining that “the relationship between the property and its location is often important to understanding why the property was created or why something happened. The actual location of a historic property… is particularly important in recapturing the sense of historic events and persons” (NPS, my emphasis). Because subjective, integrity of feeling—a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time—and integrity of association—the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property—are never, in and of themselves, sufficient to support eligibility of a property to the National Register of Historic Places. What things are, the National Register insists, is more important than how things seem.

Thus National Register significance criteria and integrity requirements codify a misreading of the American landscape that mirrors the longstanding misreading of American national literature as largely positivist, carefully bounded, and self-consciously constitutive. They suggest a clear distinction between the material real and the conceptual, and a polarizing boundary between fiction and non-fiction. They ignore what ethnographer Keith Basso calls “the symbolic attributes of human environments” (41). In this project, in the footsteps of Basso and his Apache subjects, I reveal symbolic attributes of human environments as mobile, transcendent, without integrity of place or setting. How things seem, I argue, is often more important than what things are.
The chapters that follow are an argument for a sense of place as concerned with sense as place, and for historic boundaries that acknowledge what Wai Chee Dimock, in her argument for an American literary tradition much older than the nation and broader than the continent, terms the porous and imprecise “input channels, kinship networks, routes of transit, and forms of attachment” (Dimock 3) that bind America to the rest of the world. This argument directs me to the American-readers-who-wrote, to the journals of those American emigrants and immigrants who walked west across a continent.

I find little positivism here, little physical integrity, and virtually nothing manifest. Instead I find poetry disguised as primary source and primary source disguised as poetry. Guide books “spoke vaguely” and migrant parties “wandered uncertainly.” Immigrant journals repeatedly lament the difficulty of determining distance or height in unfamiliar air and scale (“a grown man looks like a small boy”; “looks within 5 miles of you but is in reality fifty”); the difficulty of recognizing friend from foe (“and when the Indian washed his face he was a white man”); the simultaneous conflicting relief in a Continental Divide “that ill comports with the ideas we had formed” and disappointment in the efficacy of sight—”saw the far famed south pass, but did not see it until we had passed it”; and the very material confusion between the poetic sublime, the beautiful, and the lived. “We are here … in this stony, hilly, mountainous, poor, desolate, beautiful, sublime country. But sufficient to say that we have at last got to the long desired and long looked for place,” “AR” writes in July 1843, four years before his murder in the Whitman Massacre. The literal and the figurative merge. At news of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s death, Brigham Young reported matter-of-factly, “It was judged by menny … that there was more then [sic] five barrels of tears shead.” “Got sloughed twice today,” Mary Burrell writes of a muddy day on the Platte, conflating ground, experience, and emotion. The language of the emigrant
guide books is simultaneously biblical and pragmatic, an opaque conflation of representation and experience, and a slippage between historical content and literary form that refuses any meaningful distinction between the two: “Let the bed of your wagon be made of maple if you can get it, and let the sides and end boards be one wide board. Let your wagon sheet be either pine or [?], well oiled or painted; Let the bed be straight,” J.M. Shively writes in 1846.

I similarly find little evidence of the Puritans’ heirs’ decisive and opportunistic conceptual misreading of the physical fact of the continent as a vacant primordial wilderness made in and for their millennial image. I find instead a profoundly urgent search for evidence of ancestors and known landmarks and an equally urgent fear of the degree to which cross purposes crowded western space. The violent tension between horizontal prairie and vertical rock evoked descriptions not just of an exceptional geology but also of history: “an imposing pile of regal buildings in the style of the earlier days of the monarchy… apparently as perfect in its form as the hand of man could make it.” Historic content and literary form merge in immigrant journals that, like the American Gothic, describe a material land steeped in bad memories and buried crimes: immigrants travel across a burial ground and mark the days by both miles traveled forward (the language of westward progress that we know so well) and also by miles left behind and by graves passed (a language we have largely ignored).

For the Latter-day Saints, founders of “America’s Religion,” the search for evidence of ancestors is particularly material. The “Mormons” travelled across a long-inhabited long-known land with a long history most-materially tied to the Old World by Abraham’s people and by Christ’s appearance. Buried and found ancient text written on rock affirmed that the Indians were ancestral brothers of a lost tribe of Israel, the rock cities and burial mounds scattered across the Valley of the Platte the work of the Nephites, New Zion a place known from scripture, never
before seen but felt commonsensically. “This is The Place,” Brigham Young is said to have recognized upon reaching the edge of New Zion and in his certainty despite the absence of evidence I hear critic Elisa New’s reminder of the “pertinence and relevance of how things feel” (12).

Commonsensically is New’s word (194). In The Line’s Eye New offers “explorations of a much more retracted and much less hypostatized relation of the individual to nature and a much less invasive and self-possessive Protestant ethic.” Her aim, she continues, is to “reanimate aspects of the Protestant ‘legacy’” (36) and she reanimates by focusing on the constitutive power of the communally felt—the commonly sensed—rather than the individually seen. I hope to do the same

The Almo Massacre

Erosional forms ... cawed in granite ... [are] enclosed in a large basin ... entirely hidden from view on the west and partly hidden from the east... [The basin] is the site of a maze of weirdly carved forms scattered aimlessly about ... Their distribution is not uniform, but resembles scattered villages or hamlets with more widely scattered forms between.

Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology

I have a case study for this reanimation: the Almo Massacre site and story, excluded by the National Park Service from the thematic boundaries of the National Register of Historic Places’ City of Rocks Cultural Landscape. At the City of Rocks National Reserve, the park service manages a natural landscape of sublime topographic relief and a cultural landscape associated with Mormon diaspora and settlement, with nineteenth-century overland migration more generally, and with the intersection of the two in the Almo Massacre. The reserve is located in south-central Idaho and is characterized by heavily dissected, north/south-oriented ridges and free-standing granite knobs. Drainages are steep, rocky, and, for the most part, ephemeral. Intermittent Graham Creek flows across the northeast corner of the reserve, to the Almo Valley. The
west slope of Smoky Mountain, a large, free-standing erosional form, dominates the east boundary, and the Cedar Hills are located adjacent to the southern boundary. From north to south, the reserve contains two, relatively large, gently sloping, basins, each drained by an eastward flowing tributary of the Raft River. Beginning at the north end of the reserve, the Circle Creek basin draws water from three tributaries, North, Center, and South creeks. This basin contains a large concentration of granitic outcrops and monoliths that inspired the name “City of Rocks.” It also contains one of the most reliable water sources within the reserve, was a favored campsite location for emigrants on the California, Oregon, and Mormon trails, and was the location of the earliest homestead withdrawal in the area. It was here that pioneer Edward Johnson, plowing ostensibly virgin land, reported discovery of a mass grave.

In 1994, my colleagues—landscape architect Angela Miller and archaeologist Janene Caywood—and I, at the time a historian for Historical Research Associates, Inc., contracted with the National Park Service to write an interpretive history of the reserve (HRA). The goal of the study was straightforward: to delineate significant themes in local and regional history and to identify components of the landscape evocative of those themes. How and where, the park service asked, had history shaped the land, had the land shaped history, and what extant cultural forms symbolized that shaping? What we found was distinctly more complicated: an extant if eroding narrative of origin in which discursive content reflected the form of the land. Literary form and landform proved mutually constitutive.

Similar cities of rock are commonplace common places in the American West. Their topography of sharp relief and scattered forms gives shape to historical violence while the tension between vertical and horizontal elements gives shape to migration and settlement, dissemination
and regathering: to the story of the nation’s nativity. The synchronicity of story-form and land-
form at the City of Rocks demonstrates that literary landscapes are physical and historical.

This “Silent City of Rocks (‘A Land of ‘Make Believe’),” City pioneer Jean Nicholson Elwell wrote in her popular travelers’ guide, “is the high point of Cassia County’s Historic Continuum” (3). She means this both literally and figuratively. During the high point of America’s overland migration, 1849-1869, the City of Rocks (5680’) stood at the high-elevation convergence of the California, Oregon, and Mormon Trails;¹ in the lush high grass of high summer along Circle Creek, emigrants paused for rest and water before descending precipitous Granite Pass and the Humboldt Sink that lay beyond it.

This “Silent City” was not silent but the site instead of intense debate: to proceed to Oregon or to California? To abandon or to save the most unwieldy and unnecessary but most treasured goods (Granite Pass was steep and the desert behind it long)? Battle cries further rent this city at the center of Indian/Emigrant conflict: “every train that has passed over that portion of the route in the City of Rocks since the 1st of August has had trouble with the Indians,” the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise reported in 1861 and again in 1862. Trail registries scrawled in axle grease on rock loudly proclaimed travelers’ names, dates of arrival, origin and purpose

¹ The primary overland route to California ran through the City of Rocks. While the primary overland trail to Oregon ran four days’ travel north of the City, through Fort Hall, heavily traveled Oregon-trail alternative routes included Applegate’s Alternate south through the City of Rocks, over Granite Pass to Winnemucca, Nevada thence northwest (bypassing the Dalles of the Columbia River); and the Salt Lake Alternate, a detour route from South Pass, through the Salt Lake City supply center, to Fort Hall, running north through the City of Rocks. Mormon emigrants also followed this alternative route, leaving the main California Trail at City of Rocks and traveling south along the Salt Lake Alternate, against the grain, to the Salt Lake Basin.
(“California or Bust”; “Wife Wanted”). Wagon ruts etched in rock speak almost as loudly of America’s historic westward migration.

This writing ON rock overlays writing IN Rock, which is a palimpsest of a very material form. In the Silent City, Elwell wrote, “the Manuscript of God is writ large,” the rock forms suggesting the Old Man on the Mountain, his Bible revealed by the light of the setting sun; an Indian Sentry; Lot’s Wife’s fatal look backward and thwarted move forward; Pioneer Woman, seated on the front seat of the Covered Wagon, “her bonnet and dress flowing” and her motion west manifest in stone.\(^2\) Thus, travelers, tourists, explorers, and pilgrims found the known in the strange.

Today, travelers are not so likely to see Indian or Prophet, Lot’s Wife or Pioneer Woman. The area is now a climbers’ mecca and the writing on the rocks is most often chalk mark, placed at the vertical extremes, still signifying “I was here and now I’m not” but here, now, means up, not West. The immigrants’ highways remain as isolated wagon ruts etched in rock, interrupted fragments of westward migration. The trail registries have faded in the face of weather, time, and vandalism. In the midst of this silence, a rock form, granite monolith, shaped in the shape of state, speaks in a rush of time and movement, Indian massacre, attribution for the massacre, and attribution for its telling:

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ALMO IDAHO
Dedicated to the Memory
Of Those who Lost their Lives in a Most
Horrible Indian Massacre 1861
Three Hundred Immigrants West Bound
Only Five Escaped
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\(^2\) As memory of overland migration wanes, many of these formations have been more-literally renamed. Lot’s Wife is now Finger Rock, for example, and Covered Wagon is now Breadloaf Rock.
A loud silence now surrounds the story as it fills the city. The dead tell no tales,” the story goes, and the Indians “have nothing to say.” The enjambed rush of the massacre stone is emphatically punctuated by a homogenous religious community’s insistence that “it happened,” an insistence offered in the face of historians’ and archaeologists’ equally emphatic insistence that it did not. The Mormon community reads the manuscript of God in the city’s rock; this writing, they insist, is unseen but experiential, evidentiary, common-sensical (in this insistence I hear Prophet Brigham Young’s insistence that he recognized a never-before-seen valley as “The Place.”) The stone places in hard script a story they’ve sensed all along. The seen and the unseen, the unseen but felt, the history and its setting, all merge in this telling.

Despite the insistence of the faithful, the Almo Massacre is easily categorized as just one more small piece of the vast volume of American mythology rooted in primal violence or the equally vast volume of Romantic poetry in which rocks are read and misread. Yet neither myth nor poetics demand reality of its referents and the community of believers is impatient with this mythopoetic reading. Both the massacre and contemporary belief in the massacre are as easily categorized as purely conceptual nation story: the repeated “it happened,” “it happened,” “it happened” Benedict Anderson’s imagined community’s imaginative gesture toward unisonance, the five survivors a metonymic new nation. The community of believers, once strangers who most-literally gathered, now a true face-to-face community with a direct, shared, line of descent to the battlefield site and to the story’s first tellers, is equally impatient with this sociopolitical

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3The monument stone is located directly adjacent to State Route 77/Elba-Almo Highway, on private land within the community of Almo, at the east entrance to the City of Rocks National Reserve (CIRO). The National Park Service, which manages the reserve, has no jurisdiction over the monument site.
reading. And, most easily of all, the Almo Massacre can be dismissed as just one more lie told at the expense of Native communities with the express purpose of attracting tourists—and so sociologist James Loewen claims in his *Lies Across America* (2006), the sequel to his best-selling *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (1995) and a text described by its publishers as a “myth-busting history book which focuses on the inaccuracies, myths, and lies that can be found at national landmarks and historical sites all across America.” In refusal of this venal sin, the community of believers hides the monument stone from paying and prying eyes but does not take it down. The stone, no longer entertained between private memory and public vision, is thus removed from history.⁴

I hope to return the stone to view and to history. In contradiction to many critics’ focus on the rhetorical invention of America, I return to the language of material discovery: to stories rising from the land rather than stories about the land. It is the power not of the world-as-contrived but of the world-as-felt to constitute identity and memory, I argue, that lies behind Almo-Massacre believers’ insistence that the massacre happened despite all physical evidence to the contrary.

In Chapter 1, I consider the Almoites’ felt experience in the context of Mormon prophecy, theology, and history. In this reading, I am centrally concerned with the effects of the story’s poetics: how does the Almo-Massacre story invent and perform the nation? We know this reading and can anticipate its outcome: read as Nation Story, the Almo Massacre effectively “divulges … and incises the naturalization of cultural desire on the American continent” (New

⁴ Of this private/personal dynamic ethnologist Greg Dening writes, “History is … personal memory made artifact, external, social, cultural” and also memory “entertained… (from the Latin *inter tenere* meaning ’to hold among or between’”) (14-15).
2). Dig more deeply, however, below the surface and beyond what Michel de Certeau calls “the totalizations of the eye,” and one finds the lived massacres behind the felt massacre: an inheritance, unseen but felt, discovered in land(form) that carries, contains, and reveals cultural memory. This lived massacre and its translation from its authentic site to the site of its mythical reenactment is my central concern in Chapter 2. Chapter 2 reveals that trauma narratives—like poetry and, I argue, like nation story—are never about authentic specifics of place, time, or experience but about synesthetic sense: how things feel. This sense is artifactual, and thus heritable and transportable. This revelation informs my readings of the journals of America’s nineteenth-century overland immigrants who walked west and described not the virgin land of American myth but contested space. Their descriptions demonstrate what Robert Abrams calls a certain “softness of figure, form, and identity,” in American literature, formed “against a backdrop of uncertainty” (12-13). In Chapter 4, I turn from the soft forms and uncertain backdrop of history to the soft forms and uncertain backdrops of three of America’s canonical nineteenth-century nation stories: Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle,” James Fenimore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans, and Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. In these stories, the world-as-felt matters as fully as the world-as-seen.
CHAPTER 1: CAPTURED STORIES

“Nature’s silence is its one remark, and every flake of world is a chip off that old mute and immutable block.” Annie Dillard

“I saw the inscape freshly, as if my mind were still growing, though with a companion the eye and the ear are for the most part shut and instress cannot come.” Gerard Manley Hopkins

“But a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known.” Book of Mormon, Mosiah 8:17.

“To my utter astonishment I was unable to find anyone who could point out with certainty the site of the old fort. … We ascertained that the materials in the old structure were hauled away… but what became of the immense pile of wagons and parts of vehicles left there by the migrating Americans, apparently no one at this late date knows. I left Pocatello … pondering on the mutability of human things.” Ezra Meeker

Summary: What follows is a description of how the Silent City of Rock’s Almo Massacre came to be told, believed, and memorialized. It is thus, most simply, an exceptional case study in communal place making, exceptional in that here we find a rare “direct glimpse” of the process by which knowledge of generic place-type informs the experience of specific place.5

Place, however, is never simple. It is always a mobile discursive process as well as a fixed geographic coordinate. Discourse, in turn, is an intertwining of sensory experience, a pastiche of quotation, a patchwork of the remnants of different traditions coalesced at the point and moment of speech—just as trails intertwine, migrants coalesce, and native and immigrant inter-

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5 Communal place making is linked to but different than private place making. Faced with private space, individuals “dwell on themselves in terms of themselves, as private persons with private lives.” Faced with shared space, this “separatist stance” gives way “to thoughts of membership in social groups” (Basso 145). See also Frow 125.
sect at the City of Rocks. Narratologist Mieke Bal terms the discursive remnants of these intertwined heterogeneous encounters “wandering rocks” (70) and in doing so effectively links both discourse and landscape and landscape and souvenir. Significantly, land types wander with a wandering people and refuse the idea of truth or authenticity—what the federal National Register of Historic Places terms integrity of place, location, or setting—and also the possibility of vacant land or new world absent history. They act instead as souvenir, the nostalgia-driven metonymic trace of the authentic past of prior experience, a trace that manifests as impossible narrative: as a lie on the land.

**Introduction**

Cultural geographers operate under three overarching and closely linked maxims. First, place—social space—is constructed of both language and experience: “to inhabit a language,” Samuel Johnson wrote, “is to inhabit a living universe, and vice-versa.” That ‘vice versa’, ethnographer Keith Basso adds, is critical because it suggests that linguistics and cultural geography are “integral parts of the same basic enterprise” (68). The second follows directly from the first: place-making, like story-telling, is a universal tool of the historical imagination, transhistorical and transnational. Third, across culture and epoch, place serves as both auratic mnemonic devise—involving acts of remembering—and also as oracle—involving acts of prophecy. Both landscape’s memorial and its prophetic functions are fulfilled through storytelling. Jonathan Frow explains:

> [This] auratic value and … deep linkage to the past, is made up of one or more of three elements: a name (which may encapsulate a story, or a reference to divinity); a legend (which endow it with a history); a poetic thematization. Places are sanctified in a way that is neither simply religious nor simply aesthetic, by the poems that have been written about
them, some of which are of such antiquity that they have taken on the anonymity of custom.

(123)

The land forms poetry and poetry forms the land.

Any analysis of place must include its stratified and mobile poetic content, what Basso terms “the range and diversity of symbolic associations that swim within its reach and move it on its course” (145)—or, “what it is made of.” This content is continuously augmented, a ‘piling up’ and ‘rounding up’ analogous to the sedimentary depositions and excavations of geology and archaeology in general and to the confluence of trails and people at the Silent City of Rocks more specifically. Thus Basso can argue that, for the Apache, “Janus-like,” “certain localities evoke entire worlds of meaning,” past, present, and future (5) and literary critic Wai Chee Dimock, in her argument for a world rather than parochial literature, can argue that for all of us, “environmentalism is more than just a cognitive style; it is, perhaps even vitally, an affective style, animated by an attachment to particular localities, feel for the near-at-hand” (12).

The Mormon diaspora and its localized echo in the Almo Massacre demonstrate that we should understand Basso and Dimock’s “certain” and “particular” localities not as place but as place-type. Material (place; history) and metaphor (type and trope; story) merge and place is revealed as mobile: portable and heritable. We cannot bound a locality that contains the full spatial and temporal range of ‘entire worlds’ within the limits of the visible.

The relationship that Dimock draws between cognition and affect and that Basso draws between experience and language relate directly to the evidence of experience—to what Mormon settlers found beneath their feet in the American West and what Almoites see in the City of Rocks. Experience, despite its longstanding equation with the efficacy of sight, is simultaneously visual, kinesthetic, and rhetorical. The complex nature of experience suggests that there’s little to
be gained in the ongoing critical debate over the degree to which and the ways in which America’s founders struggled to reconcile experience and ideology. Jim Egan summarizes this debate: “America begins, or so one line of thinking goes, when its first European colonists were unable to successfully map their ‘Old World’ ideologies onto the experiences of a New World, Virgin Land, Unknown Coast, or Frontier. Try as they might, the colonists couldn’t keep things the same because experience simply would not allow it” (3). The Mormon history sketched below complicates this line of thinking. In this history, strata of old-world memories and myths compose the sensed landscape.

The Mormons simultaneously sensed and saw their Adamic text—literally written on rock and literally buried within the land, translated this sensed and seen text through a process simultaneously auratic and visual, and mapped their history upon the land through a process simultaneously prophetic and near-at-hand. We may now argue that this discovery and mapping is purely imaginary and rhetorical but at the moment of discovery the founders of “America’s Religion” understood New World experience and Old World history as not just compatible but intertwined, of a piece; thus Terryl L. Givens argues that to a degree not found in the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament, The Book of Mormon derives its authority from the objective objects of the physical world rather than from subjective narrative structure or literary trope (2009; cf. Shipps 171). Historian Jan Shipps clarifies that Mormon appropriation of Hebrew history is more properly understood as a “reappropriation of Christianity’s appropriation of Hebrew history” (183). Where Christians understood the symmetry between sacred histories symbolically – Isaac’s sacrifice foreshadowed Christ’s sacrifice, Christ’s law fulfilled Mosaic law– the Mormons experienced physical symmetry. Where we now read metaphorically, they saw materially. Their history was not one of rhetorical construction of the never-before-seen—and thus exceptional—
but of discovery of the already known. Everywhere they looked on their migration across the American plains to the American Promised Land they saw the ruins and stories of their ancestors. Americans, Susan Stewart argues (forgetting the Mormons and the Native Americans) “could not easily make [Native-American history] continuous with either the remote past or the present” (Stewart 141). In significant contrast, the Mormons followed the pattern of antiquarians and collectors everywhere: they found in this history and its artifactual evidence “scenes where the deepest interest of a nation for ages to succeed have been strenuously agented, and emphatically decided” (English antiquarian Joseph Hunter, 1851, qtd. in Stewart 142): Old-World history.

**Old-World History**

“Today, saints from Africa and Denmark arrived here. Their tents were scattered over the hills, and when the camp fires were lit up at night the scene was beautiful to behold It makes me think how the children of Israel must have looked in the days of Moses, while journeying in the wilderness.” Mary Elizabeth Lightner, on the banks of the Mississippi River, 1863

Between 1843 and 1869, an estimated 650,000 American emigrants (and immigrants), Mormon and non-, migrated to Oregon, Utah, and California; America’s ship, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “steer[ed] westward.” For those who heeded the gospel of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), the westward steering had begun much earlier, in Genesis and Exodus; theirs was not a migration into a new and unknown world and future but rather a migration through a wilderness and to a promised land inherited long ago by their ancestors, a place of history not of myth. As importantly, the westward ending in the land of the setting sun, foretold in Acts and Revelation, was also at hand; Mormonism was “poised on the millennial cusp” (Walker et al 39). By the time of the Almo Massacre and its antecedents at Haun’s Mill, Bear River, and Mountain Meadows, Mormons could see, hear, and feel an army marching against the righteous: “the final years [had] never seemed so close” (Walker et al 39, my emphasis). This most-material and sensory sacred history is described below.
Religious fervor burned hot in upstate New York in the early decades of the nation, on scrubland inhabited largely by the seventh sons of seventh sons forced west by constricted opportunity on the New England seaboard (Cross 8). Native-son Joseph Smith described the conflagration of the “Burned-over District” in geographic terms: “Indeed the whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, ‘Lo, here!’ and others, ‘Lo, there!’…” (qtd. in Givens 28). They looked here! there! for the place. They looked for salvation, in Jehlen’s conceptualization, “in the physical fact of the continent.”

For Smith, this material place contained a unique conflation of oneiric and material word. In 1823, the angel Moroni, son of the Nephite general Mormon, appeared before Smith in a dream and directed him to gold plates containing the historical account of people who had lived centuries earlier in North and Central America: one of the Lost Tribes of Israel, ultimately composed of the righteous Nephites and the fallen Lamanites (including modern American Indians). At this moment, revelation collapsed the distance between old and new world geography and history and revealed a much longer history to American story than had previously been supposed. America—for Smith who believed he stood in Moroni’s presence and for those who believed Smith’s account—was not exceptional, unique, or new, “a world apart, sufficient unto itself, not burdened by chronology or geography outside the nation,” but part of what Wai Chee Dimock terms the “deep time” of the world, a “criss-crossing set of pathways, open ended and ever multiplying” (3). Soon enough, Smith’s modern-day prophecy would conform to the insistent literacy of nineteenth-century Americans, the “people of the book”: by the 1840 printing of the third edition of The Book of Mormon, over 10,000 copies had been printed in the United States alone. However, at its Adamic moment, as in the Silent City of Rocks where the rocks
spoke long before the monument stone was inscribed, the Book of Mormon “spoke for itself” (Smith), the visible and audible emanations of an animated world/word antecedent to the text.

Religious questions are generally thought to be “bound up with the invisible” and thus “peculiarly subject to silencing” (Franchot qtd. in Lundin 2). Mormon theology denies this silence and insists on vision. Moroni’s testimony to Joseph Smith, Smith said, literally opened the heavens: “I had actually seen a light … [Mormoni] did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true. God knew it and I knew it” (qtd. in Givens, Viper 25, my emphasis). Revelation of inscribed word proved equally material. Smith translated the buried plates with two seer stones bound by bows to form spectacles: the “interpreters” or “Urim and Thummin. His translation, he insisted, was a multi-modal combination of the written word, revelation, Moroni’s oral testimony, and face-to-face communication with the divine. The unseen and the seen merged in revelation closely paired with artifact. Thus visited by angels, Smith—Smith said—joined the community of ancient Jewish prophets similarly blessed. Almoites evoke their prophets when they insist the massacre happened: “it happened. We know it happened. It’s written in the rocks.”

On the 6th of April, 1830, immediately following posthumous publication of the lost tribe’s Book of Mormon, trans.Joseph Smith, Smith legally incorporated the Church of Latter-day Saints and announced to the world that the stone cut without hands prophesied by Daniel was about to “roll forth and fill the earth” (Daniel 2:34) and that the restitution of all things foretold by Peter had begun (Acts 3:21). Like Daniel’s, Smith’s reading of the world’s “deep and secret things” (Daniel 2:22) was “certain and true” (Daniel 2: 46), both seen-certain and felt-true (cf. Givens, Viper 29, 35). Like the Apostles, Smith stood as material witness to the life and resurrection of Christ. Smith and his followers were quite literally reconstituting the ancient
people of Israel; thus they termed themselves the reunited tribes of Israel and appropriated the Hebraic “Gentile” in description of all others. In this mirroring, vastly disparate souls in time and place are joined as one in a community of faith.

The phenomenal success of Mormon missionary efforts in the Old World and massive migration to the New—Daniel’s stone cut loose—provides material evidence of the appeal of the Americas as the physical manifestation of the Word. Yet despite this material evidence, initial Gentile hostility to Smith’s nascent church focused on the “peculiarity” of ongoing revelation and additional scripture (and I think of James Fenimore Cooper’s psalmist David Gamut, paralyzed by a Latter-day bear that talked in the manner of Balaam’s ancient ass). Most significantly, in Smith’s divine and material history, Americans were not making history but returning to history, not lengthening time but unifying time.

Gentile hostility to material revelation in New World soil was quickly revealed as a political as well as a religious concern: Mormonism constituted a threat to the coffers and the authority of established Protestant sects and also to the political structure of those western communities rolled over and filled by Daniel’s stone. Givens argues that

The pressures of pluralism made it desirable to cast the objectionability of Mormonism in nonreligious terms. [Rhetorical strategies and political imperatives] [took] a group “out of the sphere of religion’ so as to place it “into conflict with a republican people and their institutions.” … When it came to [the Mormons], Americans found it impossible to employ the standard repertoire of nativism and xenophobic responses … since [Mormonism’s] origins and composition were inextricably bound up with American institutions, ideals, and gene pools. (Givens 7, 21-23)
There was another, closely related, reason to cast Mormonism’s objectionability in nonreligious terms. *The Book of Mormon* was first and foremost a history and it did not describe a new world at all: believers *saw, felt, found* the story foretold in the Old and New Testaments. Theirs was not meaning imposed upon the land, but meaning found within the land, a seamless continuation of the Judaic-Christian pattern of exile and restoration. Authenticity—of encounter, artifact, time, setting—are not place-dependent in this pattern. Thus Mormonism challenged the audacity, originality, and independence of American institutions, ideals, and gene pools and it did so through direct appeal to America’s most audacious claim to originality and independence. Yes, Moroni said, the word of God is evident in the American landscape, but this is old word not new, not revolutionary but familial and familiar.

It’s no wonder, then, that in the violent three decades that followed formal establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the language of Mormon relocation and extermination closely paralleled the language of Indian extermination. Both Mormons and the Native Americans with whom they claimed complicated kinship simultaneously upheld the American nation-story of a land and a people that manifested God’s ancient promises to the righteous and challenged the American nation-story of originality, individualism, and autonomy. Both were inextricably bound up with American institutions, ideals, and gene pools. Both simultaneously defined a distinct national identity and impeded national progress.

Mormons’ forced removal from the promised land of Independence, Missouri, to Nauvoo, Illinois, to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi paralleled Indian Removal (and echoes the smoke-signals of the Almo-Massacre telling). Mormon character similarly paralleled Indian character. Like the Native Americans, the Mormons “pretend… to receive communications and revelations direct from heaven; to heal the sick by laying on hands; and in short, to perform all
the wonder working miracles wrought by the inspired apostles and prophets of old” (“Jackson County Missouri Manifesto,” *Evening & Morning Star*, 1833, qtd. in Walker et al 9); the similarities to historian Matthew Cohen’s description of the Algonquians of the northeastern woodlands—also Smith’s native home—are close: “the indigenous people … had an ‘oral culture,’ dependent on face-to-face communication and human memory, elaborately supported by ritual and custom. … Men and women passed down old stories of the supernatural, of medicine, of family, while God … filled the natural world with wonders as messages to His people” (1-2).

In 1844, the citizen militia of Warsaw, Illinois would echo American Indian policy of inevitable extermination: “Let us watch the Mormons, expose their usurpations, and oppressions, check their arrogance by determined resistance to their overbearing course and if at last, we are driven to arms, let it be the result of an inevitable necessity” (qtd. in Walker et al 13). Mormon destruction of the opposition’s *Nauvoo Expositor* press made history inevitable, assured the end known from the beginning. “We have only to state, that this is sufficient” proclaimed the neighboring community of Warsaw. “War and Extermination is inevitable” (qtd. in Walker et al 13). This war and extermination looked very much like the Indian Wars, racism replaced with fear of theocracy: “every member of the society was driven from the county, and fields of corn were ravaged and destroyed; stacks of wheat burned, household goods plundered, and improvements of every kind of property destroyed” (eye-witness Parley Pratt [1833], qtd. in Walker 10). What appears to be poetic chiasmus in the Almo-Massacre telling, where massacred and massacring, Mormon and Indian are so very hard to tell apart, takes on material form in this ‘inevitable’ history.

Smith moved his nascent community of Latter-day Saints to Kirtland, Ohio in 1831 and here received a revelation directing travel farther west. As a point guard of missionaries searched
for the promised New Jerusalem, nativists seeking “relief from the unthinkable proximity of this ‘moral leprosy’” (Givens 1997, 23) violently attacked the Ohio Mormon community and drove them to Independence, Missouri, thus beginning a cycle of exile and restoration uncannily familiar to the faithful; once again, the Mormons were not constructing a history upon the land but discovering their history within the land.

In Independence, Mormon historians Claudia and Richard Bushman report,

Settlers … attacked… broke down the doors of Mormon cabins, tore off their roofs, and stoned and beat the men. Screaming women and children fled into the woods. … As news spread that the Mormons were unarmed, the mob struck again, wrecking, burning, or pillaging 200 cabins and forcing 1,200 people out into a rising November gale. The Saints gathered in the cold rain on the banks of the Missouri River and escaped to the other side. (22)

God showed his face in this second exodus, forming an ice bridge of the scattered floes and leading his people across the water (Shipps 180).

Thus materially delivered, the Saints migrated west yet again, to Far West, Missouri where, in 1838, Governor Lilburn Boggs ordered that “the Mormons … be treated as enemies and … be exterminated or driven from the state” (qtd. in Givens). Over 200 “mobbers” responded with the murder “of everyone in sight” (Bushman and Bushman 27). Before they were killed, contemporaries reported, “the chastity of a number of women was defiled by force” (qtd. in Fleisher 21). “The carrying out of the Boggs directive left an ineradicable mark upon the souls of those who survived it,” Mormon historian Robert Bruce Flanders writes of what became known as the Haun’s Mill Massacre, “and Mormon hatred of Missouri … knew no bounds” (82). All aspects of this antecedent massacre echo through the Almo-Massacre telling.
With Smith jailed, Brigham Young led the destitute community to Illinois where it founded Nauvoo, where it toiled for years in construction of a temple, and where it watched that temple burn in arson fire. In 1846, two years after Smith’s death at the hands of an Illinois mob, and in repeat of the Missouri experience of expulsion or extermination, the Mormons were forced from Nauvoo and sought refuge “beyond the nation’s borders” (Bushman and Bushman 36). On July 24, 1846, Young stood at the mouth of what would become Emigrant Canyon and gazed down on the Salt Lake Valley. Here he saw sufficient space for his people’s freedom. Here he is said to have proclaimed, “This is The Place.”

Significantly, Young named place not space. The difference, cultural Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan explains, is purely conceptual. “Space is freedom” (3). Place is “whatever stable object catches our attention” (161); “When space feels familiar to us, it has become place” (73). What caught Young’s attention in the desolate arid salt-water valley? What felt so familiar, in a western frontier we have long defined as the space of opportunity? In the Hebraic tradition of exile and exodus, the central point of orientation for Mormon culture, theology, and history, “victory” meant “escape into a broad place” (Tuan 58). Like the Puritans before them, the Mormons looked on this isolated wilderness, recognized their exiled ancestors and their homeland, and quoted the familiar words of Isaiah: ‘the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isaiah 35:1). Young would make this complex collapse of time and space specific when he merged new land and new life with old covenants: “We had, as it were, entered a new world and wished to renew our covenants” (qtd. in Walker et al 22, my emphasis.)

This new world of renewed covenant offers little in the way of integrity of setting (place) or association (time), the hallmarks of historic-site designation. Yet, as we will see in the
different contexts and settings of Chapters 2 and 3, Young’s known place stages a story repeated throughout the American West. This is not immediately obvious. We are most familiar with the stories of western landmarks whose stories are born of promotional campaigns. See, for example, Jared Farmer’s award-winning description of Utah’s Mount Timpanogas’s translation from “mountainous space to mountainous place,” the “remarkable” product of an extensive promotional campaign that concentrated invented meaning and false story in the mountain landmark (3, passim). Young and Joseph Smith before him claim something else entirely, an ancient but known landscape inherited in the time and place of God’s choosing.

Joseph Smith first articulated this fluid sense of time and place when the interim Zion of Nauvoo burned and Smith directed the Saints westward and declared “the whole of America is Zion itself from north to south, and is described by the Prophets, who declare that it is the Zion where the mountain of the Lord should be, and that it should be in the center of the land” (qtd. in Farmer 37). As the whole of the new-world continent incorporated Zion, so Smith’s “should”—a modal verb that carries the past and the future in present-tense construction and that simultaneously expresses advice for future action, obligation for present course, and inherited expectation—carries the whole of deep time. Smith echoed the modal “shall” of Moses and the material landmarks of inheritance sought by wandering people, landmarks “which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it” (Deut. 19:14). Thus Brigham Young recognized Place. This is the language and process of discovery, not construction.

Between Young’s proclamation and the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, more than 300 wagon trains—ten thousand wagons—and an even greater number of foot trains and handcarts would bring Mormons to the New Zion in the American West—the “largest mass migration by a single group in nineteenth-century America” (Walker et al 20). “We have
been thrown like a stone from a sling,” Young wrote to President Polk in the summer of 1847 in articulation of his nation’s dissemination. “We have lodged in this goodly place just where the Lord wants his people to gather,” he continued, in articulation of his people’s accumulation (qtd. in Larson 2). In this goodly place, the Mormons attempted to establish the theocratic state of Deseret on 490,000 square miles of western land extending north to today’s northern Idaho, east to Wyoming’s Fort Bridger and the Rocky Mountains, south to the newly-defined Mexican border, and west to the Sierra Mountains. “We have a nation here in the mountains,” Young announced, “that will be a kingdom by and by” (qtd, in Larson 21): the Kingdom of God literalized on earth in earthly time. Of this revelation of the Kingdom-at-hand the Mormons had abundant evidence. Looking east, behind them, they tracked the revelation and uncovering of the word, their exile, and their repeated deliverance. Looking at their feet they saw the Promised Land. Story was literalized on landscape in the blend of the empirical and the revelatory that marks Mormon theology.

**Mormon Place Making: Settlement**

It was this new nation of exiles in search of redemption that Iowa farmer Wilford Woodruff watched flood hill and dale: an estimated 10,150 men, women, and children; 3,285 families; 4,400 wagons; uncounted stock (Mormon census 1845, cited in Bushman 36; May 122). Watching the Mormons’ westward movement, Woodruff marveled “I beheld the Saints coming in all directions from hills and dales, groves and prairies with their wagons, flocks and herds by the thousands. It looked like the movement of a nation” (qtd. in Bushman and Bushman 37).

In his demographic portrait of the Mormons, historian Dean May estimates the Nauvoo Mormon population in 1846 at 14,742. Of these, he estimates that 10,150 (or 70%) followed
Brigham Young west. An additional 8,980 English converts had immigrated by 1850. By 1860, May estimates an “in-migrant” population of 41,303; of this population a significant number were foreign born—most from Northern Europe: “If a time machine would permit us to look in on a typical Brigham City street any time between 1860 and 1880,” May writes, “almost every adult we would greet would be foreign born, either British or Scandinavian” (130). Anti-Mormons charged that the Saints harbored a nation apart. “In a day of general xenophobia,” May continues, “a common charge of nineteenth-century anti-Mormons was that the Saints harbored a high proportion of foreign born who … had never been exposed to American values” (130)—non-citizens outside the culture boundaries of the nation. This cultural isolation intensified with non-Mormon western settlement. The Mormons (native and foreign born) constituted 88% of the white population of Utah in 1860; 66% by 1890; and only 55% in the decade of the Almo-Massacre’s first telling—the historic low (125).

This Mormon majority voted overwhelmingly for church authority: between 1852 and statehood in 1870, 96% of the 96,107 votes cast in Utah “went to the church ticket” (Bigler qtd. in Fleisher 31). Preoccupation with building and defending Zion, Poll concludes (in echo of the Puritan commitment to a City on the Hill), “reinforced a doctrinally based ‘we-they’ image of the world” (166). The Almo-Massacre telling evolved and was inscribed in this polarized cultural context in which the Mormons played a double-facing role in America’s westward movement: they both faced and were the savage.

Young did not view southern Idaho’s Snake River plain as a goodly place, believing that “the farther north we go the less good characteristics are connected with the valleys” (qtd. in Meinig 204). He feared the cold winters but mostly he feared the good grass — already claimed by Gentile cattle barons and certain to attract even more. Yet, by the 1870s, the City of Rocks had
become a place of settlement as well as a place of transit, home to Mormon families that expanded the cordon of Mormon influence beyond the central cultural and political core of the Salt Lake Basin/Wasatch Range, to a Mormon “domain” that ultimately encompassed all of Utah and much of northern Arizona and southern Idaho.

In accord with May’s description of a “typical” Mormon community, the 1880 federal tally of the Almo enumeration district shows concentrated settlement of Scandinavian and English immigrants, most recently from Utah. (Church-kept census of Mormon wards add to this description: at least four of the Mormon families in Almo by the 1870s had migrated from southern Utah’s “Dixie. This will matter to the Almo telling.) Despite Young’s fear of Gentile incursion, this preponderance was sustained: Asked to describe the bonds of his 1920s childhood community, E. Kimber would reply “they were all church members and they were all poor” (4). Thomas Edwards arrived first. With his tales of adequate water, good grass, abundant land, and winters less harsh than Brigham Young feared, Edwards enticed Mormon friends and family to the area. Almo pioneer Etta Taylor describes the smoke signals: Charles Ward, informed of the area by William Jones, who had been informed by Edwards, “was pleased with the area’s possibilities.” Mr. Ward “in turn persuaded Mr. John Lowe and David Ward … [and] Mrs. Lowe persuaded Robert Wake” to join the burgeoning community of Mormons along the banks of Almo, Grape, and Edwards creeks—a gathering and an accumulation (Taylor, passim).

**Smoke Signals**

The sons and daughters of these Idaho pioneers erected the Almo Massacre monument on October 6, 1938 in association with the “First Annual Exploration of the City of Rocks,” a Chamber of Commerce festival designed to simultaneously promote establishment of the City of Rocks as a National Monument and to encourage the South-Side Extension of the Bureau of
emmons 33

Reclamation’s Minidoka Project to 150,000 acres of arid Cassia County land. Though the point attracted less fanfare, exploration day and its invitation list also pointed to the Mormon community’s embrace of federal jurisdiction and federal dignitaries. Reclamation of arid lands, Donald Pisani argues, represents “continental imperialism” (272), the forced amalgamation of the West (xiii). By this amalgamation, in company with a national depression that showed little regional preference, the colonial West would be “integrat[ed] … into the nation” (273). The communities of Cassia County solicited federal dollars for reclamation and tourism because private efforts had failed. The communities asked to join the nation and they did so, in part, by engraving their and the nation’s shared story on a stone carved in the shape of state.

It snowed on exploration day and while few of the dignitaries invited to the dedication ceremony showed those who did included Idaho Senator James Pope (a non-Mormon and a reclamation specialist), Governor Barzilla Clark (a non-Mormon and a civil engineer specializing in dam construction), the superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, and a representative of the Union Pacific Railroad. This list of attending VIPs certainly suggests that future economic development was the theme of the day, not historic Indian massacre. And yet, these forward-looking visitors heard an old story synthesized and romanticized, in the weeks prior to the dedication, by Mormon Byrd Trego, amateur historian and editor of the Blackfoot Daily Bulletin, and by his literary patron Charles Brown, non-Mormon editor of the local Oakley Herald.6

In anticipation of the monument’s dedication, Brown had offered a $100 prize to the man or woman who wrote the best essay concerning the City of Rocks’ landscape or history. Exhorting his contestants to their most creative efforts, Brown advised “give your subconscious mind a chance to help. Go to sleep at night with the intention of awakening with an outline of an

6 Unless otherwise indicated, the following quotes are from Trego.
article readymade in your mind” and he concluded with the (re)assurance of the faithful that “the story is written on the rocks.” In his winning entry, “Massacre at Almo Creek,” Trego collapsed landscape and history, setting a stage appropriate to the unfolding drama, a *mise-en-scène* where the exaggerated verticality of the rocks and the exaggerated horizontal projection of the overland trail intersect in a violent battle of cultures. Landscape-types’ function as object, with all of the use and fetish value that Heidegger assigns to things (and, as we will see in Chapter 2, all of the mobility of the souvenir), is evident in this *mise-en-scène*: a world opens out from the city’s deep interiority.

Trego’s six-chapter essay, published in the *Herald*, repeats the basic structure of the Almo-Massacre story, as handed down over the course of two generations. The 1861 massacre (Trego reiterated from earlier accounts), involved 300 emigrants, ostracized Shakers (“some said”) from Missouri or, Trego claimed more cautiously, “a party of the unknown.” All but five

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*7*Compare this (re)assurance, for example, to the Medieval World’s “vision of nature as an illuminated text replete with the signatures of divinity, glossed at the margins by the insights of faith” (Cosgrove and Daniels, 4-5).

*8*While the point is Heidegger’s, the line is Frow’s. Discussing the famous shoes of “The Origins of the Work of Art,” Frow writes, a ‘world’ … opens out from the shoe’s deep interiority” (137).

of these 300 died after a four-day standoff against a fantastic convergence of Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Ute, Shoshone, Paiute, Cayuse, and Bannock Indians. Of this convergence the legend tells that

During [the emigrants’] 1,000 mile travel many members of various tribes were killed with no provocation whatsoever. Because of the size and strength of the train, the Indians found themselves in no position to retaliate, however, by smoke signals and runners they did relay word of these acts of murder to other tribesmen further west. (SIP, 2/25/79).\(^{10}\)

Thus “there accumulated a great assembly of Indians.” I suspect that the word-to-word accumulation of Saints to the Mormon fold, to the Promised Land, and finally to the Almo Ward renders this smoke-signal-to-smoke-signal accumulation of Indians less poetic effect than affect. Despite historian Brigham Madsen’s reasoned and substantiated insistence that nobody who knows anything about Indian relationships could believe the story, the evidence lived within the community, felt if not seen.

At the City of Rocks, the united Indian nations rushed the wagon circle, denied the emigrants water, shot them as they crawled toward nearby springs, violated the women with

\(^{10}\)Charles Walgamott (1928) is more circumspect in his claim of emigrant offense. In *Six Decades Back* he writes, “from an old Indian [Mr. Johnston] was able to get the Indian version which is in part incorporated in the following story: the emigrants “were harassed by Indians who they were able to keep at bay through their well-organized camp, their driving management, and their equipment of arms…. Sometimes they shot at them at long range to keep them away which angered the Indians. This, together with the natural antipathy which they held for the white man, coupled with the desire to destroy the train and possess its belongings, caused a general uprising” (123). Bessie M. Wright, in *Oakley, Idaho, Pioneer Town* – published in 1987, six decades after Walgamott’s *Six Decades Back* and 12 decades after the alleged incident – repeats Walgamott verbatim (though without attribution) (41).
wagon-axel kingpins, and ultimately tossed “the dead, the mutilated, the seared bodies” in the dry wells that the drought-stricken emigrants had frantically dug within the wagon circle. From this massacre, two or three crack-shot men, two spirited women, and a babe-in-arms—11—a metonymic pilgrim nation—escaped and wandered in the wilderness sustained by wild rose buds until they were rescued and found succor (or most-literal redemption) in Mormon communities. All others “were found dead.” The Indian victory at Almo Creek, Trego concluded, “ranks with that of ‘Custer’s last stand and the Mexican victory over the Texans at the Alamo.”

The victorious Indians paraded through nearby Ogden, Utah, the women dressed in the Shaker bonnets and “Mother Hubbard” dresses that they had stripped from the white women’s bodies, the men’s bridles adorned with bloody scalps of long fair hair. Today, not even the bones of this “party of the unknown” remain to testify to the event; “the dead,” Trego wrote, “tell no tales, convey no information no matter what they suffered. … None but Indians knew, none but Indians could tell and they had nothing to say.” Silence surrounds the Silent City’s story: a closed curtain that Trego punctuates with his melodramatic—and optimistic—conclusion: “The End.”

Local histories establish that the massacre story was “passed down from generation to generation” (SIP 1979). It originated with a 16-year-old warrior, either Shoshone “by the name

11 Accounts vary, with some reporting three men and two women (the surviving five), and an infant, not distinguished from its mother in the tally of survivors. These general proportions, however, are consistent with overland passage in general and with individual parties/familiar groups. Mary Ann and Will Boatman’s party, for example, contained ten men, five women, and three children while the Kellogg party contained six men, three women, and three children. See Rau, 14.
of Uncas” or Bannock “named Winecus.” Shoshone-Bannock Uncas-Winecus is said to have shared his story with his childhood friend Mormon emigrant William E. (Eddy) Johnston sometime after the Bear River Massacre. This 1863 massacre, Trego said Johnston said Uncas-Winecus said, in rhetorical smoke signals across generations, balanced the atrocities. Trego explained: “The Almo with its horrors was partly responsible for the conduct of Connor’s men in slaughtering men, women and children on Bear River.” Thus time “toned down the differences.”

The account becomes an accounting. The syntactic ambiguity of “Indian Massacre” suggests this historical balancing of atrocities. Victim and victimizer, subject and object cannot be easily distinguished.

If the story was repeated upon this original transmission, it was repeated quietly and failed to find its way into the written record. There is no mention, for example, of the Almo Massacre in Herbert Bancroft’s 1889 History of Utah and no mention in the American Anthropologist’s 1909 volume of names and places related to Indian history and language.

In 1926, however, this story spoken became a story written when Charles Shirley Walgamott included what became the oft-repeated definitive account in his memoir Reminiscences. Local and regional histories, including the State’s encyclopedia of Idaho Chronology and Nomenclature (1928), future State Historian M.D. Beal’s History of Southeastern Idaho (1942), and Idaho State Historical Society interpretive brochures to the City of Rocks National Reserve, repeated Walgamott’s account. In 1938, the stone in the form of state was indelibly engraved: a story caught in the form of material things. By the 1940s, local

12 The name of Johnston’s Indian informant varies between texts. Dawson (1979), for example, refers to Johnston’s informant as Uncas. Trego (1938) and Madsen (1994) use Winecus. White confusion over the tribal distinction was equally common.

“Shoshone Mike” of legend, for example, the Last Free Man, wasn’t Shoshone but Bannock.
communities staged massacre reenactments as part of Pioneer Day celebrations. And, in perhaps the oddest twist of all, a 1978 Reader’s Digest collection of *American Folklore and Legend* reports that while the circled wagons of American legend are “the greatest myth of the trail,” wagons did *in truth* circle once, “and that once was bad enough. The Massacre of Almo Creek, Utah (*sic*), was the worst disaster in the history of the California Trail. It became the prototype of the Hollywood legend” (Polley 194). Fiction hides in history.

At an unknown date, the narrative also inspired whispering, growing to denouncement, of exaggeration or falsehood. In 1971, *Southern Idaho Press* editor A.W. Dawson, citing reputable reports of an 1862 attack on the 10-wagon Smith Train, reported that while “the Almo massacre did happen in the manner in which it has been related” the number dead had been significantly exaggerated (*SIP* 9/20/73; 9/22/73. cf. *Idaho Statesman* 2/14/71). Archaeological survey has produced no artifactual evidence. (Uncovered in the 1870s during Eddy Johnston’s first plowing of his homestead site, residents explained, the bones were deeply reburied, beyond the limits of

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13 The annual July 24 celebration of Brigham Young and the first group of Mormon pioneers’ arrival in the Salt Lake Valley.

14 Dawson speculates that the Almo-Massacre telling is a poetic exaggeration of a Bannock attack on the 10-wagon Smith Train, within the City of Rocks. “By almost superhuman strength and fortitude,” Dawson repeats from the written and oral record, two men and a woman with a nursing baby made their escape, crawled through the underbrush (the baby clutched by its clothes in its mother’s teach), and lived on berries and rose hips until they reached their rescuers in the Mormons’ Brigham City. The rescue party that returned to the attack site found burned and pillaged wagons and 30 men, women, and children – all on the verge of starvation but all alive.

This “problem of numbers,” historian Patricia Limerick notes, is typical of Frontier narratives: “nearly everyone who writes about battles and massacres wrestles, at least briefly, with the problem of disputed numbers: battles and massacres are occasions of passion, and passion works against precision in numerical records” (65).
the archaeologists’ shovels; they were simply “too horrible to contemplate” [P. Tracy qtd. in SIP 1/16/94].) In 1994, Historian Brigham Madsen noted that the Almo Massacre was not reported in any of the contemporary papers that so faithfully reported earlier, subsequent, and much less deadly attacks, or in any military records, or in Bannock-Shoshone oral tradition, and stated definitively that the massacre “never happened” (“Revisited,” 370). Edwin C. Bearss, chief historian of the National Park Service, “defend[ed] both Madsen’s scholarship and conclusion” (qtd. in Madsen, Against 369).

In his history of Indian and Emigrant encounters, historian Michael L. Tate states that the massacre is now recognized “as pure fabrication” (177). Sociologist James Loewen includes the massacre in his travelers’ guide to Lies Across America and reports that “nothing happened in Almo, so far as we can tell”—nothing, that is, but the production of a sinister flight of inventive fancy: a racist lie with the venal purpose of bringing more tourists and more dollars to a region at a time largely void of both.

Loewen’s charge has merit: On the eve of Exploration Day, Trego assured an Oakley Chamber of Commerce audience that “the tourist trade can be made a major industry” [Herald 9/22/38]. “We Do Hope You’ll Come and Visit Us!” Cassia County’s Idaho’s 1963 Territorial Centennial Celebration guide gushed in material evidence of the Magic Valley’s claimed “western hospitality.” “At the Silent City of Rocks’ Almo Creek,” the guide promised, “history buffs can pause to study one of the biggest and bloodiest Indian massacres ever described in the annals of Indian-white man lore” (Cassia County).

The Shoshone tribe have demanded an apology and removal of the monument erected at the massacre site. “We [are] being accused of something that we’d never done,” Shoshone tribal
chairman Keith Tinno argued, in protest against the narrative’s affront to his people’s “honor and history” (*Times News* 1/8/1994).

The Superintendent of the City of Rocks National Reserve recommended a meeting with Almo residents during which Madsen could “mobilize public sentiment perhaps to give the embarrassing monument a decent burial and remove it from the entrance [to the reserve]” (qtd. in Madsen, *Against* 368). In response, however, to universally negative “and perhaps even hostile” local response to Madsen’s thesis, the superintendent changed his mind, suggesting that the meeting be delayed until “the dust settled” (368.). “Almoites,” Madsen concluded, “were not ready to give up their claim to some historical distinction” (368). City of Rocks National Reserve Historian Kathleen Durfee, great granddaughter of area pioneers Myron B. Durfee and Henry R. Cahoon, was similarly “not ready to relegate to the realm of fiction the stories told by great-grandparents who settled in the area in 1878” (369). The president of the Sons & Daughters of Idaho Pioneers said that “rededicating her group’s marker as a monument to Pocatello’s memory [as Madsen suggested] “would be pretty hard for us to swallow” (369).

State Historian Merle Wells attended the January 1994 meeting of the Sons & Daughters of Idaho Pioneers and described the proceedings in a letter to Madsen: “the president praised [Madsen’s] article as being thoroughly accurate but indicated her organization would take no action to remove the monument (qtd. in *Against* 370). Madsen concludes that the monument “may stay there forever or until a younger generation of Almoites decides to abolish it” (370).

Almo pioneers said only that “it happened.” Barbara Darrington, who participated in the dedication of the monument, said, “The people who live here don’t think it happened, they know it happened.” Barbara Hedges, raised in Almo, reiterated: “It happened, I know it happened.” “This is the history of the Valley,” valley pioneer Mrs. Tracy echoed. “It happened.” “We know it
happened,” Joe Durfee repeated (SIP 1/16/94). Thus the Almo-Massacre telling echoes through local memory.

Della Mullinix, the 82-year-old president of the Sons & Daughters of Idaho Pioneers, told High Country News that she was “willing to apologize to Tinno,” but that changing the monument was out of the question. “It is part of the area’s history and culture,” she said (HCN 4/4/1994). “It belongs to the public”—of which she clearly meant a very private and personal community and to which Idaho State Historian Merle Wells would write, “whatever that means” (qtd. in Madsen, Against 370).

In the wake of historian Brigham Madsen’s report that no archaeological or historical evidence supported rumors of the Almo Massacre, the Shoshone tribe demanded an apology and removal of the monument erected at the massacre site: “we were being accused of something that we’d never done,” tribal chairman Keith Tinno argued (Times News 1/8/1994). Tinno refused to tell his story “through the narratives of others” (Wald 12). 15 In this context, Tinno’s refusal of the “Massacre at Almo Creek” becomes most directly a refusal not of content but of a manner of his-

15 Tinno refuses what Mary Louise Pratt terms an “autoethnographic text,” in which “people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations other have made of them” (34). Pratt’s autoethnographic texts suggest what W.E.B. Du Bois termed “double-consciousness” and that Pricilla Wald defines as “the sense of always telling one’s story though the narrative of others” (12). This is the defining process behind all three iterations of the Almo Massacre. We see it in the sideways telling of Mountain Meadows and Bear River. We see it in the strange choice of Shakers (bearers of adopted children, identity not inherited but imposed) as the Pan-Indian army’s victims. We see it in the Mormons’ story’s doubling of Exodus and in the Westward movement’s echo of Joshua.
tory-making and record-keeping that renders the Indian not as a presence but as “a trace of a vanishing” (Jehlen, *Cambridge* 39) – Silent in a Silent City. The Shoshone seek to take back story and voice, to reassert continual and continued presence. And the current storykeepers know this, know that the question isn’t accuracy but ownership: we’ll apologize they say, but the monument stays. The story is ours. Thus the victors “arrogate the symbology of America to themselves” (Bercovitch, 6).

Today, 75 years after the Sons’ and Daughters’ dedication and 23 years after the Shoshone requested its removal, a massive juniper engulfs the Almo-Massacre monument, its unchecked growth and obfuscation counter to the rock’s stability and the text’s apparent clarity. I had to search with headlights and persistence, in failing evening light, to find a monument designed to be read, heard, seen, interpreted—and now hidden, closely held by a more-fully individuated community. Conscious of my intrusion on this now-private story, I asked the young stranger who appeared suddenly (carefully guarding the story and its telling from stranger-me I imagined, in convenient accord with my purpose, or maybe just walking home) to tell me what he knew of this horrible massacre and this hidden stone. The monument’s enjambed rush came to a sudden stop when he echoed an earlier generation of settlers and answered only “only that it happened.”

I don’t know if Wells’ “whatever that means” was merely derisive or if he was truly confused by Mullinix’s claim that the story “belongs to the public.” I was truly confused, perhaps only because I knew Reserve historian Kathleen Durfee—she who was “not yet ready” to let go of her ancestors’ history—too well to be easily derisive. This project rose from that confusion, confusion that merely troubled from 1994, when I wrote the Almo Massacre as an out-of-place too-long footnote that took up the bulk of four pages, the inauthentic oddly divided from the
authentic and authenticated by a thick black line, until 2010 when I began asking the question full time, under the tutelage not of historians but of literary critics and poets.

I learned that poems vest place with authenticity—make them real—in a way that begs for historians’ attention but that does not lend itself to historiography and in a way that makes it difficult to “go behind” the footnote, as is historians’ wont. Or: “it happened, we know it happened” despite all evidence to the contrary. In this anonymity, effectively stripped of the authority of authorship and the historicity of origins, the text becomes the formal essence of a place, an auratic object outside history: “time and distance are abolished.” And so, a great-granddaughter reports that she is “not ready to relegate to the realm of fiction the stories told by great-grandparents who settled in the area in 1878”—reports too-little time and too-little distance.

Fiction hides in history, not just as source material, so prone to the lie, but in things (cf. Freedgood 80). In fiction, objects are personified and animated, in the nature of rocks that take form and voice, for example. Through these auratic forms, the massacre that didn’t happen opens to the nation’s history. Mormons first told of the massacre and Mormons have protected this history and its stone from erosion, but both the stone and the story have found a ready audience in the Gentile community that has for so long equated the westward-facing immigrant with the nation.

Written-on Rocks: Nation Story

“Many modern historians hold that narrative discourse, far from being a neutral medium for the representation of historical events and processes, is the very stuff of a mythical view of reality, a conceptual or pseudoconceptual ‘content’ which, when used to represent real events, endows them with an illusory coherence more characteristic of oneiric than of waking thought.” Hayden White

In his analysis of distinctions between the mythic, annal, chronicle, and “narrativized” forms of telling history, White details the components of what he terms “narrativized” rather
than narrative discourse. These components include the elision of the narrator (“no one speaks”); the clear distinction between the real and the imaginary (and a corresponding judicial handling of evidence); Manichean content (promising epiphanic synthesis and foreshadowing the end in the very beginning); central stock subjects that provide culturally-specific diacritical markers for ranking significance and value; the near inevitability of the past tense (and its more infinite and hypotactic forms the preterit and pluperfect); and a well-marked beginning, peripatetic middle, and resolute end, organic and inevitable, ascribing to events an order of causal meaning not achieved by mere sequence and designed to reveal the end known in the beginning. “In the narrativizing discourse,” White concludes, “we can say, with Benveniste, that ‘truly there is no longer a “narrator.” The events are chronologically recorded as they appear on the horizon of the story. No one speaks’” (White 2-3, my emphasis). Thus narrativized discourse “feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story” (4). (As though in explication, Editor Brown assured his essay contestants that “the story is written on the rocks” [Oakley Herald 10/20/38].) The impact of this move from subject-narrator to object-narrator is most obviously a move not only toward objectivity but also toward inevitability; toward the foreseen and the foretold; a move toward to the word of God writ large in rock. Narrativized historical discourse mistakes the desired for the real.

The fantastic convergence, exceptional endurance, and provident rescue at the center of the Almo-Massacre telling condense a full range of human fear and desire. Mormon migrants to the American West founded a theocracy affirmed by the lay of the land: a basin rimmed by mountains, a self-contained place apart for a self-contained diasporic people. Thus the Mormon diaspora fulfills the American story of western expansion: at the intersection of print media and capitalism, outcasts moved west, translatio studii, across a prairie sea, founded a community, and
reinvented themselves religiously and culturally. Moreover, in its most simple form of Indian depravity and Pioneer survival, as told in the enjambed lines and sudden end stop of the monument stone, the Almo-Massacre telling belongs to those western narratives that, “by the powerful alchemy of selective storytelling, … became simple stories of adventure and heroism and triumph, with, perhaps, just a tinge of melancholy” (Limerick 63). And, like all western narratives, the Almo narrative “crashes hard” into the complexity of imperialism, conquest, and voice dramatically manifest in the massacre at Wounded Knee (68). “The most distressing element of these set pieces …,” 16 historian Patricia Limerick writes, is the finality of their plots. … Nearly every textbook crashes hard into the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890; the bodies of the Lakota people left in the snow stand for the end of the Indians as significant and distinctive figures in American history. … With the massacre at Wounded Knee, authors have drawn the curtain on the whole sad story of the conquest—drawn the curtain, driven the audience out of the theater, locked the doors, and put up a ‘CLOSED; WILL NOT REOPEN’ sign. (68-70)

16My ellipses replaces “of condemnation” and this replacement demands some explanation. Late-twentieth-century American historians, Limerick argues, with “Vietnam on their minds,” have generally recast simplified narratives of white heroism/Indian perfidy as simplified narratives of white perfidy/Indian heroism. It is these stories of condemnation that she refers to most specifically when she talks of set pieces and their hard crash. The Almo-Massacre narrative would seem not to apply for, in its most simple form, the narrative is a set piece of pioneer praise. It, however, has the same poetic effect as that which Limerick ascribes to set pieces of condemnation: it generates silence. This shared effect is ultimately Limerick’s point in “Haunted America”: both the earlier set pieces of pioneer praise and also the later set pieces of pioneer condemnation, despite their very different sentiments, share the same ending. Both “kill off” the Indians.
In the interest of reopening this national theatre, I want to look first at a familiar mode of reading the Almo Massacre. In this reading, I am centrally concerned with the effects of the story’s poetics: how does this story invent and perform the nation? We know this reading and can anticipate its outcome: read as Nation Story, the Almo Massacre effectively “divulges … and incises the naturalization of cultural desire on the American continent” (New 2); story written on the land. At its most superficial, this telling uncovers what art historian Angela Miller terms the “lost history” by which an organic national landscape comes into being—enters cultural memory as historical fact—and it confirms Myra Jehlen’s argument that discursive content constructs a vision of the land. The deeper reading that introduces Chapter 2 reveals something else: an inheritance, unseen but felt, discovered in land(form) that carries, contains, and reveals cultural memory; story found in the land.

Below, I assume Benedict Anderson’s now-commonplace definition of all nations too large to ever meet face-to-face as “imagined,” a way of attaching meaning to and organizing space and place. The way in which national meaning is attached to national place is also commonly accepted: at the intersection of capitalism, print technology, and vernacular language, those with limited filiative, personal, or historical relations to one another are able to imagine themselves as fraternally joined. This fraternity depends on awareness of and acceptance of adjacent others; the nation, Anderson argues, “is imagined as limited [emphasis in original] because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries beyond which lie other nations” (Anderson 7). Nation-building is inherently a conceptual process by which meaning is imposed upon the physical form of the land in the form of narrative. Thus discourse and landscape are linked. We know this story well: in land both mindfully invented and
mindlessly misread as vacant and self-contained, Americans contrived a “transcendent clarity” to their identity.

“It happened.” “It happened.” “It happened.” The solid certainty of these staccato end stops mimics the enjambed text engraved on the monument stone. Both refuse to entertain ambiguity or uncertainty—an organizing strategy, humanity’s “old dream of symmetry”—and insist on narrative closure. Both the fixity of the massacre stone and the community’s repeated “it happened” represent the unisonance of ideologically saturated unitary language—the “aural imaginary” that Benedict Anderson places at the center of the imagined community that is the nation (145). This echo resounds between generations. It thus enables “a people … to conceive of itself as a “solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (Anderson 26).

We find unisonance at the level not only of word but of rhetorical form, repeated across time and space. A frequently repeated emigrant story form, echoed in the Almo-Massacre telling, illustrates these formalist elements. On a tributary of Nebraska’s Elkhorn River, ca. 1853, a white man, bound for the California gold fields and “armed with an ample supply of guns knives and guns so that he could kill many Indians,” was reported to have killed an unarmed and “unoffensive” Indian woman. “Sensing the severity of the young man’s deeds,” historian Michael Tate summarizes, the man’s traveling companions honored the woman’s people’s demand for bloody vengeance. The Indians—some versions specify the Indian women, traditionally charged with domestic tasks—skinned the man alive, chopped his body to pieces, and threw the pieces in the creek that by its (re)naming came to memorialize both the indiscriminate killing and the bloody revenge: Rawhide Creek (24).
There are many Rawhide Creeks across the American west: not specific locality but trope. The story, in the manner of nation story, ultimately linked strangers across generations: Oregon-bound Calvin B. West moved the story to his own more-northerly route to underscore the danger of his own travel and his own blessed salvation (West). Helen Clark, traveling the Elkhorn Route in 1860, seven years after the story was first written down, reported the legend in first person present tense (Clark).

This unisonance illuminates one of the most startling moments of inventive fancy in the Almo telling: the accumulation of Indians who stage and perform the imagined community. The unlikely accumulation is realized through smoke signals and runners and stages unisonance as the echoed physical form of community: a solid community moving steadily across the expanse of the Great Plains and into history. The accumulation has been dismissed by historians (cf. Madsen), anthropologists (cf. Chance and Chance), and sociologists (cf. Loewen) as oneiric in form and content, recognizable as Mormon desire—an imagined composite realizing a universal(ized) revenge. No one who knows anything of tribal alliances or western geography, Madsen would write, could read the accumulation as anything but fantastic (Against).

The oneiric qualities of the smoke signals are fully replicated in the narrativized qualities of the longer massacre telling. Story rests easily upon the physical form of the New World and western landscape where the vast physical expanse allowed the successive waves of frontier development that marked American history and character as both fluid and perennial. The overland trail had a well-marked beginning, middle, and end. Along this well-marked trail, peripeteia manifested in every expanse of desert, every river ford, every precipitous pass, and every encounter with the unknown (other). This easy congruence has proven central to the narrative power of American nation stories.
More locally, narrativized historical discourse in the Almo-Massacre myth generates the unified and steady voice of overland immigrants’ steady move through western history. The Almo Massacre is a well-made story, with a recognized form, central subjects (immigrants, Indians, rescuers) and proper beginnings (exodus), middles (the City of Rocks, “high point of the historic continuum”), and ends (rescue and redemption). The content of this form is demonstrated in the following accumulation of “ands,” a grammatical rendering of the accumulation of Indians, and of continuity. Journalist Ralph W. Maughan summarizes residents’ tellings of the massacre tale in an insistent enjambed rush forward to the end known in the beginning:

The vivid accounts tell of the doomed pioneers frantically digging for water and finding none and how the party finally turned the thirst-crazed animals out of the circled wagons; and how five people were finally able to escape and make their way to safety. And how a rescue party eventually found the rest of the pioneers massacred and their wagons burned” (Idaho Statesman, 1/16/94, my emphasis).

The narrative structure of this story successively unfolds to a final (redemptive) end. Reconstructed affiliations are enacted along a coherent, continuous westward trail—interrupted but not disrupted—and are thus presented as continuities rather than discontinuities or disruptions. The end is seen in each beginning—in the Mormons as saviors, in the emigrants as survivors. The original narrator is either an imagined composite (Bannock-Shoshone/Uncas-Winecus)—effectively anonymous and inclined toward silence—or silent in absentia: the dead tell no tales. In either case, the narrator is elided. In the face of this absence, the landscape must speak.

There’s no one else and nothing else that can.

Thus Parts 1 and 3 of Trego’s seven-part essay are largely devoted to description of the City of Rocks. In this literal and rhetorical setting, the open plain, abundant water, and lush grass
of the emigrants’ Circle Creek camp are diametrically opposed to the perpendicular rock forms ("“foreign,” “grotesque,” “with shelves and inverted shelves, crevices and crevasses””) that masked the Indians’ hostile advance and to the embattled and arid trail line and wagon circle along which and within which the emigrants die. This contradictory landscape stages the unity performed by the Indians’ accumulation and the emigrants’ circled wagons and also stages their dissemination:

All along the base of the mountains to the westward were groups of rocks seemingly foreign to the landscape … grotesque masses with shelves and inverted shelves, crevices and crevasses—the Silent City. The emigrants camped down on the creek at the edge of the great plain, on the southern side of the creek where the cold water ran.

The Almo telling is choreographed around a contradictory landscape that by its very form iterates the contradictions between unity and difference, movement and stasis, voice and silence that are central to nation story.

In this cultural context, and in this place, landscape acts as a metaphor of imagined community, a literal stage for the cultural performance of unity and difference: the one-as-many moving through in celebration of the metamorphosis promised by the American frontier; the many accumulating as one in a Promised Land, in celebration of an imagined common history and ancestry. Landscape served as the material form of story and a fit stage upon which difference and union, movement and stasis, could be imagined and performed.

Both imagination and performance evoke the etymology of cultural invention, and begin to suggest the degree to which the imagining (or inventing) of the nation involves not only rhetorical construction—written on rocks—but also the discovery—in the rocks, in the form of the land—of the organic truth of the nation’s “always-already” past, present, and future. Literary
critic Jose Piedra reminds us that invention is derived “from the Latin *invenire*, ‘to come into,’ ‘to find’.” Invention, he continues, in addition to its association with myth making, has “added connotations of rhetorical maneuvers, ‘self-’ and ‘re’-search… : ‘to find something lost’ and ‘to chance upon’” (38). Significantly, these etymological roots and connotations are predominantly land based: the archaeology of discovery and chance, coming into the country. We invent, the etymology suggests, in contour lines.¹⁷

This invention in contour line includes not only sculptural and architecture space—the three-dimensional imagery of rock and the built environment—but also the imaginary space of story line: “feelings, images, and thoughts” embodied and embedded in tangible material (cf. Tuan 5).

And so, within the City of Rocks, imaginative invention replicates in rock diasporic restlessness and movement and the desire for coherence and settlement. Pioneer Woman stands beside Lot’s Wife. Past meets present, Janus-like, at the intersection of the landscape tropes of the circle and the line.

**Trauma Story: The Written-in Rocks**

Significantly, the relationship between the land and the story detailed above reveals *not only* a story of contrived imposition—the construction of metaphor by those who repeatedly failed to see the land clearly—but also of discovery. The relationship between landform and rhetorical form, material and concept, is revealed to be dialogical rather than dialectical. This, I be-

¹⁷ Jan Shipps reports that this invention in contour line has a long theological history: “When God’s in his heaven and all’s right with the world, the nature of divinity is not debatable. The nature of humanity is also settled and the proper divine-human connection is firmly established” (170).
lieve, is ethnographer Keith Basso’s point, cited in the introduction to this chapter, when he argues that language and experience are “integral parts of the same basic enterprise” (68, my emphasis). Focus on this dialogical relationship generates a history of the Almo Massacre dedicated less to debunking a sensationalized vision in which a delusional imperial and nativist community sees God in the rocks, dedicated less to revealing the process by which language shapes vision and world-view, and dedicated more to analysis of universal, unexceptional, processes by which rocks serve as witness to—and are read as testimony of—a community’s shared past and collective memory.

Rocks that bear witness, trails that propel and restrain, and circles that shelter and contain are not unique to the American western landscape or the American imagination, but general to communal imagination and national cultural invention; there’s nothing particularly exceptional or exceptionally American here and nothing that doesn’t map cleanly to Old World histories and ideologies. In the American City of Rocks, we find Russian critic Michel Bakhtin’s “chrono-tope”—”the points in the geography of a community where time and space intersect and fuse … [where] time … becomes visible for human contemplation”—and British poet Gerard Manley Hopkins’ inscape—the unified complex of characteristics that give each thing its uniqueness and that differentiate it from other things—and his instress—the impulse from the inscape that carries it whole into the mind of the beholder.

There’s also nothing particularly white in Cassia-county’s myth making. In the City of Rocks, we find the Apache “narrative art” of “place making,” “a type of historical theater in which the ‘pastness’ of the past is summarily stripped away”—stripped away by the pervasive active present tense, by “a thriving” verisimilitude, by close and careful plotting (hypotactic and
enjambed)—and a theatre dominated by the tropes of survival and of the importance of community and kin (Basso 33). We find Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz’s “something precious in the memory in blood and cells which insists on story, poetry, song, life, life.” Recognition of Basso’s narrative art and historical theater, Ortiz’s blood and cells, provides a context for past event’s transformation to present possession: “It’s part of the area’s history and culture. It belongs to the public.”

The immigrants carried voices with them; “a whole world of associations and sentiments enclosed and gave meaning” to every scene encountered” (Schama 11). The vacant New World was neither vacant nor new. In Landscape and Memory, his “reassertion of the relationship between man and nature,” art historian Simon Schama details the lifespan and the mobility of these ancient voices. Riverbanks and stream sides, Schama continues, have long connoted the kind of security “denied to mariners who lost sight of land” (261)—and denied to overland immigrants lost in the prairie sea. Americans, forced after many centuries and much exploration to relinquish faith in a transcontinental river, replaced the “ancient metaphor” of rivers as the arterial bloodstream of a people—”roadsteads to fortune, arteries of power” (363)—with the metaphor of the overland trail and the transcontinental railroad, a new metaphor that did old work. To fight one’s way upstream,” as the Mormons would do until the crest of Emigrant Hill that revealed “The Place” and as the Gentiles would do until the crest of the Sierras or the Cascades revealed a Promised Land of another sort, was to “pursue a sacred mystery, to move back in time toward some sort of Edenic re-naissance” (319). To move downstream and downhill was to engage in the ancient practice of translatio imperii and studii: a relentless push into the future.

The circle—in its diverse geographical forms, across diverse Pagan, Judaic, and Christian landscapes—”revived Platonic theories of the cosmic unities…, the fundamental unity of the
world, both in time and space” (267). Arcadia is a circle, common fields (the commonplace) unbroken by the iron line of fence and watered by a spring emitting from the circular hollow of a cave, dispersing in an egalitarian and generous circular pattern that mimics the bees “humming and hovering to and fro” (Jacobo Sannazro qtd. in Schama 527). The ancient Israelite’s descent from arid ridge line to the verdant rounded valley floor of Canaan, exactly as Mormon immigrants descended into the Salt Lake Valley and as Gentile immigrants descended into the City of Rocks, echoes the “religious sensation of entering a walled sanctuary” (7). The famed sheltering circles of the wagon trains in repose do the same.18

Yet the circle also carries communal memory of confusion, stasis, and entrapment. And so, Schama argues, the self-contained Connecticut River of Thomas Cole’s famous landscape “The Oxbow” (1836) is “the problem” (367) in a work ostensibly dedicated to America’s far horizon, long view, and progressive spirit. Time stops in the oxbow and water circles, lost. The arid wagon circle in which the Almo-Massacre victims die is problematic for the same reason. Escape stops here. If the line is the life-blood of history, and the trail the life of a nation, the circle is “a snaking beast of indirection” (Schama 311). We long for the circle as we long for the line that breaks it. In the City of Rocks, at the intersection of trails and cathedral grove, circle and line, pioneers discovered a landscape on which to stage this story.

But that’s not all that happened at the City of Rocks. The story runs deeper and wider than this story of national staging suggests. The City of Rocks holds layers of memory not only

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18 In 1841, Rufus Sage stepped away to more carefully observe his traveling home and saw “four large Connessotga wagons … and one Dearborn, all tastefully drawn up in crescent form. To the right a small pyramid-shaped tent, with its snow-white covering, disclosed itself to the eye, and presented an air of comfort…. The camp-fires in front, formed a kind of gateway to a small enclosure.”
of landscape tropes and types but of lived massacres. An uncanny white presence hides behind the silenced and accused Indian, a white presence with much to say and much to confess.

Historian Philip Deloria has tracked this uncanny presence in *Playing Indian*, his study of New World white men and women who base their national identity on a complex and contradictory understanding of the Indian as blessedly liberated from Old World conventions and horrifically trapped in god-less savagery. Playing Indian offered (and, for Grateful Dead and Redskins fans, Deloria notes, offers) all of the traditional advantage of disguise. The nascent American citizen could be both and simultaneously natural, individual, and free in the (linear) manner of the New World and civilized in the (circular) manner of the Old: an ironic doubled identity deploying theatricality and dependent upon experiential versus empirical truth. At Almo, disguise includes not only the mask of the generic/composite Indian but also the mask of the generic/composite American ‘other’: the Shaker, like the Mormon a believer in modern-day prophets and modern-day rapture and—unlike the Mormon whose “invisible tentacles” were “very hard to see” (Givens, *Viper* 6)—recognizable by her theatrical dress and experiential dance.

Irony and paradox, doubled identity and the external gaze, experiential versus empirical truth, theatricality, Paul Fussell argues, are “the literary means” by which we remember trauma and communicate the complex dimensions of traumatic experience (ix). Trauma lies beneath the theatrics of the Almo Massacre. The real subject beneath the silent composite Indians and silenced religious other of the Almo Massacre is white, Mormon, and directly descended from the perpetrators of the Mountain Meadows Massacre of 1857. In Chapter 2, I read the Silent City of Rocks as a collective trauma narrative.

This reading is founded on Jacque Derrida’s axiom that violence, rupture, or loss, of one form or another, attends the birth of all imagined communities—the abandoned past is lost to a
nascent and amnesiac nation compelled to look resolutely forward—and on F.R. Ankersmit’s corollary that atavism is the necessary national corrective. In this context, nation story and trauma narrative are very difficult to tell apart. Recognition of this connection shifts our reading of American tales of Western conquest. It compels discovery of material object—that which has been discarded and surrendered, that which stages story—rather than the constructed word.

This corrective brings lived experience—how things feel—rather than the evidence of experience—the seen and the written—to the forefront. Most specifically, we come to understand that when Almoites report, with the intensity and conviction usually reserved for eye witness, that the massacre “happened” and that the story is written within the rocks they are accurately and truthfully describing history and landscape. It’s just that the bones of the dead are not buried at Almo. They are buried at Bear River, Haun’s Mill, and Mountain Meadows. The memories of those dead and those burial grounds have been moved to the City of Rocks, in a clear example of the transportability of sense of place and a clear reminder that we misread when we too quickly and too definitively distinguish between the material and the conceptual.
**CHAPTER 2: SERMONS IN STONES**

“And this our life exempt from public haunt, / Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones, and good in everything.” William Shakespeare

**Summary:** Chapter 1 traced the Mormon exodus to the American west as material manifestation of sacred history, detailed the origins and evolution of the Almo-Massacre telling, and described the Almo Massacre as America’s prototypical nation story of fraternal gathering in a carefully bounded and delineated but rhetorical place: the massacre imagined. I now turn to another possible reading, in which this focus on place misleads: the massacre lived. Nation stories are inherently trauma narratives and trauma narratives—like poetry—are never about authentic specifics of place, time, or experience but about synesthetic sense: how things feel. This sense is artifactual, and thus heritable and transportable in the manner of the souvenir. Souvenirs are thing-types rather than thing—an inauthentic representation of the material real not dependent upon an authentic subject. Ironically, geological formations, set in stone, prove particularly effective at illustrating this imaginative process of mobility and inheritance.

Those looking in the Almo Massacre for the “totalizing narratives produced by the eye” dismiss rocks that can be read as mere story that doesn’t demand reality of its referents or experience of its subjects. And yet, consideration of the nature of traumatic experience and traumatic memory turns our focus from the rocks themselves, silent and patently void of narrative, to the raw materials of palimpsest: subtext and paratext, writing in rock. Focus on this subtext and paratext generates a history of the Almo Massacre dedicated less to debunking a sensationalized vision in which a delusional community sees God in the rocks and dedicated more to analysis of common practices by which the land is made to speak and by which rocks are read. I conclude
the chapter by arguing that the conceptual cornerstones of communal memory—haunting, trauma, and mourning—take material form. For the descendants of the perpetrators of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, communal memory lives in silent cities of rock. This ground carries, contains and reveals cultural memory. The land speaks.

**Introduction**

Historian Karl Jacoby writes that massacres are always the stories of things seen at close hand but not experienced: no one describes their own death; the dead tell no tales, and to see someone else’s pain, Elaine Scarry reminds us, is not the same as knowing your own. So how is it that twentieth-century Almo residents know anything massacre-related with such certainty? What—and whose—experience are they remembering and reporting? What’s in those rocks?

The scholar’s challenge surrounding massacres is significant. Bodies are blooded and broken and narrative is similarly ruptured. For narrative is not inherent to events; event does not equal story. Story demands a story, a listener, and a storyteller, and pain, Scarry shows, has a shattering effect on voice. Historical narratives of cause and effect, buttressed by faith in the veracity of eye witness, smooth too many rough edges. History, Nan Goodman argues, depends upon a model of the natural—you see what you get, you get what you see. Literature, Elaine Freedgood adds, hides. Similarly, unresolved traumas remain unintegrated, unseen—hidden—and are enacted instead in displaced and condensed phenomena (often of the next generations). This is where literary scholars come into play at historic sites of trauma. They are trained to look beyond, beneath the natural to other modes of storytelling, to lean into the awkward silences and gaps, to examine the diachronic and synchronic chains of associations that read like hauntings.
“Reading” traumatic memory in the Almo Massacre involves a shift in scale and perspective. If we focus only on the metonymic nation that survived Indian attack with the aid of Mormon allies, we read a united Mormon and Euro-American victory in a condensed local version of the American nineteenth century. Yet trauma study teaches us that such neat displacements and condensations are never complete. Other ghosts hide, reappearing in various forms. These ghostly shadowed stories can be seen on landscape forms that serve as mnemonic devices of collective memory.

**Nation Story and Trauma Narratives**

We imagine the nation as limited. “Even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings,” Benedict Anderson suggests, “has finite, if elastic, boundaries beyond which lie other nations” (7). There are two ways of understanding these elastic frontier boundaries, Martin Heidegger reminds us: as that at which something ceases and also as “that from which something begins its presencing. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon” (161). The institutionalized study of a national literature specific to a time and place has focused our attention on limits, the point of cessation rather than presencing. We falsely imagine, Wai Chee Dimock argues, “our” literature as “a world apart, sufficient unto itself, the product of one nation and one nation alone, analyzable within its confines” (3). In this focus on the limits to the nation and to limited national imaginings, we forget the more cosmopolitan, more mobile, and less concrete characteristics of national imaginings.19 That large body of world literature in

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19 The forgetting causes confusion, not the least of which is the difficulty inherent to theoretical efforts to distinguish between the nation and empire and the national and transnational. Language designed to distinguish instead coalesces. So, for example, Anderson speaks first of the “complex crossings” of historical forces that precipitate national imaginings before describing in contradistinction the “indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and
which river, ridge, and trail stand as “line of time as well as space” (Schama 5), suggests that the citizen did not forget this more mobile sense. Sense of place proved more about sense than place.

To Benedict Anderson’s triad of historical forces constituting the nation, Jacques Derrida adds a fourth: nations are born of trauma. Violence, rupture, or loss, of one form or another, attends the birth of all imagined communities as the abandoned past is lost to a nascent and amnesiac nation compelled to look resolutely forward. Atavism, historian F.R. Ankersmit adds, is the necessary national corrective—collective memory, however fantastical in form, compensates for collective loss. The forward-looking nation “defines its new identity precisely in terms of what has been discarded and surrendered” (265).

**Traumatic Memory**

If [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history with them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. … [What are] the implications of this paradoxical experience for the ways we represent and communicate historical experience? How is it possible … to gain access to traumatic history? Cathy Caruth, “Trauma and Experience”

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clientship” behind Javenese villagers’ prenational imaginings (). In description of Anderson’s “empty and homogeneous” nation time – the time of simultaneity and ‘meanwhile” so distinct from her understanding of cosmopolitan deep time – Dimock writes “the nation and the clock … not only unify time but also ‘dis-embed’ it, removing it from local contexts, local irregularities” (2, my emphasis). As though in echo of this national mobility, Levander and Levine describe the “ever-shifting and mutually embedded logics and subordinations” central to trans-national and trans-Hemispheric histories. In each conceptualization, the citizen (prenational, transnational, national) looks outward and time is dis-embedded from local context.

20 Ankersmit terms this collective trauma sublime historical experience, subject-less and thereby distinguished from subject-full historical experience.
Precisely because defined in terms of the lost and abandoned, national memory is more akin to traumatic than to narrative or “ordinary” memory. The distinction is central to the “lie” of the Almo Massacre and to arguments of America’s rhetorical construction. We construct ordinary memory. We find traumatic memory. Ordinary memory forms a story of the *coherent* past (Caruth, “Recapturing” 153)—there are no bones missing, or at least none that we are aware of. Ordinary memory is integrated with other experiences and, in contrast to the fantastical unified tribes of the Almo Massacre so glibly dismissed by historian Brigham Madsen, this integration is a social act; “anyone who knows anything” recognizes the memory’s structural soundness. This integration and this recognition, philosopher of pragmatism William James adds, is dependent upon the outer environment’s confirmation and preservation of concepts and emotions (cited in van der Kolk and van der Hart 158). Thus “the decisive factor shaping the founding conceptions of ‘America’ and of ‘the American’ was material rather than conceptual; rather than a set of abstract ideas, the physical fact of the continent” (Jehlen 3). The continent manifested narrative, affirmed concept, nascent nationals argued.

Except when it didn’t. Traumatic rather than ordinary events cannot be integrated with “schemes of prior knowledge… cannot become a matter of intelligence” (George Bataille qtd. in Caruth, “Recapturing” 153). Traumatic memory therefore, is often experienced as a lie. Even the name “memory” is false, suggesting a structural integration, a physical integrity belied by the experience itself. Traumatic memory “literally has no place, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present when its … images and enactments are not fully understood.” This “crisis of truth”—what the National Register of Historic Places might term a lack of integrity of place, setting, and association—does not relate to inadequate recall of event (“the event returns insistently and against the victim’s[victims’] will” [Caruth, “Trauma” 3]) but rather
to inaccurate integration of space and time: “Since the traumatic event was not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place and in another time” (Caruth, “Trauma” 8). It’s buried. We have to find it. Past and present merge, inaccurately, in a “historical enigma,” “a refusal of historical boundaries” (Caruth, “Trauma” 6-9). Thus Almoites insist, in refusal of temporal boundaries, “it happened, we know it happened.” Thus, I will argue below, Almoites refuse geographic boundaries. The Almo Massacre happened somewhere else.

This refusal of the boundaries of time and place is also a refusal of the boundaries of the individual body. At the level of the individual, the traumatic event “is experienced as an outside event to a detached “other” self—a fundamental dislocation” (Caruth, “Trauma” 9). At the level of the collective, those who did not experience the traumatic event feel it to be true, outside intelligence. “What does communal memory look like? Where does it live?” pragmatic historian David Gross asks, seeking integrity and intelligence where there is none. Strictly speaking,” Susan Sontag responds, “there’s no such thing as collective memory … but there is collective instruction” (85). Collective instruction integrates traumatic with ordinary memory: renders it social.

For the integration of traumatic with ordinary memory—collective instruction—demands an audience:

In order to construct self-narratives we need not only the words with which to tell our stories, but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them. Not only present listeners, but also one’s cultural heritage, can determine to a large extent the way in which an event is remembered and retold and may even lead one to respond as though one remembered what one did not in fact experience. (Brison 47)

The theatricality of the Almo Massacre—Brown’s dream work, Trego’s elaborate mise-en-scene, the costumed reenactments, and the tourists’ visits—create this audience.
Trauma Narrative

Trauma narratives look and feel like poetry. Nation story is similarly intuited: “No ‘scientific definition’ of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists” (Seton-Watson 5). Trauma cannot be spoken straight—both language and epistemological schemes fail us (I think of smoke signals running improbably across the length of the prairie)—but is instead “intuited and groaned” in the language not of the historian but of the poet (Ankersmit 1).

Consider the building blocks of poetry. “The language of poetry,” Cleanth Brooks says, “is the language of paradox” (Urn 3); poetry speaks the unspeakable. Irony refuses the integrity of existing schematic structures/ordinary memory; every war is ironic,” Paul Fussell argues, “because every war is worse than expected” (7). “Metaphor—like David’s stone of the Mormon diaspora—condenses, dissociates, denies, and reveals. We skip through gaps in the spatial and temporal continuum with the aid of asyndeton and ellipses. Cultural chiasmus—Indians who are Mormon and Mormons who are Shakers and Shakers who are Missourians and Missourians who are Indians and Indians who are us all—underscores ambiguity and refuses what Salman Rushdie in his national trauma narrative Midnight’s Children calls “the unchanging twoness of things.”

Litote’s understated sideways glance—the dead who “tell no tales,” the bones “too horrible to contemplate”—distances. Synecdoche—the king pin of the wagon of the train of the wave of conquest that rapes—”replaces totalities by fragments,” a “less” that we can imagine in the place of the “more” that we cannot (Certeau 101). The lie of hyperbole concentrates meaning in the epiphanic moment of discovery and recovery in the face of chaos: “it happened,” Almo residents insist of their imaginary most-horrible massacre; “it belongs to us.”
Because trauma looks and feels like poetry, it cannot be historicized—cannot be told ‘straight’ as a history of the visible and material, recounted in the authoritative voice of lived experience. Most specifically, trauma is not recounted in the past tense traditional to formal histories—a tense that imposes the chronological order of antecedent and consequence—but is instead almost universally staged in the infinite past and endless future of the imperfect tense. Neuroscientists tell us that in traumatic memory both chronology and agency backtrack in a complicated intersection of circle and line, animated inanimate, and inanimate animate. This complicated intersection maps with precision to the complicated topography and the complicated intersection of animated silence and inanimate voice that define the City of Rocks.

The infinite past and endless future is the tense not only of trauma and of the nation but also of the uncanny—the contradiction between the strange and unhomely and the known and homely. The uncanny, the ghost that “slips our Linnaean grasp,” reminds us that experience always involves more than the seen, the known, and the classifiable and that there are realms of experience “that hover just beyond the reach of our conventions and assumptions” (Punter 131). Thus David Punter defines the uncanny as that which “lies beyond the boundaries of human reason”—a point that historian Brigham Madsen should have kept in mind when he dismissed the accumulated tribes of the Almo massacre as unreasonable—and argues that the uncanny can take many forms: “coincidence/sense that things are fated to happen; déjà vu and the doppelganger; silence … if one considers instances where silence substitutes for the possibility of a response; telepathy … ‘the thought that your thoughts are perhaps not your own’ … (131).

Traumatic, uncanny, and communal memory—ghostlike and disembodied—all stand outside the limits of the subjective body and the limits of a subject’s experience. Subject-less experience is an incoherent notion and inspires incoherent narrative. Thus trauma narratives are denied
the legitimacy of positivist experience, the material epistemological framework of normative history.

Far from “mere myth,” trauma narratives reveal other factual stories, histories told in fragments of iconic, mnemonic, imagery—told, that is, in the only ways that trauma narratives can be told. Despite their complicated chronology, there is a narrative pattern to trauma narratives. They can be reconstructed. In this reconstruction, lived experience is translated first to image and then to word. These images lie in landscape, bequeathed in the stories told from generation to generation, old world to new world. The Almo Massacre narrative and its setting in the City of Rocks provide an example. Past massacre experience—of massacres that did happen—makes possible contemporary massacre recognition—of a massacre that did not.

In the contemporary story of the massacre that did not happen, we find no visible surface evidence but we do find the image-rich juxtaposition of an emigrant trail moving through and into history, a pastoral grove that stands apart from history, and the cultural battles that happen at this intersection of progress and tradition, dissemination and regathering, exile and recovery. The land form and the memory are closely linked. Landform acts as mobile mnemonic device. Rock’s more nuanced sense of layered meaning, palimpsest, and its logical equivalent in the recollection and re-collection that is memory, evokes sedimentation: geology and archaeology. To understand the power of sense of place we must first dig through layers of memories and representations and then reconstruct contemporary recognition.
The Almo Massacre’s Archaeology

“What we have here is one of those rainbow-painted pictures, never to be seen in real life, or even called up in words, but sometimes brought before us in a dream. … Sometimes, in the moment of falling asleep, we see them, and try to seize and define them. … It is something vague and haunting, like a memory…. It is not in the words … it is all among the words, like the morning mist.” Marcel Proust

Of American literature, Englishman D. H. Lawrence writes “the Americans refuse everything explicit and always set up a sort of double meaning. They revel in subterfuge…. ” (viii). Sociologist James Loewen echoes this reading of subterfuge when he categorizes the Almo Massacre as one of many Lies Across America (2006). Lawrence and Loewen are wrong and for the same reason: both insist only on vision as source of knowledge and both discount the cognitive and affective value of the buried and unseen. Both emphasize the distinction between the metaphoric and the material worlds. When we recognize the affinity between nation story and trauma narrative, we recognize the symbolic mode as a means of describing lived sensory experience. The symbolic mode proves a means of excavation and revelation not subterfuge and deception.

The Almo Massacre, as surely as it “crashes hard” into Wounded Knee, is also propelled from the fires of Nauvoo and the blood of Mountain Meadows. These traumatic events are the uncanny presences in the Almo Massacre story, carried to community consciousness by an impulse from—the instress of—the silent city of rocks. Or, in a more historical description of Hopkin’s poetic vision, by the degree to which the stories and experience of the earlier massacres establish what Jonathon Frow calls “the formal essence” of a place and govern “all later seeing” of that place (124). Remember that the 1861 Almo Massacre could only be spoken out loud in the wake of the 1863 Bear River Massacre. Trego said Johnston said Uncas-Winecus said that Bear River “balanced the atrocities. … The Almo with its horrors was partly responsible for the conduct of Connor’s men in slaughtering men, women and children on Bear River.” Thus time
“toned down the differences.” The account becomes an accounting. While Trego is absolutely right in recounting the pattern that governs all later seeing, the historical spread sheet is more complicated than he allows.

I want to briefly turn back to the moment when Brigham Young first announced “This is the Place.” The place that Young and his followers imagined was no more solitary than the Puritans’ Atlantic shore but instead inhabited seasonally by the Northern bands of the Shoshone, the Bannock, the Ute, and the Paiute and crossed, seasonally, in ever-greater numbers, by America’s overland emigrants. Between 1840 and 1869, an estimated 240,000 emigrants and 1.5 million animals migrated through southeastern Idaho depleting finite supplies of firewood, game, and forage. Indian relations with the Mormon settlers and the overlanders worsened in response to this resource depletion and the treaty obligations that increasingly threatened tribal sovereignty.

In response to intense conflict over land and resources, Young voiced a policy of cooperation and assistance with the native tribes. “It is better to feed them than to fight them,” he said famously. Mormon theology also spoke to the point. The Book of Mormon identifies the Indians as Lamanites, fallen brothers of a Lost Tribe of Israel whose fall from divine grace was mitigated by a promise of regeneration and restoration for those who accepted the gospel; like the desert, under Mormon hands, the Lamanite would also bloom. With settlement of Deseret, Young anticipated fulfillment of Joseph Smith’s prophecy of “a Union with the Indians” by which the Saints and the Lamanites, together, “could put to flight those who have O prest them” (Smith qtd. in Bagley, Blood 24). Thus the Mormons arrived at a place both known from prophecy (heimlich, 21 This balancing of atrocities suggests what historian Jill Lepore describes as the “fierce … contest for meaning” that attends all war. “Acts of war,” she reminds us, “generate acts of narrative.”
or homely) and completely foreign (unheimlich, unhomely, uncanny) to find brothers who were both host and stranger; known and suspect. In their response to the Lamanites, the Mormons, Janus-like, would look forward to the strange other, to annexation, to cultural and racial incoherence, and backward to the known brother, to shared ancestry; the Indians were self and stranger, both and the land was both old and new. This uncanny relationship fills the Almo-Massacre telling.

This uncanny relationship did not, however, fulfill prophecy. Will Bagley reports that “as Joseph Smith’s Indian doctrines ran into frontier realities. … Mormon preachers and writers quit praising the children of the forest and began complaining about degraded savages. Utah’s most powerful tribes had little interest in playing their prophetic role” (Blood 29). Thus the Mormon-Indian relationship deteriorated roughly in time with the Gentile-Indian relationship. By October of 1862, the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise reported that “every [overland] train that has passed over that portion of the route in the City of Rocks since the 1st of August has had trouble with the Indians” (qtd. in Dawson, “City of Rocks,” n.p). Commissioner of Indian Affairs Charles E. Mix felt duty bound “to warn all persons contemplating the crossing of the plains this fall, to Utah or the Pacific Coast, that there is good reason to apprehend hostilities on the part of the Bannock and Shoshone or Snake Indians” (qtd. in Madsen, Bannock 124). In 1863, as conflict escalated, Brigadier-General Connor ordered the Second California Volunteer Cavalry to “take steps to capture or kill the male adults of the five lodges of Snake Indians who have for years infested the roads in that vicinity, and who have of late been stealing from and attacking emigrants to Idaho” (qtd. in Madsen, Bannock.130). With this order, Connor set in motion the atrocity that would ‘balance’ the Almo Massacre and added to the poetic pattern of blood spilled
in circle groves, circles in tension with lines—a pattern that has proven more powerful than the manifest appearances of the world.

The Bear River Massacre of January 29, 1863 would be described by James Doty, Utah Indian Superintendent, as “the severest and most bloody of any which has occurred with the Indians west of the Mississippi” (qtd. in Bannock 139); an estimated 280 Indian warriors, women, children, and male noncombatants were killed. And, as at Haun’s Mill, and as at Almo, rape figures prominently in the account. Peter Maughan of the neighboring Mormon community of Cache Valley (just east of the City of Rocks) reported to Brigham Young, as follows: “Bro Israel J Clark has just returned from visiting the Battlefield and gives the most sickening accounts of the inhuman acts of the Soldiers, as related to him by the squaws that still remain on the ground. … They commenced to ravish the Squaws which was done to the very height of brutality they affirm that some were used in the act of dying from their wounds” (qtd. in Madsen Shoshone Frontier 193). In the aftermath of the massacre, the federal government negotiated treaties with the Northern, Eastern, and Western Shoshone. In August 1864, four Bannock chiefs also sued for peace, citing the destitute condition of their people.

The Mormon community, as it lamented the soldiers’ brutality, also welcomed the federal government’s efficiency and cared for the government’s wounded. “I feel my skirts clear of their blood,” Maughan wrote Young of the Indian dead. “We have pretty good reason to believe that if they had gained the Victory over the soldiers their intention was to take our Herd and drive it right to the Salmon River Country for their own special benefit” (qtd. in Madsen, Shoshone Frontier 194).
Bear River, 1863, is written in the 1861 Almo narrative as subscript: The bloody 1863 event “allowed” the telling. The Mountain Meadows Massacre similarly haunts the Almo account, not as part of the historical record, evidentiary, but sensed in the poetic parallels. This haunting is not particularly subtle. It is in fact so obvious as to be not only a mythologized haunting but also an accurate representation of the transportability of place(type). The massacre that didn’t happen teaches us about the massacre that did and reminds us that trauma narratives are never founded on authentic specifics of place, time, or experience but on synesthetic sense: how things feel. This sense is artifactual, and thus heritable and transportable.

The Mountain Meadows Massacre

Generations of historians have concluded that any historical account of the 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre “must rely on some rather dubious sources” (Novak 10). In the first of many echoes of Almo, the efficacy of vision and orthodox historiography prove difficult to come by and difficult to write. These dubious sources include the testimony of killers, the reconstructed memories of children spared because they could not speak and were too young to remember, Mormon apologists dedicated to subterfuge, and Mormon haters blinded by their desire for full revelation. 22 No journals or logs “are known to have been recovered” from either the wagon train or the massacre site, though “rumors persist” that a dairy was stolen by the massacre perpetrators and still lies secret and hidden in the depths of the LDS archives: subterfuge of material

22 There were no adult survivors of the massacre. Historians – Mormon and non – base their report on the memoirs of child survivors, written many years later; the letters and testimony of Mormon leaders, associated with federal and church investigations; and contemporary newspaper accounts, based on the testimony of Mormon witnesses.
form. A journal in other form lies secret in the Silent City of Rocks, disguised in the symbolic mode of nation story.

In 1857, U.S. President James Buchanan ordered federal troops to the Utah Territory to remove Young as Territorial Governor and to quell the Mormons’ “substantial rebellion against the laws and authority of the United States.” By the time the news reached the Saints, the rumor had spread that this federal army was to be led by General William S. Harney, who had earned the title “Squaw Killer” for his massacre of eighty-six Sioux, including women and children, at Ash Hollow, Nebraska Territory, in 1855, and who had been tried for the torture death of one of his female slaves. In this latter incident, the jury of inquest was unable to determine if the woman had been killed with whips or hot irons; “‘the general opinion was that it was done with both’” (qtd. in Walker et al 37). The Saints, their memories of mob rule fresh, sensed the approach not of an army but of a “mob” led by “chief mobber” Harney (qtd. in Walker et al 42). In response to this too-familiar threat to Mormon livelihood and religion, Brigham Young raised the militia and the cry of the rebel for home rule: “if it is time for the thread, in a national capacity, to be severed, let it be severed. Amen to it.”

The 40-wagon Baker-Fancher Party, enroute from Arkansas and Missouri to Los Angeles, by way of the Southern Trail through the southern reach of the Utah Territory, traveled through the heightened tensions and defensive actions of this war. In foreshadow of both the confederated tribes of the Almo Massacre and also their nameless victims, the train formed as though by smoke-signal—and scattered and regathered as though smoke:

Camped together near Salt Lake City were Fanchers, Camerons, and Dunlaps—‘three, and perhaps four companies from Arkansas, while the balance … was made up from Missourians.’ Farther back on the road they saw other emigrants who would join the southbound
group, emigrants they also knew by name…. When all of these emigrants joined together to form a new company…. it would come to be called ‘the Arkansas company. … The Missourians seen encamped with the Fanchers, Camerons, and Dunlaps were never identified by name…. In between these main parties or following them were smaller ones, some probably anonymous and lost to history. (Walker et al 100).

In composite, the trains on the southern-route, in that war-tense summer of 1857, seemed to number in the thousands. To those with direct and immediate memories of Haun’s Mill and Nauvoo, it “seemed” the accumulation of an army (Volney King, 1857, qtd. in Walker et al 106; my emphasis). The massacre that met this perceived army and this perceived aggression would offer material evidence of the pertinence and relevance of how things feel.

Like smoke signals, rumors of the perceived army’s aggression preceded the emigrant train. Mormon historians Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, charged by the Mormon Presidency with full and open disclosure of all events leading to the Mountain Meadows Massacre, report that Southern-mission settler Elisha Hoopes fueled rumors that the emigrants’ had poisoned a local watering hole with arsenic and an ox carcass consumed by local Indians with strychnine: “No one told the story of the supposed poisoning with more enthusiasm than Hoopes, whom Brigham Young had called ‘a kind of perpetual Telegraph’” (qtd. in Walker et al 121)—a purveyor of smoke signals. In further foreshadow of the imagined culpability of the Missouri Shaker Train of the Almo telling, the train harbored Mormon apostates, took rhetorical shots at its Mormon hosts and the integrity of Mormon women, claimed to possess both the men and the pistol used to kill Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, grazed its animals on Mormon pasture, and stole supplies from those Mormon communities that declined their sale. The train was not but seemed like a conquering army. “Black clouds” seemed to hang over the
Southern Mission, reminding people of their history as a united people and calling them to defensive action (Walker et al 131).

Mountain Meadows, explorer Charles Fremont wrote in 1844, in a description as easily applied to the City of Rocks’ arcadia and a reminder of the transportability of place(type), was “rich in bunch grass, and fresh with numerous springs of clear water, all refreshing and delightful to look upon” (qtd. in Walker et al, 3). This “mirage of serenity,” journalist Sally Denton would later add, again in echo of the City of Rocks, was not a sanctuary but “a perfect death trap” (129): a green oasis surrounded by rocky outcroppings, with only two narrow exits. On the morning of September 7th, a group of between 300 and 600 Paiutes—engaged by local Mormon militia officials who both warned the Indians that the emigrants would return in company with the army to destroy them and also promised the lion’s share of the train’s abundant plunder—attacked the Baker-Fancher party as they broke camp. Harmony, Utah Indian Agent John D. Lee, dressed and painted as an Indian, led the attack. The siege that followed lasted five days. During these days, as at Almo, the emigrants would frantically and unsuccessfully dig wells for ground water. On September 11, the Mormon militia, washed of their Indian war paint and newly posed as the train’s benefactors, offered deliverance. “My father was killed by Indians,” young Kit Fancher would tell journalists two years later. “When they washed off their faces they were white men” (qtd. in Bagley, Blood 154; cf. Novak 176.) (I think of the Almo Massacre, where Indian and Mormon are so difficult to tell apart.) This doubling and this imperfect tense are the sight and tense of trauma.

In their role as deliverers, the Mormon men marched under both an American flag and the universal white flag of truce. Lee would personify this doubled allegiance when he presented
himself to the desperate victims as a federal Indian agent, a military officer of the American territory of Utah, and a major in the Mormon militia. By this doubled presence, he promised, he would be able to mediate between the Ute attackers and the emigrant victims. Under the protection of this surrender and truce, an estimated 120 unarmed men, women, and children were shot, stabbed, bludgeoned, or sliced from ear to ear by the Mormon escorts who walked by their side or by the Mormons’ Indian allies who hid behind “every rock.” Only those children too young to “tell tales” were spared (Higbee qtd. in Walker et al 187). Mormon settlers adopted these 17 or 18 orphaned children into their homes and, like the celibate Shakers, raised them as their own.

The militia, some using the abandoned shovels and picks of the emigrants, dug graves too shallow to protect the dead from the scattering of scavengers and then swore each other to secrecy. We “made speeches,” Lee testified, “and ordered the people to keep the matter a secret from the entire world” (Lee qtd. in Denton). Amid the corpses, some fifty perpetrators swore “most binding oaths to stand by each other, and to always insist that the massacre was committed by the Indians alone” (251; cf. Walker et al 192, 216). The murdered emigrants participated unhappily in this silence. No witness or written record from the emigrant train survived the siege or the massacre. A modern Piute history would conclude that ‘although local Nuwuvi [Paiutes] were involved, they played a secondary role to the local settlers in the actual murders’” (qtd. in Walker et al 193). As at Almo, the dead tell no tales and the Indians insist that they are “being accused of something we didn’t do.”
Evidence

Let sanguine healthy-mindedness do its best with its strange power of living in the moment and ignoring and forgetting, still the evil background is really there to be thought of, and the skull will grin at the banquet. William James

What survives, in the face of this dearth of records, is less sight than sense, more image than word, more poetry than history. One of the surviving children, too young to name names or to tell tales, remembered only the image of bright red blankets with black borders that covered the sick and wounded in one of the lead wagons (Walker et al 196); he remembered image not word. Other children, like so many emigrants before and after them, remembered an ill-defined landscape of threat, with Indians hidden “behind every rock” (Walker et al 199; cf. Carpenter); they remembered sense not location. The perpetrators similarly spoke of rhythm and of pattern rather than the specifics of name and face; one participant, describing the movement of the Mormon militia toward the siege site and the waiting emigrants, couldn’t precisely reconstruct faces or coordinates, but remembered—and repeated, as though the movement toward holy ground rather than battle ground complicated his sense— that the men moved “in an unstructured fashion, ‘like a lot of men would go to a meeting house’” (anonymous qtd. in Walker et al 193).

This is the ironic disrupted schema of traumatic memory. A second remembered different facts but an identical sense of the complicated intersection between the sacred and the mundane, the savage and the civilized. The militia, Joel White reported, marched in a line parallel to and four or five feet to the right of the line of emigrant men—each militia member assigned an individual target—but despite this precision of pattern “the march had no rhythm; most walked haphazardly” (Walker et al 198, citing Joel White). Eye-witness accounts of the massacre differ on the words of the exact order that initiated the face-to-face executions and the Indians’ charge—some remember “Halt,” (Walker et al 191), others “Stop and Do Your Duty” (Denton),
while Lee insisted that the men were ordered to “Do Your Duty to Israel”—but their sense of the event is consistent. At a word, the world changed.

Despite the militia’s efforts to secrete personal effects and to bury bones “too horrible to contemplate,” blood outed and skulls grinned at the banquet. In a foreshadowing of the Almo telling, silence failed. Southern-mission settlers stripped the wagons of goods and the bodies of bloody clothing: “women from Cedar City and nearby settlements arrived to remove the calico dresses and lace pinafores of the women and children,” Denton writes from the 1875 testimony of Fanny Stenhouse (Denton 149). John D. Lee would later boast possession of eight gold pocket watches (Walker et al 207). Those evidentiary goods not claimed by the Mormons were claimed by their Indian allies. Two days after the massacre John D. Lee held a banquet in Harmony and his Indian guests “had the most outlandish garbs on. They had the clothes of the dead people, their hats and all, and the women had the womens [sic] things on them,” Elizabeth Ann Shirts remembered (qtd. in Walker et al 221). Mountain Meadows proved hard beneath the lush grass, the Mormon militia had come armed with guns not shovels, and the bodies of the dead were buried in too-shallow graves; “within a day or two many of the bodies had been pulled to the surface, torn into pieces and scattered” (Walker et al 235). In April 1859, Brevet Major James Henry Carleton of the First Dragoons arrived at Mountain Meadows under orders to bury the bones of the victims. “The scene of the massacre, even at this late day,” he wrote, was horrible to look upon”:

Women’s hair in detached locks, and in masses, hung to the sage bushes, and was strewn over the ground in many places. Parts of little children’s dresses, and of female costume, dangled from the shrubbery, or lay scattered about. And among these, here and there, on
every hand … there gleamed, bleached white by the weather, the skulls and other bones of those who had suffered. (qtd. in Walker et al 3)

Carleton and his troops gathered the scattered skeletons of thirty-two of the massacres’ estimated 120 victims. Loaded en-masse in a wagon, the bones “revealed a sight which can never be forgotten” (4).

These exposed and scattered bones stand in stark contrast to the deeply-buried too-horrible-to-contemplate bones of the Almo dead. We can read this contradiction in two ways: as proof of the evidentiary power of eye witness and the lie told at Almo or as evidence of the layers of memory and representations that form place. I am arguing for the later. I assume that Carleton, like Lee, meant that neither he nor his men would ever forget: this is the authority and efficacy of eye witness. Yet the descendants of Carleton and his men, the descendants of Lee and his men, have also not forgotten, in a material manifestation of trauma’s heritability, generation to generation. The bones continue to speak, the ground continues to reveal its buried secrets, and the rocks of mountain meadows continue to offer witness.

Three families living in or near Cedar City in the late 1850s would migrate to the well-watered mountain meadows of the Almo Ward. They may in fact have kept Mormon involvement in the Mountain Meadows Massacre “secret from the world,” but others did not and soon

23 Descendants of participants Jabez Durfee, David Stoddard, and Dudley Leavitt. Moreover, in the 1900 Federal Census of Cassia County, Idaho, Almo Enumeration District #034, 74% of the district’s 206 residents—the families of Robert and James Wake; John Lowe; Lula Campbell; Charles and Levi Ward; William Jones; William Johnson [who owned the purported-massacre site]; Henry Cahoon; Henry, Charles, and Lorenzo Durfee; Thomas King; Helen Edwards; Helen and William Eames—had lived in Utah prior to their move to the northern mission. Over half of these men and women had been born in Mountain Meadow’s Iron County or its immediate vicinity.
transmission of massacre images extended well beyond the face-to-face community of kinship to the extended and scattered community of Latter-day Saints. Within a day of the massacre, word spread through Cedar City that “the job had been done” (qtd. in Walker et al 212). Before the end of the year, Saint Amasa Potter of the “Australasian” Mission wrote of the arrival of a ship carrying news of the Southern Mission’s “dark days.”

Elisa New asks that we attend to the “materiality” in nineteenth-century American poetics and argues that this attention reveals not just “an explanation of its own effects but a closer relation with affect itself” (9). I understand New’s *effects* to relate to place—to the poetics, for example, of written-on-rock assigned human form—and New’s *affect* to relate to sense—to the silent witness, for example, of the felt but unseen. The materiality of Mountain Meadows and of its *déjà vu* in the mirroring landscape of the Silent City of Rocks never escapes the witnesses; both accounts are defined by visual impressions of the contradictory—friends who are foes and foes who are friends, white men who are Indians and Indians who are white men, children who are innocent and children who know. Again and again we hear this tension displaced to contradictory land forms: the tension between a circle of refuge and a circular death trap; water and its absence; the circle of safety that is also a prison and the line of the trail that is both escape route and death march. These landscape forms in the Silent City of Rocks, I argue, act as souvenirs that testify to the authenticity of the Almo Massacre; in the manner of souvenirs, they carry narrative. The Almo-Massacre faithful read Mountain Meadows in the mirroring City of Rocks landscape, even those who do not know that that is what they read.

These recursive narratives and the emotional affect at their heart are dependent upon landscapes’ function as what T.S. Eliot calls the objective correlative: “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that particular emotion.” These bloody mountain
meadows were all of these things: the set object of meadow-circle and trail-line; the stage of events standing outside intelligibility—less effect than affect; the hollow that held smoke signals “not in the words … [but] all among the words, like the morning mist.” Participants collected these objects situations, and events and carried them forward.24

Souvenirs act as evidence of experience, as metonym that simultaneously reminds one of contact with and proximity to an experience and of the body’s contradictory distance from the place and time of that experience (cf. Stewart 135). This reminder of distance is in turn a reminder of loss and alienation: the loss of the self-who-was and the alienation of the self from its origins. The partial and therefore poetic/metonymic nature of the souvenir—thing-type rather than thing—is also inherently inauthentic—an abstract or conceptual representation of the material real. The experience represented by thing-type is therefore governed by typicality and general pattern rather than the authentic experience of the individual subject. This is the alienation at stake for City of Rocks National Reserve historian Kathleen Durfee when she is asked to “relegate to the realm of fiction the stories told by great-grandparents who settled in the area in 1878.”

This is also the alienation that Gabriele Schwab describes in *Haunting Legacies*, her excavation of the process by which “the legacies of violence not only haunt the actual victims but also are passed on through the generations” (1).25 “Strictly speaking,” there is no such thing as

24 Notably, twentieth-century overland-trail enthusiasts will “collect” generic events as collectors collect souvenirs. Of his vast collection of written accounts of common trail experiences, Edward Ayer wrote, “I collected most of [these experiences] while residing in California some years ago.”

25 Schwab’s focus in *Haunting Legacies* is on the guards of the Holocaust, not the guarded, the murderers, not the murdered. Her study of transgenerational memory is thus particularly appropriate to my consideration of Mormon transgenerational memory growing out of the Mountain Meadows Massacre.
transgenerational memory (or the common[ly]-sensed), Susan Sontag argues, there is only the materiality of communal instruction. Sontag reminds us that the materiality of Schwab’s argument is not obvious; Schwab herself insists, incorrectly, that her cornerstones of haunting, trauma, and mourning are purely “conceptual” (11). Despite the abundance of material sign of the Holocaust and the authentic experience of individual subjects, Schwab argues that this visible evidence—positive presence—is not what defines communal memory. The communal transgenerational memory of German witnesses to the Holocaust, she argues, looks instead like absence—“traces, gaps, and lacunae (5)—sounds like silence, and lives in “cryptic enclaves of language … crypts … of words buried alive, relieved of their communicative function” (4). Knowledge, Schwab argues, is not the product of vision—a direct apprehension of the world of transparent objects—but of sense.

Material type holds conceptual sense and this conceptual sense migrates with a mobile people. The psychic life of these violent histories is sustained over time and space by those unaware of either the invisible crypt or its silent contents. “It is through the unconscious transmission of disavowed familial dynamics that one generation affects another generation’s unconscious” (Schwab 4). Or, returning to the codified language of historic-site designation and evaluation, integrity of association has very little to do with integrity of place.

Just as Smith was not the first prophet and the Book of Mormon not the first revelation, rocks that bear witness to far-distant events are not exceptional to the American western landscape or the American imagination. Remember, for example, that it was the Stone of Shechem that bore witness to God’s renewed covenant with the Israelites (Joshua 24:1-27):

Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak in the sanctuary of the LORD. 27 Joshua said to all the people,
“See, this stone shall be a witness against us; for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us; therefore it shall be a witness against you, if you deal falsely with your God.

This was not God-as-witness embodied in the stone of Shechem, the aura of God divorced from his presence—not to a people who disavowed idolatry. At Shechem as at Almo the stones concretize time. In their silence we sense “the sound of meaning immanent in things” (Rancière 92). Examples multiply: The carefully tended descendants of the trees of the Mormons’ Sacred Grove, where the Angel Moroni first appeared before Joseph Smith, continue to bear witness to the miracle. Granite stones gathered by hand from Mountain Meadows by the descendants of those killed, and transported backward in space and time along the emigrants’ trail to Arkansas, guard the Arkansas memorial cross and offer witness to the distant massacre (Novak 6). And, in 1877, Federal troops executed John D. Lee in Mountain Meadows. Historians Walker, Turley, and Leonard report that the government “never explained” its decision to return to the site of the crime—a decision “largely unique in U.S. jurisprudence” (Walker et al 228).

The silent meadow explains for them: by 1877 the once-lavish Mountain Meadows springs had shrunk to “a sunken pool of slimy, filthy water” and Lee’s last view was of an affectively and appropriately desolate place (execution transcript, qtd. in Walker et al) without evidence of spring or renewal. Geologists say that heavy rains the winter of 1861-1862, falling on eroded and overgrazed soil, disrupted the water table (Novak 7): an explanation of its own effects. Others insist that the desolation was “the curse of God” (qtd. in Walker et al 229) and that the meadow kept horrified witness to the crime: a relation with affect itself.
The careful horticulture at Sacred Grove (a kinship network), the backward movement of the memorial stones (routes of transit), and the conflation of place of crime and place of punishment (a form of attachment)—all double threadings—concretize deep time. The stones of ages bear witness to an infinite history and render that which is private to a generation and specific to a place in time public and universal. This is not Benedict Anderson’s linear “nation time,” “abstracted into metric … on the strength of which the ancient and the modern can be certified to be worlds apart, never to be in contact” (Dimock, 2). Nation time is trauma time.

Anderson makes the mistake we’ve long made. He understands “in contact” in terms of place rather than sense. We have misunderstood the sense-logic and the tense of nation time. Stones that bear witness, rocks that carry story, are the materialized form of the imperfect tense, a tense both durative and iterative. Umberto Eco explains:

as a durative, it tells us that something was happening in the past but does not give us any precise time and the beginning and the end of the action are unknown. As an iterative, it implies that the action has been repeated. But one is never certain when it is iterative, when it is durative, or when it is both. … It is the ambiguity of this tense that makes it the most suitable for recounting dreams or nightmares. It is also the one used in fairy tales. ‘C’era una volta’… hints at a time which was uncertain, perhaps cyclical. (12-13)

The Almo Massacre story is told imperfectly: “it happened.” The story is iterative: the trauma had been and has been repeated. The story is durative: there is no precise time and the beginning and the end are unknown; there is no precise place at the crisscrossing of trails where Circle Creek interrupts the traces of westward progress. This is narrative revealed as the product
of Dimock’s crisscrossing set of pathways “weaving in and out of other geographies, other lan-
guages, and other cultures” (3). What better narrator for this cyclical history of conflicting de-
sires than the rocks that witness deep time?

Contrary to twentieth-century American literary criticism and historiography, this collec-
tion of landscape objects as souvenirs does not construct the mythological wide open western
landscape of unfettered opportunity. The sensory impression of empty space, Yi-Fu Tuan argues,
is never a question of the number of feet planted per square foot. It is instead a question of cross
purposes: “conflicting activities generate a sense of crowding … . The world feels spacious
when it accommodates our desires, and [feels] cramped when it frustrates them” (64-5, my em-
phasis). Or: how things seem is often more important than what they are. When we attend only
to the conceptual in American mythology we see only a manipulative and opportunistic con-
struction of empty space. When we attend to the language of how things feel, we find something
else. The land felt cramped and unfriendly; crowded and inhabited; at cross-purposes with im-
migrant desires not an organic and pre-ordained fulfillment of those desires.
CHAPTER 3: “AS LARGE AS LIFE AND TWICE AS NATURAL”

“We passed in the desert about 100 wagons 500 dead oxen & other property …. This desert is entirely destitute of vegetation & is the place for the Emigrant to see the Elephant we saw him sure as large as life & twice as natural.” David Dewolf

“Of the five women only three are known…. Perhaps the remaining women were wives of hired hands. … Patches became visible upon the clothing of preachers as well as laymen…. The grandmother’s cap was soon displaced by a handkerchief or a piece of cloth. Grandfather’s high crowned hat disappeared as if by magic.” Ezra Meeker

Summary: In the previous chapters, I have made much of Mormon migrants’ apprehension in the western landscape of phenomena structured beneath the surface and beyond the visible. I found this apprehension to be more spontaneous than calculated and more material than conceptual. In this chapter, I turn to the Gentile migrants and find the same modes of apprehension.

Westward migration from, to, and through the ‘primitive time’ of Indian Country is not only the Mormon origin story, but the (white) nation’s. Like the Mormons, the Gentiles see and set this story in stone. Four American presidents, for example, are carved in the face of Mount Rushmore, in the Black Hills sacred to the Sioux. Sculptor and second-generation immigrant Gutzon Borglum lauded the site as “perfect” because—like the confluence of trails at the high point of history in the City of Rocks—it was at the literal center of the land acquired in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 and because—like the immigrants’ debris field at the City of Rocks—it contained the archaeological remains of European conquest, most notably the original French ‘tablet’ claiming the western lands (qtd. in Schama 395). George Washington and Abraham Lincoln memorialize the birth and the preservation of the Union. Thomas Jefferson is carved in this memorial stone because he orchestrated the Louisiana Purchase and thus assured the expansion of the nation; his face literally faces west. Theodore Roosevelt is carved in stone because he figuratively broke the stone of the Isthmus of Panama and thus, Borglum argued, “accomplished the
purpose of Columbus’s entrance into the western hemisphere” (qtd. in Schama 395.). Reminiscent of the writing on the rocks at the City of Rocks, a giant “entablature,” shaped like the Louisiana Purchase, was to contain nine dates central to the history of the nation; seven of these nine related to Westward Expansion. And, in more literal fashion than at the City of Rocks, the stone ultimately proved too fragile for this composition and the entablature was removed from site design.

Mount Rushmore is an aggressive and theatrical representation of the constructed nation, evidence of a whole host of “ideological agendas, cultural preoccupations, anxieties, and obsessions” (Abrams 3); it’s not surprising that it graces the cover of the latest edition of Lies Across America (Loewen 2010). But, as at the City of Rocks, the written-on rocks divert our attention from another if related story of phenomenological discovery: stories embedded in rock. And so the Gentiles describe their journey west. Again and again they write of the journey they “are about to embark in” (and again and again their editors note ‘sic’) (Frink 46, my emphasis; cf. E. Elliott and S. Davis).

Introduction

Man is the measure of all things. To be “whole,” Cultural Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan argues, is to know where you are in place and time. To step to the unknown—to move either backwards, as in Tuan’s example of dancing, or blindly, as in our example of new-world migration—is to “abrogate historical time and oriented space” (and the two are “aspects of a single experience”). Those moving beyond the efficacy of sight, into a space and time of disorientation, feel “apprehensive even when assured that nothing lies behind [or before] to cause a stumble” (128). Apprehensive and disoriented, they search to discover those marks of the familiar that bring time and
space back into human perspective. For America’s nineteenth-century overland emigrants, these marks of the familiar were not a direct expression of Natural Law, organic to the material land and thus outside history, but old-world markers fully investing in history: sublime castles and silent sentinels boding division.

To repeat Myra Jehlen’s persuasive—and now common—demonstration of the construction rather than discovery of the New World: the first Europeans to the New World “saw themselves as quickening a virgin land … still waiting the primal molding, anterior to the world’s divisions” (4). This anteriority affected visions of space as well as of history: absent division, space feels infinite and opposites imagine that they can “cohabit indefinitely “(18). Having arrived at a land imagined as vacant and outside history, the American found herself “no longer the historical dispossession of past rulers but the natural possessor of [her] own world” (8-9). The natural possessor of his own world, the American imagined himself “liberated from a net of social and political interdependencies … [and] render[ed] … inherently whole and self sufficient” (4). Whole and self-sufficient, the natural possessor of his own world became the prototype of the American Individualist: eighteenth- and nineteenth-century liberalism incarnate. The imaginative process, Jehlen continues, was exceptional to our nation and our space:

European reformers had argued in accord with Natural Law philosophy that their societies should parallel and complement nature. … Americans saw themselves as building their civilization out of nature itself, as neither the analogue nor the translation of Natural Law but its direct expression. (3)

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26 These aspects of the familiar are the souvenirs of Chapters 1 and 2: the metonymic and condensed traces of past experience and evidence of present loss or absence found by the Latter-day Saints in New Zion and the City of Rocks.
In this drama, “the first act in knowing ‘America’ is acknowledging it as a concrete fact” (3). Thus Christopher Columbus lost naming rights to the new world by posing the question of all subjects—immortalized by Mark Twain’s Nigger Jim as “Is I ME, or who IS I? Is I heah, or [where] IS I? Not dat’s what I wants to know”—too “abstractly” (Jehlen 2). “To determine where he was, instead of consulting the beach on which he stood, Columbus pondered theoretical globes. Had he defined his position in its own actual terms, that … beach would have revealed … a whole new world” (2). In contrast, Amerigo Vespucci earned naming rights to Columbus’s two continents “simply by recognizing their existence” (2).

It is important to note that Jehlen, in conformity with general and important trends in historical revision, is not equating either the idea or the myth of American with its “material reality.” She is instead concerned with the “connection of mystique to reality” (10). She asks by what rhetorical and phenomenological processes Americans imagined and constructed a continent that matched not their destiny but their desire. Yet, her description of imaginative and constitutive process does not map to the written records of those nineteenth-century American emigrants who walked the continent, emigrants compelled of necessity to acknowledge the continent in actual terms, as concrete fact. These emigrants did, as Jehlen describes, associate idea with land and yet there was little contrived in this literal association. Emigrant Mary Burrell, for example, writes of a muddy road in mid-May 1854: “Got sloughed twice” (May 19) and in the heat, drought, and fear of the Humboldt Sink: “I am Humbolted pretty badly these 2 or 3 days past” (August 5). When these emigrants consulted the beach on less material matters, they found neither fact nor solid ground and they heard conflicting voices, as often as not, and silence more often than that. And so, at the most-significant fork in the long road Jacob Hayden’s party “concluded to let the oxen decide our destiny. We started them and awaited the issue with great anxiety; they turned to
the left, leaving the Oregon road to the right.” This is American positivism: migrants whose “realities influence[d] their practices” (W. Ostwarld qtd. in James, “Pragmatism”) and who, like the nation in its nineteenth-century coming-of-age, were “conscious of a universal mission pretending to a conquering destiny” (James, “Pragmatism”). This conquering destiny, in pragmatic fashion, does reveal itself through the practical embodiment of the oxen’s material movement rather than the universal abstraction more commonly associated with the nation’s manifest destiny. The company, however, uncertain, anxious, and disempowered, lacks the “certain acuteness,” “restless, nervous energy,” and “dominant individualism” associated with the American imagination. Hayden and company don’t know how to read the beach they’re on.

They were not alone in this confusion. In general, nineteenth-century overland emigrants did not imagine or construct infinite space anterior to the world’s divisions, and they did not imagine themselves whole or self-sufficient. *They found contested space, and they lost perspective.* Their descriptions, like those of the characters of our nineteenth-century literature (see Chapter 4) and the boundaries of our nineteenth-century nation and of our historic sites (see Chapters 1 and 2), display what Robert Abrams calls a certain “softness of figure, form, and identity against a backdrop of uncertainty” (12-13). This is the sight and tense of dream, and in this dream world the distinction between the conceptual and the material collapses.

**America’s Religion**

We’ve seen this collapse in the collapse of Mormon theology and history. We cannot tell when one ends and the other begins. Though our only non-Indian ‘home-grown’ religion, and one that purports to incorporate Native-American history within the vast diaspora of the lost tribes, Mormonism has long been understood as a thing only superficially representative of United States culture and history; to dig below that surface is to arrive in a foreign country and
another time. For while the Mormon diaspora fulfills the American story of egalitarian western expansion—European outcasts who moved west, founded a community, and reinvented themselves religiously and culturally—it simultaneously contradicts and belies the American story. It contradicts the story in that the new group wanted to split from not affirm the nation, belies it in that Mormons apprehended a crowded and contested Old World known from scripture and from history and revealed the finite limits to the nation’s famed tolerance and opportunity.

Of the fulfillment, the Daughters of Utah Pioneers write,

There is a deeply impressive parallel concerning two great moments in our Country’s history. The first happened when our Pilgrim forefathers landing in 1620 on an inhospitable shore, were met by savage Indians, and were forced to obtain sustenance from a none too fertile land. The second was the day when that great religious leader and first great Western statesman, Brigham Young, gazing out across a broad expanse of desolate sagebrush valley, simply stated, ‘This is the place.’ (Lee v)

Historian Eric Eliason grounds his description of Mormonism as “The American Religion” on this Puritanical scattering and return (2; cf. Austin). Like the Puritans before them, the Latter-day Saints were compelled in this utopian vision to subsume social pluralism in a comprehensive communal ideal of unity. The Book of Mormon, historian Nathan Hatch argues, is a document “of profound social protest … an impassioned manifesto by a hostile outsider against the smug complacency of those in power and the reality of social distinctions based on wealth, class, and education” (125-126). As for the Puritans, the goal of this radical pluralism was not one of dissemination, the one as many, but of accumulation, the many as one: “a return,” Richard Hughes writes, “to civil unity under the “lordship of Jesus Christ” (24).
The ways in which Mormons and Mormonism contradict and belie the American story have been given more press and have inspired more mobs. Remember Mormon historian Terryl Givens’ claim that to a degree not found in the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament, The Book of Mormon derives its authority from the physical world rather than from narrative structure or literary trope. The Mormons read the ancient history of their ancestors in a land neither vacant nor outside history. In sharp distinction, the Mormons’ nineteenth-century non-Mormon contemporaries, those who moved west to make manifest a manifest destiny, are thought to have imagined a vacant primal infinite space in which the promise of liberal individualism could be realized.

Givens’ argument of Mormon difference is made on the broad outline of Mormon history in which the history of the Israelites is replicated in known and remembered place (see Chapter 1). His argument is further supported by the fine details of Mormon emigrant experience. I detail that experience briefly below, before turning to the Gentile emigrant experience that is presumed to contradict—but does not.

Saint Sophia Goodridge, member of the Mormon handcart brigade of 1850, describes the sandstone and granite monolith “Chimney Rock” as having “the appearance of cement between the column. It is supposed by some to be the work of the Nephites” (August 13). (Thus, historian Jan Shipps writes, “physical evidence of the ancient Nephites’ habitation bridges the 1800 year “lacuna in [Mormon] religious history” [175].) Saint Mary Elizabeth Lightner assumes the voice of these lost Nephites when she describes the burned-out ruins of the Mormons’ Nauvoo Temple:

Nauvoo lies on the opposite side of the river and looks deserted enough. One corner of that once beautiful temple alone remained, a monument of former beauty and grandeur.

… As I looked at it from this point, and though of what it once was, blossoming forth in
beauty, with a population of seventeen thousand inhabitants, I felt to mourn over its present desolation. I thought, ‘Can it be that I shall see the place no more? Where once the Prophet stood and moved the hearts of the people to worship God according to the new and everlasting covenant, which had been revealed through him to the people in this generation, and where he gave himself a martyr for the cause he taught? One of our passengers has just saved a man from drowning. (May 1863)

Past perfect—where once—present progressive—Nauvoo lies—and future perfect—I shall—merge in place and in the imperfect tense. Lightner is aware of antecedent and dispossessed past rulers.

Walking to Zion, Mormon migrants looked forward and backward. The mileage markers written on rocks along the Mormon Trail between Winter Quarters and the Salt Lake Valley referenced the number of miles behind the immigrants not the miles before them. The reverse would also be true: as Gentile migrants “turned their thoughts” east and “homeward” on Independence Day, Mormon migrants instead looked west and homeward to Salt Lake on Pioneer Day, the anniversary of the first Saints’ arrival in the Salt Lake Valley.27

There may be little exceptional about these responses to landscape in a religious context. I suspect that Givens exaggerates the differences between the Book of Mormon and its antecedents. Despite Saint Paul’s28 insistence in the Book of Hebrews that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for but unseen” (ll.1) he follows verse 1 with a litany of the seen: the walls of Jericho tumbling, the mouths of lions shut. The seen and the unseen, the story and its setting merge. There is also nothing exceptional in a global context. The Saints describe a long-inhabited place fully invested in the long scope and scale of world history, open ended. In the Mormon stories,

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27 See, for example, Caroline Clark, 1866.
28 The traditionally held author of Hebrews, though this authorship is in increased question.
ancient redemption, historic martyrdom, and contemporary sacrifice stand cheek by jowl, in text and in time, simultaneously mythical and pragmatic: “he gave himself a martyr for the cause he taught. One of our passengers has just saved a man from drowning.” This Janus-like evocation of past, present, and future in sacred (national) space echoes the “always-already” time of every nascent nation. To experience the ruins of revolution is to stand in the present and simultaneously mark a primitive organic past beyond immediate more belligerent memory and also the inevitable destiny foretold by that organic past. Lightner’s transition from personal vision to communal thought in the transition from private thought to public speech, quote within quote, is the *heteroglossia*, the multiple tongues, that Michel Bakhtin places at the center of the novel. The novel is the form that Benedict Anderson places at the origins and the consolidation of every nation. Goodridge’s recognition of Chimney Rock as repository of memory was an attempt to translate the open frontier to known place: “places are assumed to exist,” cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan argues of all of us. “The problem is to find them” (73).

Gentiles’ related attempts to find the familiar are too often dismissed as the anxiety of influence, inauthentic cliché, rather than as authentic descriptions of lived experience. For while the Saints’ response is not exceptional in the global context of nation building, it does contradict the story of American exceptionalism. Of the stories told in hindsight of a mythical western space, none is more famously constructed of meager knowledge and much yearning—yearning, historian Patricia Limerick writes, for the coherent, the simple, the linear—than Frederick Jackson Turner’s “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893). “Up to our own day,” Turner wrote upon the U.S. Census Bureau’s declaration of the official end of the frontier, “American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West.
The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development” (19). Thus Turner transformed “cultural differences into commonality and community” (Brook 127). By development, Turner meant Americans’ cultural and national identity: “coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness”; “restless, nervous energy”; “dominant individualism.” To transform cultural differences into commonality and community is to produce an infinite and therefore mythical space.

The American frontier seemed very different—and not just because Turner, as is so often noted, forgot that women, Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Jews, Mormons, Catholics, and urbanites were doing at least some of the sensing. Turner understood the frontier only in hindsight. He forgot that a boundary is that “from which something begins its presencing.” To remember is to undermine the common assumption of America (and its national literature) as sufficient unto itself. This is not the language of construction—the forced imposition of ideology in the face of the collision of order and chaos, place and space, culture and wilderness—but the language of discovery. There was always something there there. The question, for the immigrants and for us, is ‘what’ and ‘how to find it’?

The question demands an ‘inside-out reading’: from the emigrants’ sense of space to their texts, from practice to theoretical construction, rather than from text to space. Michel de Certeau’s analysis of practices of everyday life provides a description of and a method for this inside-out reading. He writes of culture’s ghostly palimpsests:

Escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible. Within this ensemble, [are] practices that are foreign to the ‘geometrical’ or ‘geographical’ space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions. These practices of
space refer to a specific form of operations (‘ways of operating’), to ‘another spatiality” (a poetic and mythic experience of space. (93, my emphasis).

In the following pages, I detail overland immigrants’ poetic and mythic means of describing the strange space of the American west, space that again and again “escapes the imaginary totalizations of the eye.” These means bear little resemblance to “quickening” and this space bears little resemblance to virgin land. The land does not carry the idea of liberal individualism and while narrative follows contour line, both are strange and marked most fully by disorientation.

“Geographical Space of Visual and Theoretical Construction”: The Western Frontier

Below, I briefly outline the well-known empirical details of overland migration—the visible—before heeding Elisa New’s admonition to also attend to how things feel.

In 1840, Thomas Farnham and his small party traveled from Peoria, Illinois to the Oregon Territory, initiating a mass migration that would peak at over 100,000 in 1852 but that would not end until completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Historian John D. Unruh, Jr. writes that overland migration has been “one of the most fascinating topics for writers, folklorists, and historians of the American West. The overlanders'... legendary covered wagons have come to symbolize America's westward movement” (3).

Harlow Chittenden Thompson of Dundee, Illinois spoke for many when he explained his departure: “I was turning twenty-two years of age, out of money, and saw no prospect of employment … I had very little to do and nothing to do with” (1, 22). The push west then, for this “free, enlightened, [but] redundant people,” was considerable. The pull also proved compelling: fertile soil, not only in Oregon but also in Mexico's northern province of California. In 1849, the discovery of gold in California added significant power to the pull. California boosters described a
gentle and healthy climate, potential agricultural wealth, an enormous variety of resources, and abundant game. In 1840, Richard H. Dana published *Two Years Before the Mast* and boasted “In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be!” (163).

Potential emigrants debated the wisdom of their westward journey in what historian John D. Unruh has called “a carnival of ignorance, unreality and confusion” (30); the “coherent,” “linear” “simple stories” of American western settlement (Limerick 63, 68) would ultimately rise in defense against this confusion but they most distinctly did not rise out of it. In 1813, the St. Louis Missouri Gazette reported “no obstruction … that any person would dare to call a mountain” between St. Louis and the Columbia River [and] in all probability [no Indians] to interrupt … progress” (qtd. in Unruh 28). In 1830, trapper William L. Sublette successfully breached the Continental Divide at South Pass with wagons. He subsequently reported to the Secretary of War that “the ease and safety with which it was done prove the facility of communicating over land with the Pacific ocean” (qtd. in Unruh 29). Others argued that while the mountains might be passable (with great difficulty), the “Great American Desert” was not. W. J. Snelling predicted mass starvation in the arid plains, loss of stock to Indian theft, and Indian attack “in retaliation for the pillaging of white hunters.” He concluded that the trip could not be made in one season, forcing emigrants to winter in the Rocky Mountains where they would first eat their horses and then their shoes before “starving with the wolves” (qtd. in Unruh 30).

“In proof” of the journey’s possibility, Presbyterian missionaries Samuel Parker, Marcus Whitman, and Henry Spaulding, in the company of women and children, traveled overland to Oregon Territory in 1834. Methodist Missionary Jason Lee followed in 1839, with 51 settlers. Reports sent from the Whitman mission to eastern religious journals were replete with details of
the prospering farms and of abundant resources. Perhaps as significantly, the Whitman's presence promised shelter and companionship at the end of a long and unfamiliar trail.

The first party to travel overland to California hailed from Platte County, western Missouri. The 69 men, women, and children were encouraged by returned trapper Antoine Robidoux who described a “perfect paradise, a perennial spring” (Bidwell 7). They were led by John Bidwell and John Bartleson and further assisted by trapper Thomas Fitzpatrick and Jesuit priest Father De Smet. Like the parties to follow, they raced the seasons, scouting the Platte River plain for the first sign of sufficient spring grass to sustain their herds, and sprinting across country at an average pace of 15 miles per day in a desperate race to beat the snow to the Sierra Nevada.

The Bidwell-Bartleson party followed the Oregon Trail as far as Soda Springs (near present-day Pocatello, Idaho). Here, half the party opted for Oregon. The remainder abandoned their wagons and proceeded southwest across the tortuous, alkali “Bonneville Flats” north of the Great Salt Lake, along the trail blazed — and dismissed — by Jedediah Smith in 1827 and Joseph Walker in 1833. By 1843 the preferred route to California ran from Fort Hall, up the Raft River, to the City of Rocks, west to the Goose Creek range, to a (barely) tolerable wagon crossing at Granite Pass — the main overland road to California.

This route met the basic requirements of an overland trail: it possessed a minimum of geographic obstacles (although wagons had to be lowered by rope down Granite Pass and other defiles); water was available at reasonably regular intervals, as was sufficient browse for emigrant stock; and, with the exception of the unfortunate and much-lamented loop to the north between South Pass and the Raft River confluence, the trail formed a direct line between the Mississippi Valley and the promised land.
Subsequent alternatives — the Applegate Trail, the Salt Lake Alternate, Hudspeth’s Cut-off, the infamous Hasting’s Cutoff across the 100 Mile Desert— varied the route between South Pass and the Upper Humboldt. These alternates promised varied advantages: some were billed as shorter, offering emigrants the advantage of time (winter and the Sierras approached); some offered access to provisions (the barren Forty-Mile Desert, within which both man and beast had starved, approached). The advantages realized did not always comport with those promised: shorter did not always mean faster and provisions were not always available.

Beginning in 1843, California trader, cattlemaster, and pioneer John Sutter hired former mountain man Caleb Greenwood to lure and guide the Oregon bound to California. Granted a pulpit at the British-operated Fort Hall (where the British were more than happy to turn traffic from contested Oregon Territory), Greenwood proselytized to the exhausted and confused on California's greater virtues and easier access. A.B. Guthrie immortalized Greenwood in the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Way West* (1949):

> [From Fort Hall to Boise] there's the Snake to ford twice.... The Snake ain't no piss-piddle of a river even if you might think so, seein' it from here, but you'll get over, most o' you, and maybe some wagons... Damn me fer a liar if fer days you don't roll along her rim and no drink for man or brute, and there she flows, so goddam far and steep below... Califomy way is too by-jusus tame. Nothin' the whole length of her to test a man. Nothin' to remember 'cept easy goin'.... [They raise] nothin' cept what's sot in the ground and whatever chews on grass. She's a soft country, she is, and so goddam sunny a man wonders ain't there ever no weather here. It ain't like Oregon thataway. (253)
After the 1849 discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, Greenwood's promotional services were no longer required. Gold proved a powerful incentive against which the promised virtues of Oregon paled.

Whether they turned left or right at the junction of trails, the emigrants walked through contested ground. Although Indian danger along the overland trail has been greatly exaggerated (many more emigrants succumbed to drowning, disease, and accident; reminiscences of overland travel, told from memory rather than experience, are much more likely to contain accounts of massacres than daily diaries). In 1852, Caroline Richardson reported that “we are continually hearing of the depredations of the Indians but we have not seen one yet” (qtd. in Unruh 175). As immigrant numbers increased through the early 1850s, the drain on the tribes' traditional grazing resources intensified, leaving Indian lands impoverished. Increased emigrant numbers also spelled increased white/ American Indian contact: emigrants reported a dramatic increase in the number of stock stolen, while the Indians complained of unprovoked attacks, and federal Indian agents complained of the unethical behavior of white traders “who plied the natives with whiskey and sold them guns and ammunition” (Elias Wampole, qtd. in Madsen, Bannock 74).

Most emigrants killed by Indians died individually, in isolated incidents, yet it was the massacres that captured public attention. In 1852, 22 emigrants were killed in the Tule Lake Massacre, and 13 in the Lost River Massacre; in 1854, 19 died in the Ward Massacre, 25 miles east of Fort Boise; in 1861, 18 members of the Otter-Van Orman train were killed 50 miles west of Salmon Falls on the Snake River. The massacres were generally attributed to the Bannock and Shoshone, although eyewitnesses, Indian agents, army personnel, and the Oregon legislature reported the participation of “out-cast whites” who “led on ... bands of marauding and plundering
savages” (Unruh 181-195). Although the threat of death was of greatest concern, many more emigrants would experience the loss of their livestock: “it was the art of stealing horses which, at least according to emigrant testimony, the Indians had absolutely mastered” (Unruh 181). Such theft was a significant blow, depriving emigrants of a food source, a transportation source, and the oxen, mules, and horses that pulled their wagons.

Between 1841 and 1848, the journey from Missouri to California consumed an average of 157 days; add the years 1849-1860, and the average drops by over a month, to 121 day.29 After the great Mormon migration of 1847, those whose provisions, wagons, stock, or resolve had failed had the option of detouring to Salt Lake City. Prior to 1849, the emigrants were primarily families of farmers, hopeful of settling—in California and Oregon. After the 1849 discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill the trains were joined by single men, unencumbered with heavy loads and hopeful of leaving California once they had struck it rich in the placer deposits of the Sacramento Valley; by 1850, both those who were successful and those who failed added

29 Unruh argues persuasively against "the language of typicality" in describing immigrants’ journey: “it seems axiomatic to distinguish between abnormally wet and abnormally dry years.... The inexorable growth of supportive facilities ... further negates the usefulness of a typical year’ approach. ... Similarly revolutionizing the nature of the overland journey were the diverse traveler-oriented activities of the federal government: exploration, survey, road construction, postal services, the establishment of forts, the dispatching of punitive military expeditions, the allocation of protective escorts for emigrant caravans, the negotiation of Indian treaties designed to insure the safely of emigrant travel .... The California gold rush accelerated the amount of eastbound trail traffic. ... Trail improvements contributed to significant reductions in the amount of time required to travel the overland route” (379-381).
a stream of east-bound traffic to the migration. By 1852, the gold fever had waned and “families seeking new homes” once again replaced the fortune hunters. For those traveling between 1851 and 1862, when the threat of death from hostile Indians kept pace with the threat from cholera or accident, the journey west of South Pass was significantly more dangerous than for those who had preceded and those who would follow (Unruh 403, Faragher 35).

Yet there were the constants of daily life — irrespective of the year, men and beasts needed food, water, and protection. Seven thousand five hundred mules, 1,000 oxen, 23,999 horses, and 5,000 cows accompanied the 9,000 California-bound wagons counted in Fort Laramie in 1852 — the peak year of emigrant traffic. Cut the numbers in half, for more “typical” years, and they remain impressive. These animals needed water when they “nooned” and again at the end of the day. The drain on the semi-arid West’s water and browse resources was significant (Little 8).

Late in the summer, camp sites also became dumping grounds, as travelers rested and prepared for desert and mountain crossings; of these ascents and descents and this drought, none occasioned greater concern than the Granite Pass descent and the Humboldt Desert that lay beyond it. The City of Rocks at the confluence of trails is thus remembered not only as one of the trail’s great oddities, but one of its great debris fields and market places. Here, emigrants lightened their loads, jettisoning all but the essentials of continued travel: “at a fine spring and good grass we took dinner. Here the old Fort Hall road and the Salt Lake City road come together. . . .

30 Despite this significant change in demographics, the absolute number of families on the trail remained relatively constant through the gold-rush years.
Here we overtook a company who were abandoning their wagons, and like us, packing” (Stansbury qtd. in Rau 101).³¹ As late as the 1970s, scattered remains of the wagons and abandoned personal effects remained along the length of the overland trails. That they were only scattered attests not only to the passage of time, but to the extent to which subsequent emigrants salvaged and reused what others had left behind, especially the axles and wagon tongues used to make wagon repairs. As the Mormons struggled to forge a city in the wilderness, their salvage parties ranged in a wide arc north and east of Salt Lake: “especially welcome” were the tons of iron from abandoned wagons they brought back into the valley (Wells 7.1). By the 1850s, Mormon entrepreneurs had established seasonal blacksmith shops in the Raft River Valley, along the main line of the California and Oregon trails. Others traveled north from Salt Lake at regular intervals, to sell cheese, butter, eggs, and other perishables to the emigrants (Myres 159; Sudweeks 295).

While descriptions of a typical trail experience, transcending the vagaries of route and year of travel, are a dangerous historical exercise the same is not necessarily true of generalizations about migrants' psychological response to their journey. Historian John Mack Faragher, in his comprehensive study Women and Men on the Overland Trail, argues that emigrant diaries reveal a striking similarity in their pattern of organization and in their emphasis. “Things they had done that day” form the third most common notation; reports on families' health, comfort, and safety, the second. The most common notations, however, were of things they had seen that

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³¹ Captain Howard Stansbury of the US Army Corps of Engineers, 1850, describes a typical debris field: “the road has been literally strewn with articles that had been thrown away. Bar-iron and steel, large blacksmiths’ anvils and bellows, crowbars, drills, augers, gold washers, chisels, axes, lead, trunks, spades, ploughs, large grindstones, baking-ovens, cooking stoves without number, kegs, barrels, harness, clothing, bacon, and beans, were round along the road” (qtd. in Rau 101).
day: “the emigrants were startled and in some cases overawed by the imposing natural landscape and strange climate through which they passed” (Faragher14). And, as Wallace Stegner would later note, their descriptions of the “weird” configurations—and I think of de Certeau’s everyday strangeness that escapes the totalizations of vision—are striking in their consistent retreat to castles, silent sentinels, and the sublime: “It is almost pathetic to read the journals of people who came west up the Platte Valley in the 1840s and 1850s and tried to find words for Chimney Rock and Scott's Bluff, and found and clung for dear life to … clichés” (53).

The Western Frontier: Poetic Practices of Space

“There it was: reality, denouncing the vanity of books and yet just like what the books led us to expect, what words led us to love.” Jacques Rancière, translated from the French

That is the well-known story of America’s overland migration. It’s true, even the imagined boosterism of Guthrie’s historical Caleb Greenwood: the sun shines in California and the Snake River taunts a dry land. Much, however, remains unsaid. Buried beneath the modern accolade, the “enterprise” of Dana’s ‘enterprising people,’ lies the linguistic trace and contamination of enterprising’s “early, and chief, bad sense” of lack—lack of knowledge, primarily, though also of patience, or kindness—rather than of surfeit. “An enterprizing foole needs little wit,” R. Cotgrave translated in his 1611 Dictionary of French & Engl. Tongues while in Gibbon’s The History Of The Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire, written in the year of the American Revolution, “Diocletian justly dreaded the enterprising spirit of Carausius.”32 The action, v., of enterprise, and the thing, n., show a similar evolution, from any human undertaking, to an exceptional undertaking to, as in our traditional reading of Dana, the exceptional undertaking of an exceptional people. Dana himself follows his most-famous quote with doubt: “Yet”… (163). This trace

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of the early “bad sense” of absent knowledge lingers in immigrant accounts, largely buried, an anxious sense that escapes the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye” (de Certeau).

Much of the emigrant experience denies the efficacy of sight. While the Whitman train proved the viability of overland travel, it was dramatically less conclusive manifestation of the wisdom of immigration or of federal Indian policy—even in its ostensibly benign missionary form: on November 29, 1847 the Cayuse Indians of the Mission community killed Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and twelve others. While fur trappers promised immigrants a paradise of perpetual spring, they failed to offer a detailed description of the way. Bidwell recalled years after the pioneering passage of the train that bore his name that “our ignorance of the route was complete. We knew that California lay west, and that was the extent of our knowledge” (9). While descriptions of the seen and heard do dominate immigrant diaries, the most common remarked upon sight proves to be graves and the most common remarked upon sound, wolves. While it is true that US settlement of Oregon Territory by United States’ citizens would ultimately be a factor in US control, the power of this civic duty as a push west has been dramatically overstated by those historians and memoirists who view the eastern trail head in the context of its western terminus. Journals kept during the course of the journey rarely mention these political stakes; theirs was merely arduous undertaking, not exceptional enterprise. The false orientation of hindsight is also revealed in historians’ common invocation of the immigrant in contrast to contemporary trail guides’ common invocation of the emigrant. The immigrant faces forward in time and space: the place to which she travels defines her. The emigrant, like Lot’s Wife, moves forward while looking backward; the loss and absence of the place from whence she came defines her.

Despite careful planning and careful packing, this mutually-dependent community scavenged from their neighbors—that is the nature of enterprise’s loss or absence. It scavenged table
tops and wagon seats to make graves, scavenged the abandoned relics of one community to build another. Immigrants traveled through contested space: ate the dust of wagon trains that stretched as far as the eye could see; waited in line at river fords for weeks; imagined Indians “behind every rock.” The crowding, the scarcity, and the scavenging all contradict the Turnerian myth of an America of endless space and endless opportunity, “sufficient that opposites could inhabit indefinitely.” We, of course, know that the myth is false—that Turner got it wrong. We forget that the emigrants knew it too. They lived not in Turner’s space but at the intersection of pragmatic and mythical space, where presence(ing) begins rather than ends.

The emigrants realized the enormous personal, social, cultural, and political consequences of their journey and left an astonishing array of diaries and letters describing their routes and life along those routes; as part of federal efforts to locate and commemorate the overland trails, National Park Service historian Merrill Mattes located over two thousand journals and memoirs kept or written by the estimated half-million people who participated in overland travel—a broad demographic. These descriptions, like the land and the history they describe, are only roughly chronological. Some are memoirs written years later from the present-tense chronicles kept along the trail; verb tenses shift at will as their authors forget their place in time and space (cf. Margaret Frink). Some are compilations, the letters sent home inserted at the appropriate place within the daily chronicle (cf. Dewolf). Some are written wholly after the fact, often decades later. These memoirs are not included in the following close readings; I’m more concerned with the ground beneath the emigrants’ feet than the ground once walked. Mine is neither a historical nor a sociological study. I have searched for representative examples of place making. Finally, I refer to the journal keepers as emigrants, not because they weren’t also immigrants.
but because my intention in the following close readings is to revise the orientation or perspective by which we read accounts of nineteenth-century Americans’ encounter with the physical fact(s) of the continent. Finally, I read the emigrants’ encounters with two organizing structures in mind: cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s seminal assessment of the means by which human beings find place in space and the intersection of this assessment with Myra Jehlen’s seminal description of the place nascent Americans constructed in their imagination.

“Quickening a Virgin Land … Anterior to the World’s Divisions”

Literary critics commonly argue that America’s primary dimension is not time but space or, rather, that universal space translated to infinite time. Arguments that nascent Americans moving west conceived a symbiosis with the material laws of the land and thus imagined themselves outside the socially-constructed divisions that crowd Old World history fail to account for the fact that time and space “are aspects of a single experience.” No single experience makes this point more clearly than walking in a straight line, where miles walked translate simultaneously to future possibility and also to past loss and where to move upstream or against the trail’s grain is to move backwards in history (and so America’s east-bound migrants, whether defeated and despondent or newly-rich were universally called the “turnarounds”). The river and the trail are Michel Bakhtin’s quintessential chronotopes—not concrete fact but the theoretical abstraction where time “becomes visible … and space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time and history and the enduring character of a people” (84).

As seen in Chapter 2, all nations imagine their history in the enormously dilated time of dream, prophecy, and enchantment (cf. Eco 42-43), tell their imperfect history in the imperfect tense, and concentrate this dilated story in landscape. And so the Frenchman Jacques Rancière describes the signs by which “the gaze” of an English poet, two German poets, a French utopian,
a Swedish actress and an Italian film director “comes to recognize reality as exemplary of the idea … and the way in which a thought comes to incarnate itself, in a landscape or a living scene, in order to make a concept present” (2). So Joseph Ware in his *Emigrant’s Guide to California* writes to the men and women just beginning,

> After travelling a few days, you have become acquainted with the qualities of the different men in your company. Elect the best one—Let there be no contention or intrigues in your camp. If dissensions break out in your camp, separate peacefully. (13)

Ware’s transition from election—a community’s birth—to movement—a community’s history and its future—is instant: “everything being arranged to your satisfaction, begin now to ‘catch up’” (14). Thus he condenses not only time but past present and future travelers in shared space into a generic whole. Experience is similarly condensed. His readers ‘caught up,’ Ware writes,

> You have now been out more than a month, and experienced all the perils and hardships of life on the Plains. Many are no doubt down with sickness, mostly bilious complaints, many with rheumatism, contracted by being in the water much of the time. (17)

Those who traveled followed suit, the enchanted imperfect tense merging seamlessly with the past tense of the real (as material and metaphor merge in Mormon history and truth and lie merge at the City of Rocks). “For *want of space,*” Keturah Belknap wrote in 1848, “I must cut these notes down. It is afternoon; we will hitch up and drive till night. Here we are; it is almost sundown. We stop at noon for an hour’s rest” (n.d. [p. 39], emphasis added). We understand the day to be unspecified because it’s any day and her “out of space” to mean scarcity of both paper-space and time-space. What is harder to recognize is the movement back in to time and the real.

> “It’s very warm, the oxen all have their tongues out panting,” she writes in what is *both*
imperfect description of a hot and onerous journey and a specific moment in history: “George took out the wash pan and a bucket of water and let our team wet their tongues.”

S. H. Taylor, traveling in 1850, proved fully aware of both his life in nation time and his place in the world’s divisions. In an entry titled “Facing the Wilderness,” Taylor wrote “Our departure is one of those hours occurring seldom in life, on which the past and the future press heavily. There are visions of sickness and pain that rivers of sympathy cannot relieve… and of the burial and desertion of precious remains on the desert where the waves of empire will go over them as unheedingly as the sea goes over its dead.”

In his anticipation of sacrifice and vision of the waves of empire to follow, Taylor echoed the official story of American destiny: he faced self-consciously forward. Taylor foreshadowed America’s “Quintessential Pioneer”\(^{33}\) and the Oregon Trail National Historic Landmark’s “most impassioned booster, Ezra Meeker who first walked the Oregon Trail in 1852. Meeker began his public speeches by assuring his audience “I don’t intend to speak of what I have done but of what I intend to do.” His legendary death-beds words were consistent with this forward-looking stance: “I still have work to do.” Historian Howard Driggs explained: “There is a flash view of Ezra Meeker. The embodiment of the typical pioneer—face forward—eager to do and to dare” (Driggs). There is every reason to believe that Meeker approached the trail the same way. US Army officer and “Indian Fighter” Henry J. Carleton remembers the white-topped wagon trains as a “beautiful sight. …—the long line of cattle—the horsemen … with their long rifles—the drivers with their long whips—all moving so regularly forward, that when viewed from a distance it seemed as if they were united and propelled by the same power” (qtd. in Novak, 36). Men marked time and space by counting the miles: day after day journal after journal ends with

the miles behind them. This is the constructed America, a nation facing resolutely forward and making its mark through travel and acquaintance.

Others (women, mostly) tell a different story. On a day of rest that did not prove a day of worship, Cecilia Adams (or Parthenia Blank; we’re never sure which) looked backwards: “I cannot help thinking of our dear home to day I think I see them going to the house of God to worship there” (Sunday June 20). In the time of cholera, Adams and Blank mark their passage through the Valley of the Platte by counting graves instead of miles. With the penciled pages opened before the researcher, the textural physical similarity to the counting of miles—the same white space, the counting as epigraph to the day’s entry—proves striking:

July 5 … passed graves
July 6 … passed 6 graves
July 11 … passed 15 graves
July 12 … passed 5 graves

Each grave evoked the miles, people, and places behind them rather than the country before them. The migrants moved forward looking backward at their dead. Natural possession of one’s own world is a consequence of perspective: of looking forward and of knowing where you are and where your ancestors lie. The emigrants knew neither.

“Whole and Self Sufficient”

It proved almost impossible to protect the bodies of the dead from wolves. The ground was either too soft to compact well or too hard to dig deeply. Rocks to place on top of the soft or

34 The number of dead affected the material conditions of the nation and its citizenry, though it had little effect on Turner’s concept of either. Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein report that the average American’s life span declined between 1790 and 1865: “geographical mobility helped to spread infectious diseases” (1).
shallow grave were hard to find and proved largely useless anyway. The first coffins could be fashioned from wagon seats or cook boxes, or from boards brought from home in anticipation of death. The second to die in any wagon was buried in a shroud instead; fragments of these shrouds littered the prairie, along with recognizably human bones and locks of human hair. Thus the corpses were “lost” and “disoriented” in the most pragmatic understanding of the word: body parts were no longer geared to the traditional reference point of a central core. Traditional relationships (front to back, side to side) proved arbitrary (cf. Tuan 36).\textsuperscript{35} The emigrants perceived this disorientation in horror, horror that by late summer was veiled by studied disregard: “Saw the bones of a man dug up to day,” Lucena Parsons wrote in calm conclusion to her description of the City of Rocks and Granite Pass (April 23).\textsuperscript{36}

Death and its dislocation echoed the emigrants’ lives and their physical disorientation. This fear for their lives and this disorientation—a failure of perspective and visual acuity—hides in the hollows of their words. Faragher reports that emigrants commented most often on things they had seen that day. Wallace Stegner in turn dismisses these picturesque descriptions of things seen as “almost pathetic” in their desperate retreat—as though clinging for “dear life”—to the “clichéd” Romantic-era tropes of castles, sentinels, ruins, the beautiful, and the sublime. In his misreading of the descriptions as poetic abstraction, Stegner forgets that the emigrants were clinging to clichés for dear life. When space threatens we seek familiar place. Cliché is familiar place, the rhetorical mark of all who have gone before us.

\textsuperscript{35} Tuan writes, “What does it mean to be lost? Space is still organized in conformity with the sides of my body. There are the regions to my front and back, to my right and left, but they are not geared to external reference points and hence are quite useless. Front and back regions suddenly feel arbitrary” (36).

\textsuperscript{36} Parsons wintered with the Mormons in Salt Lake City – thus the April arrival in the City of Rocks.
Stegner also forgets that no one was more aware of the inadequacy of language to describe concrete fact and the actual than the emigrants themselves. Of the City of Rocks, Harriet Sherill Ward writes, “At eve we encamped in Pyramid Circle, a delightful place indeed and one which requires [sic] the pen of the poet or the pencil of a painter to portray its beauties” (Wells, Appendix II). Writer after writer repeats her dismay. Sarah Davis, on the 4th of July, 1850, gives up and takes a literal approach (and reminds us that clichés are clichéd precisely because they so effectively merge the conceptual with the material): “we are now in the rocky mountains and it is rocky mountains for certain is some of the largest rocks I ever saw” (July 4).

Most importantly, Stegner misses the fact that the critical problem, as emigrants tried to “describe the beach on which [they] stood” in actual rather than abstract terms, wasn’t only that they had no words but that they had no measure. The Beautiful, “the subjective principle which determines what pleases or displeases only by feeling and not through concepts, but yet with universal validity,” Kant and the nineteenth-century Romantics hoped, could provide the orienting measure of the transcendent human (Bk. 1 §20). When Rufus Sage (1841) describes Chimney Rock as “a grand and imposing spectacle, truly;—a wonderful display of the eccentricity of Nature. How come such an immense pile so singularly situated? What causes united their aid to throw up this lone column, so majestic in its solitude?”—he pairs his hope in Nature’s singular rather than cross purposes with the universal adjectives that suggest his desire for the “residually common world” revealed by a transcendent aesthetic of the beautiful. He seeks the familiar not “as if for dear life” but for dear life.
The effort fails—and not just after the fact when Stegner reminds us of aesthetics’ regulatory function in service of ideological forms; it fails Sage at the moment of experience, when he follows the desired unity of Nature’s purpose and men’s taste with the disunity of failed perspective. The description above concludes: “the ‘Chimney’ is situated about three miles to the left of the mountain trail, though it seems no more than eight hundred yards distance.”

Perspective failed by 3:1. Holmes Van Schaick’s experience marks the same failure of comprehension. A “truly romantic road” displaying the “wisdom and grandeur of nature” is followed closely by a “region … [displaying] the remnants of wagons, harnesses, scores of dead cattle” (July 19). Turner’s praise of pioneer “acuity” notwithstanding, the pioneers continuously lamented the unreliability of sight and sense. Because the human body “is the measure of direction, location, and distance” (Tuan 44) this failure of perspective translated as personal fragmentation and loss. Beauty affirms wholeness. The sublime challenges wholeness. Again and again, the emigrants reach for the beautiful and find the sublime.

That which exceeds the calculation and understanding of language or vision is sublime. This includes vision in contradistinction to discourse and the sensed in contradistinction to the seen. Language and the seer, Jean-François Lyotard argues, accommodate these limitations through “allusion to that that does not allow itself to be made present … the conceivable which cannot be presented” (81). Read with the self-assurance and orientation of hindsight, the emigrants’ names for the rock formations of the American West—castles, silent sentinels—constructed the present and conceivable: America invented not discovered. If we read instead for discovery of a continuing presence and presencing rather than construction in the face of absence

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37 Citing Terry Eagleton Dimock writes, “while the aesthetic is an idea steeped in bourgeois ideology, it nonetheless ‘provides an unusually powerful challenge and alternative to these dominant ideological forms’” (107).
we can imagine another reading, a reading in which, for the disoriented emigrants faced with the
sublime, the names instead allude to a presence beyond the visible. These rocks exist not in
themselves, as themselves, but in the figural space of collective memory.

Stegner considers the sublime a poetic abstraction and forgets its relationship to the
actual: to beauty that can kill and that, in this refusal of the safe integration of interior and
exterior worlds, exceeds human calculation and understanding. The emigrants don’t forget: In a
terrifying storm, under the fragile protection of a flattened canvas, Mary Burrell writes “much
lightning & heavy thunder & large hail! tremendous time getting supper. Wet beds. ‘Tis
sublime.” Ascending to the top of Devil’s Gate, Louisa Cook affirmed the distinction between
the beautiful and the sublime: “I ascended to the highest peak & looked over & it seemed as
though I could never catch my breath it was so awfully grand. Near by was the grave of a man
who became dizzy at this Gap and fell over killing him instantly” (July 10).

Four years before his death in the November 1847 “Whitman Massacre,” “A.R.” [Andrew
Rodgers] describes his arrival in “this stony, hilly, mountainous, poor, desolate, beautiful,
sublime country. But sufficient to say that we have at last got to the long desired and long looked
for place” (July 7, 1843). Two and a half years later, A.R. is only barely more concretely situated.
His letter to his brother conforms to the habits of immigrants: the heading contains place as well
as date and yet these reference points have no center.

April 23 1846

between Walker and Ishimakain Station near Ft. Colville.

I am so far from where any body lives that it is almost impossible to tell you where I am. I
tried in the heading of this letter to give you some idea of the place but I expect you will
not be much wiser than before. … When I left home I had no thought of ever being where I am now….

As often as they describe the landmarks of Chimney Rock, Scott’s Bluff, Independence Rock, and Devil’s Gate, anomalies in the flat prairie, they describe confusion: “on these level prairies we cannot judge much of distance by the eye” (Adams, July 3). Sage, for whom the journey and the prairie, by the time of his second trip in 1841, had become familiar, reveled in the failed apprehension of the greenhorn: “Upon this question [of the size of Chimney Rock and its distance from the trail] our party entertained no small diversity of opinion. Some of the less knowing were confident it could not exceed a half mile, and one fellow offered to bet five dollars he could run to it in fifteen minutes. It took ‘the greenhorn’ forty-five minutes to reach the spot.” Disorientation in space translates as disorientation in time. Of the granite “City Rocks” Parsons writes, “They are composed of a substance resembling salts & are in a state of decomposition A few more years & then will be leveled with the ground” (April 23).

Jehlen defines subject wholeness and self-sufficiency as the shared consequence of imagined infinite space. Tuan and the emigrants do too. “Solitude,” Tuan writes, is “broken not so much by the number of organisms as by the sense of cross purposes. … Conflicting activities generate a sense of crowding. … The world feels spacious and friendly when it accommodates our desires, and cramped when it frustrates them” (61-65). In Tuan and the emigrants’ conception, the demographers “actual terms” of solitude (akin to Vespucci’s pragmatic reading of a New World beach), bodies per square mile, are less relevant than the body’s sense of undisputed primacy. In our desire for a transcendent clarity to our identity we may in retrospect imagine Indian Country as an uninhabited space and a virgin land. Tuan writes that the Russians never

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38 Parsons wintered with the Mormons in Salt Lake City—thus her April arrival in the City of Rocks.
learned to love their seemingly-endless expanse of Steppes, seeing the threat and cross-purpose of loneliness and madness. Americans, in contrast, “learned to see the plains as an uninhabited symbol of opportunity and freedom (64, my emphasis).

Their feet still on the ground and in motion, the emigrants hadn’t learned this yet. Faced with what Turner described as abundance to match their desire, they see instead the possibility of conflict: “July 3 we are camped tonight in a beautiful bottom with grass waist high to the men. They feel uneasy on account of the Indians as it is a good place for them” (Shakleford). Faced with wonder, they are reminded instead of contest:

While the stock was being cared for the women and children wandered off to enjoy the sights of the city [of Rocks.] … There was everything one could imagine. … When they returned to camp a stern and well-merited reprimand awaited them.39 “How could you do such a thing? Did not you know there might be an Indian behind every rock?” etc. etc We were so spellbound with the beauty and strangeness of it all that no thought of Indians. (Helen Carpenter qtd. in Myres 159).

The Indians not only crowded the emigrants’ space, they challenged their perspective of time and space. Again and again, emigrants write a version of Eugene Ware’s scared and disoriented, “All at once … 30 Indians came out of nowhere on a dead run” (n.d.). Historical time—”all at once”—and oriented space—”out of no where”—are abrogated and revealed to be shared aspects of the emigrants’ single and singular experience.

It’s not just sight that fails the emigrants, when they “face the savage,” but sound and literacy too. “Do you hear that wolf,” Eugene Ware asked his guide, only to be told “that isn’t a

39 Why ‘them’? Doesn’t Carpenter join the women and children? Shakleford does it too – reports, observes, but leaves no record of participation. Is this interesting?
wolf, that’s a Cheyenne” signaling to the Indians behind every rock, “back and forth … at great distances,” of the number of soldiers they saw “and whether it was safe to attack” (n.d.). Pioneer Preacher Reverend Sherlock Bristol, though writing in retrospect, remains unable to unpack this lived confusion. He writes, “we came upon the ruins of the ‘Van Zant’ train, which a year before was here ambushed and captured by the Indians. It was a sad sight—the charred remains of wagons … the skulls of murdered men and women. These were scattered about, the work of these devils of the desert” (146) and in this description I can’t tell where Indian agency ends and the wolves’ begins. The ambiguity of Bristol’s memory and of his prose is particularly fitting here. We know, now, that the Van Zants were ambushed and murdered by white men, dressed as Indians. This is America’s “softness of figure, form, and identity against a backdrop of uncertainty.”

An uncertain trail supported this backdrop. The numerous ‘cut-offs”—a “shorter road across [a] bend” (Frink July 25)—were often not. Margaret Frink explains the vernacular: “a ‘greenhorn cut-off’ is a road which a stranger or new traveler takes believing it to be shorter, but which turns out to be longer than the regular road. There are many such on the plains” (July 25). In the first year of any cutoff, the emigrants sometimes moved backwards and always moved blindly—and experience was no guarantor of the familiar. The very ground shifted. In the event of rain, rumor had it, all crossing Hasting’s Cutoff across the 100-Mile-Desert “would sink, to rise no more. The road runs upon a crust, of no great thickness, covering an ocean of mud, saturated with salt” (Langworthy n.d.). At least one veteran reported that it was as if he’d never walked the trail before. Frink again, as they embarked on Sublette’s Cutoff:

This morning we heard that a gentleman … who had crossed the plains the year previous, was encamped near us with his family. At Mr. Frink’s suggestion I called at their camp to learn, if possible, something of the road ahead of us; for our guide-books did not cover this
part of the route. Mr. Redwine’s reply was that he knew no more about the road than if he had never traveled it; that everything seemed new to him” (June 28).

Veteran or greenhorn, the emigrants traveled blind to what was before them and blind to what was behind them. If, like Henry David Thoreau, their “heads [were]” hands and feet,” their subject identity was in question. They can’t read the beach they’re on. Packers brought the Frink party “the alarming tidings” that cholera had appeared behind them and was racing toward them. Rumor “from the front” brought alarming tidings that “the grass was all burned off” (May 28); Margaret Frink, writing in the shifting verb tenses common to emigrant memoirs, writes “What was to become of us, with nothing for our horses to eat, and we unable to go either forward or backward?” She then affirms time and space as aspects of a single experience—”out traveling” the rumor and the burned grass in a day—before replicating in lived experience Tuan’s abstract definition of the meaning of “to be lost”: “We were journeying, of course, in the dark all the time, and never knew what was in store for us ahead. The elevation of this point is two thousand seven hundred and ninety feet above the Gulf of Mexico.” While she knows precisely where she is in the abstract context of the globe, she has no idea what beach she’s on. Her “front and back, right and left are not geared to external reference points and hence are quiet useless” (Tuan 36).

Turner described the American as standing upright and facing forward, which, in the American measure of things, means to face west. This man, he continues, is the inevitable product of an open frontier and open space, space so vast Thomas Jefferson told the nation upon the Louisiana Purchase that America could realize its promise to the 10th and the 1000th generation and within which an Indian Nation could be established (cited in Meinig 13). Tuan confirms the logic of Turner’s American man with the room and standing to act. “Upright, man is ready to act. Space opens out before him. Freedom implies space; it means having the power and enough
room in which to act.” The emigrants instead report limited standing and space so crowded that feared they would never make their name or their fortune.

Sally Hester lamented that at Independence Rock “the rock is covered with names. With great difficulty I found a place to cut mine” July 2). Indians hid behind every rock and in every wolf’s howl and the sick and dying lay “on the right and on the left, in front and in the rear, and in our midst.” Of greatest concern, vast multitudes of white men crowded the trail; the material fact of the continent would not, they feared, accommodate their desires. In a common description written in a common tone of anxiety, Frink writes:

It was a grand spectacle when we came, for the first time, in view of the vast emigration, slowly winding its way westward over the broad plain. … It seemed to me that I had never seen so many human beings in all my life before. And, when we drew nearer to the vast multitude, and saw them in all manner of vehicles and conveyances, on horseback and on foot … I though, in my excitement, that if one-tenth of these teams and these people got ahead of us, there would be nothing left in California worth picking up. … I was half frantic over the idea that every blade of grass for miles on either side of the road would be eaten off by the hundreds and thousands of horses, mules, and oxen ahead of us. And, worse than all that, there would only be a few barrels of gold left for us when we got to California. (May 20)

Or Eugene Ward:

Many told of trains that were from 10 to 15 miles long being aggregations of several independent trains. They told of 800 ox-teams passing their ranches in a single day. … I myself have stood on the Sioux Lookout with my field glass, and have seen a train as long as I
could definitely distinguish it with my glass, and it would stretch out until it would become so fine that it was impossible to fairly scan it. (n.d.)

An anonymous man from Illinois, described in a journal entry titled “Fear of Room,” as “struck with a panic at seeing the immense tide of emigration flowing westward. His mind had never [illegible] to realize the vast expanse of our Western regions and he felt assured that this multitude would crowd that country to overflowing and to starvation” (qtd. in Smedley). Tuan, I suspect, would like the ambiguity of the title and the incongruity between vast expanse and immense multitudes: our unnamed man witnesses de Certeau’s ghostly palimpsests, the felt expanse outlined against the visible multitudes.

Drawing this same palimpsest, Frank Langworthy also senses the ghost of Napoleon and the antecedents of American empire outlined against the visible: “Along the Platte,” he writes—establishing de Certeau’s “geographical space of visual construction,”

numerous trains beside our own are now constantly in view; the crowd thickens as we proceed, at every step, and will seemingly soon become an almost unbroken procession…

Casting my eye across the river, I beheld an imposing spectacle. I saw an interminable and unbroken line of covered wagons,… as far as sight could reach. We begin to have oc-

Indi
dualism Incarnate

tual proof that an army is on the march to California, covering the road like that of Napo-

leon’s, when moving upon the great road of Kaluga towards Moscow” (n.d.)

Individualism Incarnate

“The first striking feature that meets the eyes of the savage … is the restless moving throng of emi-

igrants, each armed with a knife on one side and a revolver upon the other.” F. Langworthy

In the final step of American Incarnation, whole and self-sufficient, the natural possessor of his own world became the prototype of the American Individualist: eighteenth- and nine-
teenth-century liberalism incarnate. Blessed with an expanse of free land, “the entrepreneurial
pioneers owned the land and also identified with it” (Jehlen 4). In the seminal expression of this imagining, Frederick Jackson Turner writes “the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development” as a nation of “restless, nervous energy” and “dominant individualism.” Analysis of the extent of the pioneers’, Turner’s, and the nation’s misreading (and misleading)— in the context of native land and the Indian Wars, the failure of the Enlarged Homestead Act and of dryland farming, corporate takeover of Timber and Stone Claims and railroad right-of-ways, the refusal of the rain to follow the plow—is at the heart of contemporary American scholarship. Here I focus only on the extent to which disorientation in time and place rendered American pioneers dependent, on the land and on each other.

Dana’s “enterprising people” proved unfailingly aware of their status not as individuals but as a people, dependent and communal. We see this interdependence in the ‘personal’ journals by composite subjects unconcerned with authentic distinctions in voice, vision, authorship, or the subject—those of twin sisters Cecilia Adams and Parthenia Blank, for example, or husband and wife Will and Marianne Boatman. We see this interdependence in the pastiche-as-plagiarism of the trail guides, where Joseph Ware repeats William Clayton’s description of the trail from Fort Laramie to Bear River “without much change even in the wording,” where Ware, Clayton, and all others repeat “The Great Pathfinder” John C. Fremont’s 1842 description of South Pass (“about nineteen miles in width, without any gorge-like appearance”), and where Ware uses Fremont’s words and experience to describe in first-person present-tense the Bear River Valley that he had never seen: “a beautiful valley, and bounded by mountains one above another, rising
suddenly from the plains” (Ware 28). Authenticity, here, relates not to subject voice but to objective ground. And so historians suggest when they forgive Ware’s work as “plagiarism, but from the best handbook” (Caughey in Ware 20 fn 33, my emphasis).

In 1850, emigrant Franklin Langworthy stood at the eastern terminus of the California Trail and described “a restless moving throng of emigrants, each armed with a knife on one side and a revolver upon the other” (n.d.). Margaret Frink, standing at the same point in the same year, wrote, “There were all conceivable kinds of conveyances. There was a cart drawn by two cows, a cart drawn by one ox, and a man on horseback drove along an ox packed with his provisions and blankets. There was a man with a hand cart, another with a wheelbarrow loaded with supplies” (May 20). Turner and those before him have focused on the “each” in Langworthy and Frink’s descriptions rather than the “throng” and on the solitary ambition in their movement rather than the shared apprehension. In their daily diaries, the emigrants instead apprehend the throng and the shared.

Small companies traveled more quickly than large companies; in the rush for gold this speed proved particularly attractive. Yet large companies were much more likely to arrive safely in California or Oregon, and in better time. Those companies that observed the Sabbath were the most successful of all (whether because they were thus assured God’s protection—concept—or because they allowed their animals and themselves a day for rest and recovery—matter—mattered not at all to the outcome). Langworthy explains:

Many men argued, that the smaller the company the better. This doctrine may be correct in reference to those selfish, unreasonable beings, who have not virtue or sense sufficient to enable them to know when they are doing well…. It is necessary to guard the camp and stock every night, and where there are but few to perform this duty, their rest must be
constantly disturbed…. Thus our bond of union, which was to hold us together through the journey, proved to be a rope of sand. We broke in fragments, and other companies shared the same fate. (n.d.)

The emigrants shared stories and memories as well, condensed into the most appropriate representative places. And so, stories of horror, beauty, or weather on one trail were repeated years later on another. Historians struggle to decide if the secondary accounts are authentic—the authentic mark and memory of the individual—or simply etched, inauthentically, in the public’s common sense. In either reading, time is disoriented and autonomy refused (cf. Eco 29).

**Subterfuge and Substratum**

*“The Americans refuse everything explicit and always set up a sort of double meaning. They revel in subterfuge.”* D.H. Lawrence

In discussion of the degree to which excavation of the Almo Massacre reveals the Mountain Meadows Massacre, I quoted D. H. Lawrence’s accusation of American subterfuge and argued that he was mistaken. Lawrence discounts the cognitive and affective value of the buried and unseen and exaggerates the distinction between the metaphoric and the material worlds. Chapter 1 was devoted to the subterfuge: revelation, ascension, history, tribal alliance, new-world space, and nation-place made manifest. Chapters 2 and 3 have each been dedicated to lived experience lying beyond vision yet hidden in narrative that functions not as subterfuge but as allusion to that that cannot be made manifest. Chapter 2 was devoted to the authenticity of the Almo Massacre in the absence of material evidence. Chapter 3 has been devoted to perceptions of time and the land, perceptions long-deemed essential to Americans’ positivist invention of an organic truth to their past experience, current interests, and future intentions. The tension between the sensory real and textual fiction, surface integrity and textual subterfuge lurk beneath
these stories. In each, what appears to be rhetorical construction or imposition in fact evokes some ‘thing’ (language fails here). In each of these stories, metaphor alludes “to that that does not allow itself to be made present … the conceivable which cannot be presented.”

In the following chapter, I turn from the historic experience of America’s defining nascent and migrant subjects to nascent America’s defining literature. In traditional readings of American nation story, the land grounds conceptions of America; it is in these stories that conceptions of the nation took shape and ideas took material form. Setting acts as stage, the medium of metaphor. The Almo Massacre, and the emigrants’ sublime experience all point to a more nuanced reading of the American land not as stage but as mise-en-scene, literally “to put in place,” the totality of things on stage that creates the viewer’s comprehensive sense of character experience and story content. The ambiguity of ‘things’ and the absence of agency in this unattributed common definition is the point not the problem here. Language fails and demands air quotes, the subject that has no name is passively avoided. Thus mise-en-scene, like philosophy’s sublime and psychology’s uncanny, is film criticism’s “grand undefined term” (Henderson 315). The prophecy and place-making of America’s Religion, the uncanny Almo Massacre that simultaneously happened and didn’t happen, the emigrants’ sublime experience all suggest that nineteenth-century Euro-Americans were much more concerned with what they couldn’t see than with what they could. In Chapter 4, I ask what happens when we read Huckleberry Finn, Hawkeye, and Rip Van Winkle as similarly disoriented rather than clear sighted? What happens when we stop assuming that, in the manner of a fated people, they knew the end of their story before it even began? What happens when we consider objects and places in the novels that bear their names not
as metaphors of internal states, or the opposite, as the pragmatic real, but as evidence of the inter-
dependence of the seen and the felt? Below, I ask how “things” and “place” felt to these patri-
archs of American culture.
CHAPTER 4: “READING LITTLE AND WALKING AND THINKING MUCH”

When fictional characters begin migrating from text to text, they have acquired citizenship in the real world and have freed themselves from the story that created them. Umberto Eco

The few remaining chapters which were to complete the narrative [of Arthur Gordon Pym] have been irrecoverably lost. We shall never escape from that wood. Edgar Allan Poe

Summary: Remember that in 1938, Charles Brown, Gentile editor of the Oakley, Idaho Herald, offered a $100 prize to the man or woman who wrote the best essay concerning the Silent City of Rocks’ landscape and/or history. Exhorting his contestants to their most creative efforts, Brown advised “give your subconscious mind a chance to help. Go to sleep at night with the intention of awakening with an outline of an article readymade in your mind.” Brown concluded with the (re)assurance of the faithful that “the story is written on the rocks.” Brown’s (re)assurance had historic precedent. The emigrants who traveled the overland trails over the course of America’s nineteenth-century overland migration also found story in the fantastic shapes of this and other rock cities. In his winning entry, “Massacre at Almo Creek,” Mormon historian Byrd Trego collapsed landscape and history, setting a mise-en-scène where the exaggerated verticality of the rocks and the exaggerated horizontal projection of the overland trail intersected in a violent battle of cultures. Story line mapped to contour line.

Brown’s (re)assurance that the Silent City’s story was written on the rocks raises questions of the form and content of American nation stories. Where is agency assigned in this oneiric imagining of story written on rock? Written by whom? When? How? Most obviously, in its physical manifestation of the fated word, landscape serves here as symbolic object—as palimpsest—

40 Compare this (re)assurance, for example, to the Medieval World’s “vision of nature as an illuminated text replete with the signatures of divinity, glossed at the margins by the insights of faith” (Cosgrove and Daniels, 4-5).
and authorial agency is assigned, past progressive, to God as embodiment of the fated and the organic. Alternatively, the writer/reader assigns landscape symbolic agency; the rocks are “narrativized,” made to speak, to paraphrase Hayden White, and to speak themselves as a story. This is constructed social space, in which the object’ of interest shifts from what Henri Lefebvre calls “things in space”—the written-on rocks—to the” production of space”—to writing on the rocks (36-37). This production, in the context of the invention of the nation, is familiar: a psychosymbolic drama of American desire for escape played out in the physical, material terms of terra incognita.

Brown’s exhortation to dream also vaguely suggests an even more problematic agency. He asks his contestants to invoke the muse. With this invocation, Brown elevates the rock beyond palimpsest (object) and beyond ventriloquism (a secondary constructed subjectivity) to productive agent, constitutive of national experience: to rocks that write. Brown is speaking symbolically and, in his suggestion of the fated and organic, is displacing rather than establishing human or geological agency. However, in this chapter, I take Brown literally and consider when and how land produces the nation’s story.

In Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle,” and James Fenimore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans, the land functions as an objective correlative: a material set of objects, a situation, a chain of events that provide form and pattern to emotion. The objective correlative, however, is not virgin land “as far as the eye could see” but contested space. The dominant emotion is not what Turner described as “strength combined with acuteness” but disorientation and limited perspective. Story line maps to contour line but the idea of America does not map to the land.
Introduction

Edmund Hesserl and his most-famous student Martin Heidegger argue that reality is contingent on experience. We encounter the world phenomenologically. There is no aspect of consciousness that is not mediated by the experience of sensory perception and physical form. “World” comes prior to understanding. Yet, Heidegger would argue, in what is known to philosophers as the hermeneutic turn, experience is not transcendent/a-historical but culturally conditioned and constructed through language. In this context, the “imaginative operations” of metaphor are “gifted” or “donated” from generation to generation. Our experience of the imaginative operations of language is physical and material. Thus, for example, Charles Altieri, reports that he experiences “the inner rhyme and strong pair of monosyllables [of Plath’s “Cut”] as something close to nails; thus Michel de Certeau writes of objects’ and words’ “hollow places in which a past sleeps”; and thus Cooper writes a hawk-eyed scout who expects “at each step, to discover some object he had formerly known” (149). At the moment of the philosophers’ hermeneutic turn, the theorized distinction between the real and the represented collapses and cultural constructions (texts, nations) prove to be multiply inscribed and wondrously layered. We encounter this full(er) range of meaning when we read from the text, looking out, rather than from theory, looking in or—to return to written-in rocks and to the overland immigrants—with an eye to the ground beneath their feet rather than their feet upon the ground.

When we read Twain, Irving, and Cooper from the text looking out, we read stories in which discussion and experience previously closed off by critics within the rigid boundaries of a nation are countered by an opening-out to shared human experiences. These experiences are enacted outside what American-studies scholar Teresa Toulouse calls those ““historicist models that reduce history to the description of the sum total of power relations” (22). Most significantly to
my project, Twain, Irving, and Cooper write about a land that does not easily carry the idea or the image of the nation. We added that easy synergy later. This latter-day imposed reading expresses the force of our desire to find the familiar in sublime and contested space: to find (a) place. It does not represent the land encountered or the land imaginatively described.

According to American scholarship of the past half century, those in a new world void of tradition or history invented an organic truth to their experiences, interests, and intentions. They constructed cultural memory as they constructed a nation. Thus they produced a national space. I want to bring discovery back into this equation, not in opposition to rhetorical construction, and not in its imperial context of the search for and discovery of manifest (visible and waiting) destiny, but in the context of apprehension, in the land, of phenomena structured beneath the surface and beyond the visible. These phenomena reveal a national fiction with deep connections to the land and belie the longstanding misreading of American national literature as largely positivist, carefully bounded, and self-consciously constitutive.

Over the course of centuries, the North American reading public selected a basic repertoire of images that signified “America,” a repertoire that including “a new, immense, unbounded world” upon which America could realize its promise “to the 10th and the 1000th generation” (Jefferson qtd. in Meinig 13). By the nation-building nineteenth-century this repertoire also included the Gothic images of a history-rich, and haunted space and of a space so vast as to disorient and to disturb all sensory perception (and so voices are thrown in The Last of the Mohicans, and mountains redact stories in “Rip Van Winkle,” and “Niggers run south” in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn). The perverse scale of the American West in these imaginative accounts mirrored national anxiety over the haunted immensity of the western territories. The texts examined here prove unable to fit the idea of America to the land—or, at least, to fit any
eschatological, clearly visible, or carefully bounded idea of the nation to the land. We read
resolution and synergy, the constitution of the nation in its canonical literature, only from the
safety of familiar place.

“No Words to Put It In”: Contradiction and Coherence in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

“It was pap, sure enough—and sober too, by the way he laid to his oars. I didn’t lose no time. The
next minute I was a-spinning down stream soft but quick in the shade of the bank. … I got out
amongst the drift-wood and then laid down in the bottom of the canoe and let her float. I laid
there and had a good rest and a smoke out of my pipe, looking away into the sky, not a cloud in it.
The sky looks ever so deep when you lay down on your back in the moonshine; I never knewed it
before. And how far a body can hear on the water such nights!” Mark Twain

In the opening pages of Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), Huckleberry Finn (man or boy? civilized or savage?), his murder feigned, gives Pap sass and slips to
the Mississippi River, rejecting the cramp of clothes, the “regular and decent” ways of Widow
Douglas (71), and the name and law of the father for a life “free and easy” (177); a life “so far
away,” he imagines, “that the old man nor the widow couldn’t ever find me no more” (91, my
emphasis). Twain would later underscore the centrality of this nature/culture binary, re-stated as
the opposition between sensibility and intelligibility. The novel, he explained to critics, “is a bat-
tle between a sound heart and a deformed conscience” (qtd. in Doyno 12). Over the course of the
novel, the opposition fails.

This structure is a familiar one. Of the paired oppositions central to signification, the op-
position between nature and culture or sensibility and intelligibility is “congenital to philosophy”
(Derrida 86). This is “the old dream of symmetry” (Irigaray qtd. in Butler 30), the stuff of fairy
tale in which the way and how of presentation dictates the what (Propp 29). The Mississippi
River, we understand, is to transfer or transport (Gk metaphor) a classic and coherent plot line:
from crisis, through self-recognition, to a reversal of fortune. At the moment he slips from his fa-
ther’s law to the river’s water, in crisis, Huck is literally dead to society. If the story holds, he
will be reborn in nature, his confused status (man or boy? civilized or savage?) resolved. On the river, stripped naked of disguise, he will find not only escape but also his true identity: his true sound heart.

Huck is joined by Miss Watson’s Nigger Jim (mirror on Huck’s deformed conscience, father to his sound heart), on the run from threatened sale to New Orleans. Jim desires freedom and identity (and they are the same thing). Jim has learned what he is: “I’s rich … . I owns myself, en I’s wurth eight hund’d dollars” (110). He does not know who he is (and, significantly, that “who” relates directly to “where”). “Is I me or who is I? Is I heah, or whah is I? Now dat’s what I want to know” (140). If the opposition holds, Jim (free or slave? man or no?) will be reborn in nature, his confused status resolved.

Yet there is no structure in 1850 Missouri, no center. Jim has nowhere to run: neither west to Missouri—and slave law—nor east to Illinois—and the Fugitive Slave Act. Thus doubly bound, he hides on the river centered between them, a river imagined as simultaneously beyond and at the center of slave culture and yet in fact a river running inexorably to the place from which Jim runs. Neither the Mississippi River nor the American Continent will carry Twain’s plot or Jim’s idea of freedom. This soft shape makes no sense in the context of an America where “the decisive factor shaping the founding conceptions of ‘America’ and of ‘the American’ was material rather than conceptual; rather than a set of abstract ideas, the physical fact of the continent” (3). This must, critics have long argued, be a failure of plot.

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41 Under the terms of the federal Fugitive Slave Act (1850) suspected escaped slaves were to be captured and turned in to authorities for deportation back to their owners. A thriving bounty-hunter economy, represented in Adventures by the Duke and the King, developed.
An Incoherent Notion

“It don’t make no difference how plain it is, there ain’t nothing in it” (141).

Critics Victor Doyno and Henry Nash Smith describe (and dismiss) this central contradiction as either a prosaic conceit or a plot crisis, or both. Doyno argues that Jim and Huck’s bypass of the Ohio River is a pragmatic moment allowing Twain to continue the action on “the river [he] knew so well” (11). Smith terms the text’s southward movement “a crisis in the management of plot” (325). “As Huck and Jim float past Cairo,” Smith continues, “Mark Twain’s desire to write a story drawing upon his memories of the lower Mississippi comes into conflict with the idea of telling the story of Jim’s escape from slavery” (326). Smith concludes that in response to this desire, Twain tells two irreconcilable stories: one of nature and freedom and one of culture and slavery.

Thus we inherit a simple tale of “the raft versus the town, the River versus the Shore” (Smith 329), and, briefly, a story of the triumph of sensibility over intelligibility and concept over matter. Huck and Jim’s “new goal,” Smith argues—their goal of objective freedom unlikely—is a subjective state [of freedom], having its empirical basis in the solitude of the friends in their ‘home’ on the ‘big river’ but consisting in a mode of experience rather than an outward condition” (Smith 328). Thus Smith insists on distinguishing between material and metaphoric readings.

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42 The Ohio River flows into the Mississippi at Cairo, Illinois. Jim and Huck’s first and most logical escape route is along the Ohio: “we would sell the raft and get on a steamboat and go way up the Ohio amongst the free States, and then be out of trouble” (137). Twain, in elaborate twists of plot, conspires to keep the pair on the Mississippi.
We inherit a very different text when we refuse this opposition and attend, instead, to phenomena structured beneath the surface and beyond the visible. The very unintelligibility of the choice to run toward the place from which they run—*an incoherent motion*—becomes the point not the crisis of this text, suggesting not the abdication of Huck’s and Jim’s desire but the fullest realization of Twain’s. I argue that Twain does not desire to tell a story of Jim’s escape (latter-day desire, perhaps, but a desire in irreconcilable tension with Twain’s choice of Mississippi River setting) but rather desires to tell the story of the impossibility of Jim's escape in a post-War un-Reconstructed world where the emancipated were not emancipated—*an incoherent notion*.

Incoherent notions represent failures of authenticity—they have no physical integrity, refuse the totalization of vision, and disrupt the subject’s orientation in space. To be disoriented, Tuan writes, is to be lost: “there are the regions to my front and back, to my right and left, but they are not geared to external reference points and hence are quite useless. Front and back regions suddenly feel arbitrary” (36). Or, as Jim says in full refusal of Frederick Jackson Turner’s American acuity, “‘Is I me or who is I? Is I heah, or whah is I?’” Twain’s Mississippi River does not provide a way out of slavery but rather provides a way in. Jim, Huck, Twain’s readers, and Twain himself (stymied downstream from the Ohio River, unsure of how to proceed with his story), have long been lost in this incoherent space.

**An Incoherent Motion**

Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss asks us to suppose “that everything universal in man relates to the natural order and is characterized by spontaneity and that everything subject to a norm is cultural and is both relative and particular” (8). Twain carefully establishes this congeni-
tal opposition in the opening pages of *Adventures*. Tom Sawyer, the Widow Douglas, Miss Watson, and Pap Finn all insist (in their particular ways) on that which is “regular.” The Widow is “regular and decent in all her ways” Huck complains (71). “Now … do you want to do things regular, or don’t you?” Tom Sawyer demands (77). “Don’t scrunch up like that Huckleberry—set up straight—don’t gap and stretch like that,” Miss Watson orders (72). “Don’t gimme no sass,” Pap threatens. Their “regular,” moreover, is both arbitrary—”that is just the way with some people. They get down on a thing when they don’t know nothing about it” (71)—and also constitutive—”a body is always doing what he sees somebody else doing, though there mayn’t be no sense in it” (148).

The river, in contrast, is spontaneous and universalizing; it exists outside of time, space, and social structure. On the river, Huck and Jim are “always naked, day and night” (178), their true identities revealed. Silence reverses chronometry and tachometry: On the river there is “not a sound, anywheres—perfectly still—just like the whole world was asleep” (177). Here, Huck and Jim “caught fish, and talked, and took a swim now and then. … And nothing ever happened to us at all” (124). Here too, in the climactic scene of forgiveness and reconciliation, when Huck fools Jim shamefully and Jim fights back (“straightens” and looks at Huck “steady”), they shake hands and exchange apology: gestures of mutuality/unity/*universal*ity that Twain denies them on shore (cf. 74, 142).43

The mutual gesture is further presented as a triumph of feeling over knowing: of the pertinence to how things feel. Huck, Tom says, “don’t seem to know anything, somehow—perfect

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43 Doyno reports that in draft manuscripts Huck shakes hands with Jim on Jackson’s Island, sealing his promise not to tell Jim’s secret. Twain removes this “gesture of reciprocity,” Doyno concludes, “because the handshake would imply an interpersonal mutuality far too early in the novel” (12).
“Everything was dead quiet, and it looked late, and smelt late. You know what I mean—I don’t have the words to put it in” (98). Early in the novel, Jim wrongly insists that Huck—who he believes to be dead, drowned, and spectral—”go en git in de river again, whah you b’longs” (104). Yet in Huck’s apology to a “nigger,” and in his subsequent blasphemous promise to defy “conscience” and go to Hell to save Jim, we hear Jim’s insistence differently. Huck belongs on the river. Here we see his sound heart. Similarly (universally), Jim too belongs on the river. Here he stands straight and looks steady.

The meaning of the river shifts and this shift relates directly to the moving relationship with the shore. In Huck’s initial imagining of escape and rebirth the river would function as a stage for his freedom and rebirth: “I’d go down the river about fifty mile and camp in one place for good.” As traveled in fact, the moving river serves as a nonlocus or soft form carrying both plot and men. Huck marvels, “Now you feel like you are lying dead still on the water; and if a little glimpse of a snag slips by, you don’t think to yourself how fast you’re going, but you catch your breath and think, my! how that snag’s tearing along” (139). Huck and Jim find themselves in a universe remarkably similar to that of the overland emigrants and of Huck’s future trail west to the territories), a universe of radical uncertainty, with no fixed landmark, and no point of reference by which to measure anything.

This uncertainty, moreover, is inevitable. Twain presents the plot contortions necessary to keep Huck and Jim on the Mississippi as matters of fate not of choice. Against all reason, a riverman declines to estimate the distance to the confluence of the Mississippi and the Ohio. Immediately upon learning that they have floated below the confluence the pair discovers that they have inexplicably lost their canoe—their only mode of upstream transportation: “there weren’t no way
but just to go along down with the raft” (158, my emphasis). As they look for a canoe to borrow the night “suddenly” grows “gray and ruther thick” and bar to their canoe heist. They find no fixed landmark, no point of reference in this river-universe of radical uncertainty. In this thick darkness a steamboat blasts them from the Mississippi and from each other. When they regain the river, their raft miraculously (inevitably) restored, there is no more mention of the Ohio. The novel and the pair resign themselves to their fate and bad fortune and to the Mississippi River (and they are all the same thing): “anybody that don’t believe yet, that it’s foolishness to handle a snake-skin, after all that that snake-skin done for us, will believe it now.” Huck narrates, remembering an earlier invitation to bad luck. Their passage south is both unintelligible and also an inevitable matter of fate, fortune, and the limits of language.

**Soft Forms Against a Backdrop of Uncertainty**

The river no longer tolerates the idea of America. Told by a lying Huck that he has dreamed the natural elements—solid fog, grounding towheads, stiff currents—that separated Huck and the canoe from Jim and the raft, Jim interprets his dream:

the first tow-head stood for a man that would try to do us some good, but the current was another man that would get us away from him. … The lot of tow-heads was troubles we was going to get into with quarrelsome people and all kinds of mean folks, but if we minded our business and didn’t talk back and aggravate them, we would pull through and get out of the fog and into the big clear river which was the free States. (141)

True to Jim’s dream of condensation and displacement, in recognition of his fear (and despite the force of his desire), the river and the alienating current are the same. It is the river that separates them, keeps them from the Ohio, and keeps them moving south simultaneously from and into slavery. The river will not match idea.
The land will also invade the river, from outside, further weakening the opposition that is central to the river’s signification. The river is not “so far away” as Huck had first imagined (91). The sounds Huck first hears “across the water” are the voices of men (99). The tow-heads are of the shore and of the river both: troubles and quarrels interjected in idyllic space, revelation of difference and of the cross-purposes that crowd space. Buck Grangerford, personification of the code of the south and tragic manifestation of Tom Sawyer’s romantic heroes, seeks salvation in the river and pollutes it with his bullet-riddled body instead (175). The Duke and the King contaminate the raft’s naked spontaneous unity with disguise and with what D. H. Lawrence called “subterfuge”; Jim, by the time the contamination is complete, lies tied to the raft “day and night,” a slave disguised as a slave rather than a man revealed—”naked day and night”—as a man (211).

Finally, steamboats ply the river’s waters, introducing industry, time, and incoherence. Huck and Jim, the river-silence broken, hear a steamboat “pounding along” (as chronometer, tachometer, and portent) and taking both organic and constructed form:

She was a big one, and she was coming in a hurry, too, looking like a black cloud with rows of glow-worms around it; but all of a sudden she bulged out, big and scary, with a long row of wide-open furnace doors shining like red-hot teeth, and her monstrous bows and guards hanging right over us. There was a yell at us, and a jingling of bells to stop the engines, a pow-wow of cussing, and whistling of steam—and as Jim went overboard on one side and I on the other, she came smashing straight through the raft. (159)

The center is contaminated, the raft deconstructed, the house divided. This is no nation.

Appropriately, then, the adventures of Nigger Jim and Huckleberry Finn circle back to the beginning. The river takes them back to the place from which they ran. Both men
and nation stumble when they move backward. “Normally, a person feels comfortable and natural only when he steps forward,” Tuan explains, “stepping back feels awkward and one remains apprehensive. … Upright, man is ready to act. Space opens out before him” (35, 128). Jim, who escaped slavery, finds himself chained in Uncle Silas’s shed; he looks backward, from his knees. Huck, who escaped the Widow Douglas’s decent and regular ways and domestic space, finds himself in Aunt Sally’s domestic space subject to her decent and regular ways. Tom Sawyer, who tormented Jim in the coded play of deformed social conscience in the opening pages of the novel (74-75), miraculously, inevitably, reappears and torments Jim again.

Jim’s rescue from Uncle Silas’s shed should be a simple matter of simply, sensibly, opening a door and letting a good man go. Under Tom’s authorship it devolves instead to an “Evasion,” “mysterious and troublesome and good” (273), involving agonizing delay, moats, blood writing, rope ladders, case knives, amputation, rats, spiders, and snakes, and a single flower cultivated of hope and watered with tears. “It don’t make no difference how foolish it is,” Tom tells a reluctant Huck, “it’s the right way—and it’s the regular way. And there ain’t no other way, that ever I heard of, and I’ve read all the books that gives any information about these things” (280-81). As readers, we expect this of Tom. He has not traveled with us along the river, in movement toward self-awareness. It is enslaved Jim’s and deformed Huck’s return to the point of beginning (and Twain’s too, perhaps) that troubles us the most.

Huck, his conscience deformed, is ultimately “satisfied” with Tom’s foolish plan and so “waltz[s] in” (272), his earlier man-to-man apology to Jim for foolishness forgotten and his sound heart hidden. There is also no sign of the free man who had recognized Huck’s foolishness as “trash.” On the river, in the clearing after the fog, Jim “straightens” and looks at Huck “steady” and says: “all you wuz thinkin’ ‘bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim. …
Dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren’s en makes ‘em ashamed” (142). In the shed, in the fog after the clearing, a slave with dirt on his head and the promise of swarming snakes on his mind slumps and says unsteadily “Blest if I can see de pint. But I’ll do it ef I got to. I reck’n I better keep de animals satisfied” (296). The violence of this play in a disoriented and disorienting text should not surprise us. Incomplete or evasive signification is cultural play at its most destructive. Making destiny manifest is violent work.

Separateness and slipperiness are at the heart of Tom’s evasion, etymologically and as a component of narrative structure. To evade is to separate. It is also to slip away. The crux of the evasion is the radical disconnect between Tom’s ideas and Jim’s material status (as a man and as property, both); there is no reciprocal relationship between conceptions (of America) and physical facts (of the continent). Tom’s original plan for Jim’s rescue was “real mysterious, and troublesome, and good” but he was sure that he could find a way “twice as long.” “There ain’t no hurry,” he says as Jim waits desperate with the hurry of the thing (273). The reciprocal relationship that Tom suggests between “troublesome” / “long” / “good” fails Jim completely. The rats, spiders, and snakes, Tom promises Jim (correctly) will “just fairly swarm over you, and have a noble good time.” “Yes, dey will, I reck’n,” Jim answers. “But what kine er time is Jim havin’? Blest if I can see de pint [my emphasis]” (296). Failed reciprocity also defines Tom’s plan for a blood journal—“regular and necessary,” he insists, though Jim, Huck and Jim remind him, “can’t write a lick” (278); in this case, the failed signification is of language rather than history. Meaning proves arbitrary and relational and the slippage between signified and signifier opens up a world of space for misreading.

History slips too. Jim is a prisoner and a slave only because Tom tells him that he is. Knowing that Jim has been freed by Miss Watson, and as Jim sits cussed, cuffed and shackled,
Tom represents that he “set the runaway nigger free” (315). The failure between metaphor/idea and material/land is complete: Tom did not set a runaway nigger free. He captured a free man. He insists that captivity signify freedom and that runaway nigger signify free man. The Reconstructed South, Twain argued, insisted the same.

**Failure of Plot and Place**

Critics argue that Tom Sawyer’s return at the end of the novel and the concurrent “return” to the place and tone of the beginning represents (either or all) a failure of Twain’s moral vision, his ultimate inability to write either Huck’s maturation or Jim’s humanity, and a triumph of comic over somber tone (cf. Fishkin 51, Smith 326). The failure, I argue, is either the Continent’s—it willfully refuses to carry the idea of the nation—or the critics, who are looking for manifest destinies. There is a more somber reading that finds brutal irony not comedy in “The Evasion” and that acknowledges the ironic secondary meaning of evade: to equivocate, to cleverly avoid an unpleasant truth: land that will not carry idea, a destiny that is not manifest (would a runaway nigger run south?). Writing in and of the post-War South, Twain writes a free man who is not free; a running man with nowhere to run; a free and easy river running from through and to slavery; and a bloody civil war between heart and conscience that comes to naught. The river runs to the place from which they run. It cannot be distinguished from the place from which they run. This is the novel’s scandal in the context of America’s construction—and its failure as nation story.
“Dreaming More than All”: the Landscape of Fantasy in Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle”

I am an old traveler. I have read somewhat, heard and seen more, and dreamt more than all … and I am always at a loss to know how much to believe of my own stories. Washington Irving


Fiedler continues, “Ever since [Rip], the typical male protagonist of our fiction, has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat—anywhere to avoid ‘civilization,’ which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility.” I argue that Fiedler constructs this mythical forest and that Rip, in contrast, discovers the ghosts of the distant forest to be as violently disorienting as Dame Van Winkle. Irving constructs a social space that reflects this double bind, and he does so by first invoking and then refusing the methodologies and coherency of the picturesque and of narrativized historical discourse.

“Nations,” Lauren Berlant declares in the opening sentence of her study of the national symbolic, “provoke fantasy.” Benedict Anderson makes a different, though related, point when he argues that nations are imagined. Poised between these two theoretical contexts, the nation acts as both author and object of oneiric thought, produced by and productive of fantasy. Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” illustrates the point, as critics continue to debate whether the story is merely
derivative of the German folktale of Peter Kraus the goatherder, itself derivative of Diogenes La-
erte’s *Epimenides*, or reflective of unique American experience. In one reading, author and
reader look east to the fantastical raw materials of which the new nation is mimetically imagined.
In the other, author and reader look west, to the fantasy that the new nation provokes. My pri-
mary focus, in this essay, is westward to the future and the new nation. Rip is not the German Pe-
ter Kraus who tends the pastoral goats. American Rip travels west with Wolf. The fantastic land-
scape framed in his westward look is incoherent, redolent not of the unity and optimism with
which America’s official stories are so often inscribed but of difference, division, and fracture—
of a barely contained violence and a poorly concealed fear. When he looks east, Rip sees “many
a mile of rich woodland … and at a distance the lordly Hudson” (39). When he looks west, he
sees “a deep mountain glen, wild, lonely, and shagged, filled with fragments … scarcely lighted”
(39).

This spatial incoherence and the narrative incoherence by which it is established contradicts
both the official nation story and also the intent and means of the picturesque aesthetic with
which Irving’s work is often linked. Below, I briefly summarize the historic moments about
which and in which Irving wrote “Rip Van Winkle,” with particular attention to the language of
fate, organic unity, and unbridled potential (a coherence of time, space, and prophecy) that in-
fused the nation’s official rhetoric; turn to an examination of the picturesque and of narrativized

44 See, for example, Henry A. Pochmann, “Irving’s German Sources in The Sketch Book,” Studies in Phi-
lology (1930), Daniel G Hoffman, “Irving’s Use of American Folklore in ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’,” *PMLA*
(1953), and Howard Horowitz, “‘Rip Van Winkle’ and Legendary National Memory,” *Western Humanities Review*
(2004).
discourse as kindred (and kindred-ly paradoxical) means of manipulating images to organic coherence; and then turn to the story that Irving imagines in the rocks of Rip Van Winkle’s haunted hollow.

**Dream Time**

There is no littleness about the Hudson … Here everything is boldly touched. What lucid and penetrant light. No European river is so lordly in its bearing, none flows in such state to the sea.’ The Rhine is lyrical … the Hudson epic. It implies a continent behind. George William Curtis (1816).

The ghosts of Henry Hudson’s men, haunting a deep ravine of the Kaatskill mountains, enchant perpetual-child Rip Van Winkle to his long sleep in approximately 1774. He wakes 20 years later, in his old age, in the wake of the American Revolution and on the eve of the first Congressional election between Alexander Hamilton’s Federalists and Thomas Jefferson’s Democratic Republicans; are you “Federal or Democrat?” a hostile villager demands before denouncing Rip as a Tory (45). At stake in this question, both Federals and Democrats claimed, was the nature of the new nation. The Democrats supported states’ rights, opposed a strong national government, and iterated their support for the people—particularly the yeoman farmer—over the aristocracy: issues predicated on what Democrats identified as the necessary and inevitable westward diffusion of settlement and power. The Democrats failed to wrest control of Congress from the Federalists in 1794, the election that caught Rip by surprise and nearly proved his sedition, and again in 1796 and 1798. In 1800, in what Thomas Jefferson termed “the Revolution of 1800,” the party assumed a substantial Congressional majority and the presidency. Diedrich Knickerbocker, Irving’s historian alter-ego, writes the story “posthumously,” from the vantage

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45 Based on Knickerbocker’s report that Rip slept for 20 years, Wells dates the beginning of the story to post 1773/pre 1776, arguing that “the question as to whether Rip was ‘a Federalist or Democrat’ would have had little meaning before 1793” (Wells 6).
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point of the grave and of a time roughly 20 years beyond Rip’s awakening. Thus Rip wakes halfway between the imagining of the nation and Irving’s provocation of national fantasy, both a European echo and an American provocateur. By the time Irving’s Knickerbocker writes his ghostly narration, the Democrats of the election of Rip’s awakening had held power for over a decade, had secured the Louisiana territory, had fought the War of 1812 to a draw, and had initiated the great national debate over Indian Removal to land west of the Mississippi, a debate that would culminate in the Indian Removal Act of 1827.

As clarified by Irving in postscript, Indians and western settlement (and, in policy and national myth, the two are not meaningfully distinguished) haunt Rip and Rip’s story. “The Kaatsberg, or Catskill Mountains,” Irving establishes, “have always been a region full of fable. The Indians considered them the abode of spirits” (48). Indians and western settlement haunted Henry Hudson and his crew too. The men had come in search of the Northwest Passage, a corridor west to the Pacific settlements. They found instead neither clear passage nor “a virgin land, but … one that was teeming with several million people” (Salisbury 4). Historian Richard White has termed the culture of contact that followed “the middle ground,” place suspended, if uneasily, between European and Indian culture and reflecting aspects of both, place inhabited by a Creole culture that faced, though uneasily, both east and west (Warner “Colonial” 54; see also Richter). This middle ground, the Greek’s frontera where presence ends and presencing begins, is the space of disorientation. “What does it mean to be lost,” Tuan asks and then answers: “Space is still organized in conformity with the sides of my body. There are the regions to my front and back, to my right and left, but they are not geared to external reference points and hence are quite useless. Front and back regions suddenly feel arbitrary” (36).
Irving constructs this disorienting middle ground when he writes a story in which the “little German superstition about the Emperor Frederick der Rothbart” mels with the legend of the Manitou and when he describes a literary valley suspended between Rothbart’s Kypphauser and the Manitou’s Kaatsberg Mountains (48-49). It is because of this middle ground, Michael Warner adds in “What’s Colonial about Colonial America,” that “Anglo-American settlement does not look like colonialism in the usual sense”:

The relationship of settlers and indigenes does not take the visible form of super- and subordinate so much as of center and margin (that is, frontier). … Creole culture was able in general to ignore the context of [native] dispossession. … Even in colonies with an imported slave population, the white Creole’s learned to think of themselves as the locals. They learned to think of the story of their own entrenchment and expansion as the story of a developing local civilization. Indeed, the question of who gets to be local was always the brutally contested question of colonial American history. (“Colonial” 54, my emphasis)

Neal Salisbury extends this learned confusion beyond the Creole population to subsequent interpreters/readers of the historical record and the historic landscape when he argues that “most historians … have yet to recognize the existence of a Native American—as opposed to English or European—background for colonial history” (4). This national learned confusion between colonizer and colonized is exaggerated in the history of the Hudson River Valley where

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46 Sacvan Bercovitch’s study of American exceptionalism and millennial promise is also relevant here, though in the immediate context of New England rather than New Netherland. The Puritans understood themselves to be a chosen people in a chosen land: God and prophecy answered the question of who got to be local and—as in prophecy—this question was brutally contested. The Book of Joshua follows Exodus.
Dutch settlers who followed Henry Hudson and his crew were defeated by the British in the 1664 Second Anglo-Dutch War, where rioting tenant farmers of the late eighteenth century disrupted the prosecution and belied the language of revolution (Humphrey, passim), and where many refused to fight against their Canadian neighbors in the War of 1812.

Learned confusion between nationalism and imperialism, the native and the Native, Warner continues, is reified in a national mythology self-consciously inscribed with “themes by means of which colonial writing could be seen as essentially American: the wilderness, natural man, the social covenant, individualism, the rise of democracy and the self-made man, the revolt against Europe and the sublimity of new beginnings” (52). In a conclusion that calls into sharp question critics’ common description of the “radically different world” to which Rip woke, Warner describes the mistake of describing the “the emergence of nationalism as a sharp break with colonial culture. … National culture began with a moment of sweeping amnesia about colonialism” (“Colonial” 62-63). We can also think here of Irving’s refusal of any “sharp breaks” with colonial culture, refusal manifest in his ironically subtle replacement of George III’s scepter with George Washington’s sword.48

Warner sustains his argument with reference to the imperial century to which Rip woke. The British, in the Treaty of Paris that ended the American Revolution, for example, failed to

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47 See, for example, Wermuth who describes “a dramatic change,” the magnitude of which only Rip is able to measure (2), Wells who describes Rip’s village as “profoundly altered” (6), and Plung who argues for a radical metamorphosis (passim). See also Richardson, who is concerned with the prevalence of ghosts in a “a place of rapid change” (3).

48 The ironically-subtle distinction between King George’s scepter and President Washington’s sword also takes on greater meaning in the context of the later westward war; the Treaty of Ghent specified restoration of the status quo antebellum.
consult their Indian allies. The Americans would do the same in the Treaty of Ghent that ended the War of 1812, enormously confusing the emphatically reiterated distinction between the (American) colonized and the (British) colonizer. Upon conclusion of the War of 1812, cultural geographer Donald Meinig notes, British Canadians living at the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes borderlands north and west of Rip’s sleepy hollow, “could breathe a great sigh of relief that they had not been conquered and forcibly incorporated into the body of their aggressive, volatile, republican neighbor” (46). (I wonder if the common and seemingly obvious equation of aggressive, volatile Dame Van Winkle with Mother England [cf. Sears] or with America’s domestic scene of “sex, marriage, and responsibility” [Fiedler] are not too simple, pulling our attention eastward to moments of self-consciously inscribed national or domestic revolution rather than westward to the War of 1812 and the story of imperial conquest.)

The Anglo-American lie of local rather than interloper standing is revealed most fully at the margins (“that is, frontier”) where the new American came face to face with the native American. Of note to Rip’s social space, the western boundary of New York colony, in 1774 when Rip walked west with his rifle and with Wolf, remained undefined. Of note to Irving’s social space, the western boundary of the United States, in 1819, remained undefined. As Tuan reminds us, Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other” (3).

Tuan also reminds us that in the Hebraic tradition—that is, in the eyes and words of a diasporic people—”space means escape from danger and freedom from constraint. Victory is escape ‘into a broad place’” (58); place is no more than space that meets our desire. With the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the nation, in the stroke of an imperial pen, doubled in size from 900,000 square miles to an estimated 2,000,000 square miles. That the two million was only an estimation
matters. The new nation proved literally unrepresentable: an unmapped unknown basin, historical geographer John Allen jokes, “surrounded by ridges of better knowledge and grading into a vast, flat surface of pure conjecture” (qtd. in Meinig 59). Faced with the sublime—unrepresentable and incomprehensible space crowded with cross purposes—Jefferson imagined instead a neutral and empty place. The Louisiana Purchase, he promised the nation, was “the place.” It represented a “new, immense, unbounded world,” upon which America could realize its promise to the 10th and the 1000th generation and within which an Indian Nation could be established (qtd. in Meinig 13). The new nation, he suggested, would be engendered by a simultaneous movement across space and through time. It would be defined, Chief Justice John Marshall reiterated in 1821, in defense of Indian Removal, by unity: “the United States form, for many, and for most important purposes, a single nation. … In war, we are one people. In making peace, we are one people. … America has chosen to be, in many respects, and to many purposes, a nation” (qtd. in Meinig 399).

And yet, in 1803, the rhetoric that attached the Louisiana Purchase to a nationalist/post-colonial rather than imperial moment had not yet been firmly secured. The Native and Creole inhabitants of French (so recently Spanish) Louisiana woke, like Rip, unwittingly, to a new sovereign. “We ought,” John Quincy Adams argued, “to have applied to the inhabitants of Louisiana to recognize our right to govern them” (qtd. in Meinig 14). Others’ hesitation is more fully the hesitation of the pragmatic imperial than of the democratic national, but it—like Adams’s—also refuses Jefferson’s optimistic vision of beautiful (unified) place rather than sublime contested space. How, the Federalists argued in 1803, could East and West be bound together in a coherent federation? The purchase, in their minds, did not engender the nation so much as endanger it
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(Meinig 4). When, they asked, was too much really too much to manage? Others disdained Jefferson’s optimistic vision of Indian Country, arguing that it was American enterprise that was too much to manage. “You had as well pretend to inhibit the fish from swimming in the sea” as to prevent “the adventurous, roving, and enterprising” Americans from populating [a proposed Indian Country] Senator Samuel White testified (qtd. in Meinig 13]. Regardless, however, of specific concern, the western lands of the Louisiana Purchase represented either or both the means for national coherence and immortality—place for Jefferson’s 10th and 1000th generation, place to map an idea on the land—and also the frightening space of the nation’s division.

As Irving wrote “Rip Van Winkle” this contradictory promise and threat dominated national discourse on overland emigration and western settlement, generating what historian John D. Unruh has called “a carnival of ignorance, unreality and confusion” (30). In 1813, in the wake of—and in a significant misreading of—Lewis and Clark’s exploration of the western territories, the St. Louis Missouri Gazette reported no obstructions (mountainous or savage) worthy of the name between St. Louis and the Columbia River. This optimism fueled an American literature replete with protagonists “greedy for land, annoyed with boundaries, enraged by fences, and ‘intoxicated by space’” (Howe qtd. in Kern 166): what Warner describes as those official themes by which colonial writing could be seen as essentially American. Others countered the Gazette, urging caution. W. J. Snelling, for one, predicted mass starvation in the arid plains, loss of stock to Indian theft, and Indian attack “in retaliation for the pillaging of white hunters” (qtd. in Unruh 29). In Snelling’s frightened imagining, Indians, mountains, desert, and wolves cannot be easily distinguished. The presence of each suggests and creates the limits to Jefferson’s limitless space and limitless optimism. Each complicates the rage and intoxication of America’s protagonist.

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49 Kern argues that “the prime symbol of the Faustian soul of the modern age is limitless space” (139).
These feared physical barriers to freedom and prosperity—mountains, deserts, Indians and wolves—found political counterpart. (Thus, Lefebvre argues, mental constructions overlay physical topography in the construction of social space.) Slavery, Indian Wars, and radically limited enfranchisement stood in tense contradiction to the Declaration of Independence. America’s subaltern would recognize each as America’s imperial inheritance and would, accordingly, see little difference between sword and scepter. Both barred passage to the nation’s interior and to its promise. Critic Nan Goodman summarizes the question simply: “who was in and who was out?” These inside-outside tensions were staged on the western wilderness generally and at the frontier line dividing east and west more specifically. “The revolutionary contest,” Theodore Roosevelt wrote in *The Winning of the West*, had a twofold character. “In the east it was a struggle for independence … in the west, a war of conquest” (qtd. in Richter 190). In the west, America the post-colonial democratic nation would find its most iconographic expression of freedom and Empiric America would find the grounds for territorialization and conquest (cf. Warner “Colonial” 55 and Richter 2).

The cultural pressures placed on western land are antithetical. It is the job of myth, Sacvan Bercovitch argues, to absorb and to reconcile the antithetical (185). It is the job of the pervasive American myth of neutrality, “with its emphasis on the dream of collectivity and unity,” Lauren Berlant adds more specifically, to silence or to veil “fractious political discourse” (33). In this national mythology of neutrality, of which both sleeping Rip Van Winkle and the Silent City’s Almo Massacre are a piece, absorbed tensions seep, revealing their presence in structural instability, porous borders, and a superficial silence broken by the raucous discourse of ghosts. The setting of “Rip Van Winkle” won’t carry nation story.
Both the picturesque—a fantasy of coherence—and narrativized discourse—a fantasy of neutrality—are aesthetic tools for controlling the seep and the structural incoherence that the seep threatens; they provide the means for finding place in unfamiliar space. The picturesque is largely dependent upon spatial organization; its link to the construction of social space proves obvious. The connection between narrativized discourse—concerned, ostensibly, with temporal organization—and the construction of social space is less immediately obvious but equally significant to any assessment of the connection between story and landscape. The coherent landscapes of national mythology are constructed through the inscription, or layering, of narrativized discourse, with its proper beginning, peripatetic middle, and inevitable end (seen in the beginning), on land. Inevitable ends demand inevitable setting.

The Picturesque

The picturesque invites us to consider that nothing can be, other than what is … [and] frequently renders … ‘the principle of change’ as an immutable law. John Lucas.

Most tangibly, the American rectangular land survey imposed “order upon the land.” First legislated with the Ordinances of 1785, the cadastral system organized the public domain, including previously unsurveyed western New York State, into six-by-six mile townships divided into thirty-six sections of one square mile each. Roads and fences followed section lines and etched a precise geometric order upon the organic contours of the land. “Most Americans and Canadians,” cultural geographer Hildegard Binder Johnson writes, “accept the survey system that so strongly affects their lives and perception of the landscape in the same way that they accept a week of seven days … or an alphabet of twenty-six letters—as natural, inevitable, or in some inscrutable
way, divinely ordained” (i). The survey stands as metaphor for the picturesque and for narrativized discourse, not only in its method but in the paradox of its perception.

In the introduction to the *Sketch-Book*, of which “Rip Van Winkle” is a (displaced) piece, Irving’s wandering alter-ego Geoffrey Crayon writes, “I longed to wander over the scenes of renowned achievement—to tread, as it were, in the footsteps of antiquity—to loiter about the ruined castle—to meditate on the falling tower—to escape, in short, from the common-place realities of the present, and lose myself among the shadowy grandeurs of the past” (12). Crayon’s “Author’s Account” and the European sketches that follow are closely aligned with the picturesque aesthetic tradition of controlled wildness and controlled wandering. In fact, Susan Manning argues, the *Sketch-Book* stands as a “literary analogue” of the artistic tradition in which the prose of Geoffrey Crayon becomes itself a sort of ‘Claude glass’” (xvii-xviii).

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50 This language parallels Fletcher and Stevenson’s description of the Great Chain of Being and of the body politic in early modern England: “While these concepts prevailed, an ideal of harmony, of society as a living organism in which each man had an allotted role, underpinned the complex reality of a system of hierarchical relationships” (2). The cadastral survey is inherently hierarchical (Meridian, Township, Range, Section, Acre) and related, through the Homestead Act allotments, to allocation of both land and social standing. Through this survey, the government allots, “fixes the locality of, localizes” (OED allocation; allocate).

51 I am speaking of the picturesque as a unified genre, without major distinction between its various aesthetic forms (as produced by “the tourist, the landscape gardener, the painter, the aesthetic tourist, the literary writer” (Copley and Garside 2-3). This generic representation, Stephen Copley and Peter Garside argue, falls apart when the more-subtle distinctions between genres are examined. I am concerned, here, not with the subtle distinctions but with the defining paradox that broadly links genres: the insistence upon the natural in the face of the active manipulation of the natural through design.
The “Claude glass” or mirror central to the popular nineteenth-century aesthetic movement produced “landscape” from land. The viewer turned his or her back to the real and looked through the tinted mirror, rosily; one literally looked east, for example, to see a western prospect. (The mediation of the mirror, in effect, marks the shift from first-person to third-person point-of-view.) Thus the Claude glass circumscribed panoramic images of wildness and took them out of true focus and out of true color, exaggerating light and shadow and simultaneously both smoothing and disorienting the image. Thus artists and tour guides accomplished the writers’ “feat of making inanimate topography into historical agents in their own right” (Schama, 13): the nation constructed rather than discovered.

The picturesque tour had two modes, both manipulated. Proponents of the new aesthetic guided tourists along established itineraries of pre-selected viewpoints deemed best able to provide “the desired effect” (Manning xvii). Alternately, the “picturesque traveler” set out in pursuit of the object of desire—”new scenes continually opening and arising to his view”—all the while “suppose[ing] the country to have been unexplored” (Gilpin qtd. in Whale 176, my emphasis). Explorer and naturalist Baron Alexander von Humboldt explains: “the spectator, enclosed as it were within a magical circle, and wholly removed from all the disturbing influences of reality, may the more easily fancy that he is actually surrounded by a foreign scene” (qtd. in Sears 51, my emphasis). This was an aesthetic of controlled wildness and controlled wandering. Significantly, the means of control—boundaries (circumscribing wildness) and fancy (circumscribing reality)—work only when they’re removed from the viewshed/experience. The Claude glass disguises limits. The picturesque wanderer supposes and pretends.
In picturesque works, the artist’s and viewers’ sight falls most often on ruins, the rustic, or panoramic natural viewsheds. In the first, Vivien Jones notes, “history and change [are] reduced to an aesthetic sensation” (134). In the second, Jeffrey N. Cox argues, the picturesque beggar is portrayed as a fixed, inevitable part of the social scene. In the third, “confinement of the picturesque eye” by points of geographic termination or closure circumvents “overwhelming” wide-angle views (Gilpin qtd. in Kutchen 398). In each instance, the object of inquiry is distanced and abstracted and thereby fixed and immobilized. This aesthetic movement of distance and stasis is paradoxical; it both fixes the scene in the past (where Crayon, for example, chooses to wander) and suggests what John Lucas calls “the immutable law of change,” effectively fixing the scene, simultaneously, in the foreseen future. “Ruins/poverty happened/happen/will always happen.” The effective removal of human agency in this pathos of complacency (Lucas 83) creates the emotional distance that is the aesthetic’s hallmark. This simultaneous suggestion of fixity and change suggests what Berlant (in the context of the national symbolic, not of the picturesque) will call the constructed status/state of the “always already” (8).

With this manipulation, the aesthetic of the picturesque, its practitioners theorized, navigated the difference between what Edmund Burke termed the beautiful—”smooth,” small, “inducing static calm”—and the sublime—awesome, vast, unrepresentable, compelling “the terror of disorientation”—and arrived at a middle ground of “thrilling delight, or stirring repose” (qtd. in Kutchen 397). In navigating the distance between the sublime and the beautiful, the literary picturesque often settles on images of the nation, where wandering is circumscribed by national boundaries and where (imagined) shared origins and history define the wanderer’s point of demarcation and her point of return. Thus “national self-consciousness and literary-Picturesque point of view developed hand in hand, Manning notes (xviii; cf. Copley and Garside 7), and thus
we find it in narrative mode in the National Tale (Trumpener, passim). The aesthetic would have enormous appeal in the “carnival of confusion” of nineteenth-century Anglo-America. This America was new and newly unrepresentably vast, contemplating an unprecedented mobility and a rapid maturation, and dependent upon the manipulated representation of the continent as objective, neutral, and empty, undisturbed by the disturbing influences of Native presence. A nation “enclosed, as it were, within a magical circle.”

Picturesque practitioner Geoffrey Crayon learns the story of Rip Van Winkle from Historian Diedrich Knickerbocker. Aesthetics of space and time merge, though uneasily, in this twice-told tale. This pairing begins to suggest the means by which story is written on rock.

**Narrativized Discourse**

These mighty pyramids / of stone / That wedge-like pierce the desert airs, / When nearer seen and better known / Are but gigantic flights of stairs. Longfellow, “The Ladder of Saint Augustine” (1858)

At first blush, the picturesque and historical discourse have little in common. The first fixes a moment in time, constructing the organic always-already. The second imposes the chronological order of antecedent and consequent, or causal effect. Historical discourse, ostensibly, doesn’t take the reader out of time but rather moves the reader through time. Yet, historian Hayden White argues, the intent of narrativized historical discourse is to suggest the organic inevitability of an end or conclusion foreseen in the beginning. This is not a description of anteriority of time and progress (causation) but of the preordained and prefigured. Thus, not surprisingly, our most dramatic examples of the always-already come from sacred text. Erich Auerbach writes, for example, that “if an occurrence like the sacrifice of Isaac is interpreted as prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ, so that in the former the latter is as it were announced and promised and the latter 'fulfills' the former, then a connection is established between two events which are linked neither tempo-
rally nor causally” (qtd. in Anderson 24, my emphasis). Nations, Benedict Anderson adds, provide a secular alternative, each generation inevitably foreshadowing the next in an always-already narrative expression of the nation’s continuity through time. Jefferson promised national immortality, and he promised it in narrative form, when he promised that the vast expanse of the western territories offered space for the 10th to the 1000th generation and he mapped this eternal national narrative to space. In these two examples, one sacred, one secular, we see more clearly than in the fixed image of the picturesque that the always-already is not only time-less but time-full. It incorporates past, present, and future. Narrativized historical discourse does the same.

The writer of narrativized historical discourse, White argues, veils his/her subjective presence in order to suggest the coherence and organic inevitability of the content, place, and pace of the history thus narrated. In this process, word becomes image and storyline conforms to contour line: concepts find their material ground. The writer 1. elides the narrator—”no one speaks” (first-person subjective perception is refracted through third-person objective narration, as through a Claude glass); 2. insists upon the clear distinction between the real and the imaginary (a narrative form of *chiaroscuro*); 3. establishes the symmetrical form of Manichean content; 4. writes central stock subjects who provide culturally-specific diacritical markers for ranking significance and value (a topographic image of a fixed space/place); and 5. confines his/her narrative to a carefully circumscribed shape of well-marked beginning, peripatetic middle, and resolute end.

The impact of this dream-like move from subject-narrator to object-narrator is a move not only toward objectivity but also toward inevitability. Narrativized discourse assumes the objective organic *real*, a real that is waiting to be *found/discovered* as it simultaneously and paradoxically *constructs* the subjective manipulated fantasy. In the absence of a subjective narrator, in the
objectivity of neutralized space, White argues, “the world speaks and speaks itself as a story” (4). Narrativized discourse is a voice of form and coherence, emanating from landscape, “more characteristic of oneiric than of waking thought” (ix).

American images of narrative written on the land appear to suggest radical movement and the sublime (wilderness and the self-made man promise “the sublimity of new beginnings” Warner writes) and therefore to defy the conventions of the picturesque. Yet Turner, for example (and Longfellow, too, in his eschatological verse), refused human/national agency in this migration: “the buffalo trail became the Indian trail, and this became the trader's ‘trace’; the trails widened into roads, and the roads into turnpikes, and these in turn were transformed into railroads.”

In each instance, movement that appears to be marked by causal anteriority is in fact presented as natural, prefigured in the form of the land. Story, quoting White quoting Benveniste, “appear[s] on the horizon of the story” (3). This prefiguring derives its power, its status as the preordained, from the parallels perceived between organic setting and organic story. In their most perfect mirroring, setting and narrative form cannot be distinguished and landscape is read as story. Through the techniques of the picturesque and narrativized discourse, material factors of a place, physical facts of a continent, can be shaped to conceptions of a place and a people. This isn’t what we found in The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn, this isn’t what we’ll find in The Last of the Mohicans, and it isn’t what we find in “Rip Van Winkle.”

There is, White insists, a less picturesque narrative alternative. This alternative discourse refuses the causal determinacy of a well-marked beginning, middle, and end phase; insists upon the explicit or implicit “I” who maintains the subjectivity of the discourse, and “openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it” rather than “feign[ing] to make the world
speak itself and speak itself as a story” (2-3). We see this narrated rather than narrativized discourse in the annal form that, in the infinite open-ended present, provides mere sequence, including blank years in which “nothing happened,” years of note (and years noted) only for their representation of a vertical chronological time that refuses the causality of horizontal linear representation. Similarly, the Chronicle, White continues, “aspires to narrativity, but typically fails to achieve it; … is marked by a failure to achieve narrative closure; … breaks off in medias res, in the chronicler’s own present; leaves things unresolved or unresolved in a storylike way” and ends in termination rather than conclusion (5). (“One could make a pretty good case,” White concludes, in what also stands as an indirect refutation of fancy and reflection in the picturesque, “that both the annal and the chronicle are paradigms of ways that reality offers itself to perception” [25].)

This, Berlant might add, is cultural work that does not tend “toward the national horizon” (8)—that does not, in fact, tend at all. Rip Van Winkle, the wandering loiterer who escapes from the common-place realities of the present and loses himself in the shadows of the past, reminds us of Geoffrey Crayon only briefly. Irving’s refusal (or failure) of coherence is most evident in his disruption of time—a lazy loitering refusal to tend to/toward anything at all. He’s strange, his antiquity out of order, and his experience unfathomable. There is nothing inevitable about Rip, or his story, or the social space in which the story is set. Crayon asks, in effect, “Who was I?” while Rip asks, disoriented, “Who am I?” and we hear the question’s twin: “Where am I?” The twined questions scare him and evoke the terror of the sublime.52

52 Note, for example, the difference between Crèvecoeur’s famous query, “who is this American, this new man?” and Rip’s. The first is picturesque, a distanced and abstracted panoramic (generic) appraisal. The second is immediate and personal—beautiful in its focus on the self, sublime in the magnitude of its national ramifications.
“Does nobody know poor Rip Van Winkle?” Washington Irving

Literary critic Thomas Wermuth describes Rip Van Winkle’s eighteenth century Hudson River Valley as “a simple, uncomplicated society dominated by small self-sufficient farms, hearty yeoman, and isolated, but close-knit communities” (Wermuth 2). Fiedler represents Rip as Huckleberry Finn’s true father, gun in hand, taking the first significant step west to the territories and freedom. Wermuth, Wells, and Plung all describe Rip’s return to a “profoundly changed” “radically different” world. Plung describes the predictable course of the bildungsroman, noting both Rip’s maturation from perpetual child to village sage and this maturation’s symbolic connection to the new nation. There’s a precise order to these mis-taken readings, order dependent for its stability on the exaggerated binary of revolutionary nationalists and domestic colonizers, on the exaggerated difference between the virgin wilderness and the domestic sphere, and on the refusal to look beyond Humboldt’s picturesque “magical circle” of uninhabited land to the “more disturbing reality” of an inhabited and haunted space.

Irving asks, in the opening paragraphs of “Rip Van Winkle,” for such an ordered interpretation. Historian Knickerbocker writes the tale (not only in third-person but also posthumously, in a lovely exaggerated representation of the elided narrator) and so, Geoffrey Crayon assures us, we inherit a tale of “scrupulous accuracy” and “unquestionable authority” (33). Crayon “finds” (33) the tale among Knickerbocker’s papers, who in turn found the story in the old burghers and their wives, who in turn (we learn at the tale’s end) breathed air thick with Indian fable of the animated Kaatskill mountains, controlled by the “old squaw spirit” of the Manitou (48-9). This complicated defense of provenance reminds me of the etymology of “invention” (“to come into,’ ‘to find’”), its connotations of rhetorical maneuvers (“‘re-search’”), and its connotations of myth
making ("‘to find something lost,’ ‘to lie,’ ‘to chance upon’") (Piedra 38). In the imagery of levels of archaeological/artifactual discovery Irving evokes Crayon’s encounter with a truth buried in and organic to animated American soil and thus, as Crayon again reassures us in conclusion, a truth “beyond the possibility of doubt” (48). In true picturesque tradition, young Rip is a rustic (“a simple, good-natured fellow [34]), his home a ruin (“sadly time-worn and weather-beaten” [34]), and his valley a picturesque panorama, “framed” by the lordly Hudson to the east and the Kaatskill mountains to the west. Moreover, these mountains can be read—they are “regarded by all the good wives, far and near, as perfect barometers”—and they can write and redact: “when the weather is fair and settled, they are clothed in blue and purple, and print their bold outlines on the clear evening sky; but sometimes, when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a hood of gray vapors about their summits” (34, my emphasis). The landscape tells itself as a story.

When Rip looks to the east (his gaze displaced, as through a Claude glass, through Peter Kraus the goatherder, Epimenides, and the Manitou), he sees a circumscribed picturesque landscape. When we look east, metaphorically, to history rather than to space, we see Rip’s break with the colonial past, we see empire in Dame Van Winkle and in George III’s scepter, and a new nation in Judith’s seeming benevolence and in George Washington’s seemly sword. Rip moves west with his dog “Wolf,” representative of the undomesticated wild, evocative of the Indian spirits that fill the land, and as far from Peter Kraus’s German goats as one can imagine. He travels with rifle in hand to an unfrequented land of undefined limits in an explicit escape from his own and from Wolf’s domestic “persecution” (39). Thus Irving feigns western space appropriate to American nationalism. Thus Fiedler and others see the story tending toward the national cultural horizon.
Yet when Rip looks west, moves west, he does not move in the “magical circle” of uninhabited space but in a disturbing reality. From the highpoint of the ridge, Rip looked down “into a deep mountain glen, wild, lonely, and shagged, the bottom filled with fragments from the impending cliffs, and scarcely lighted by the reflected rays of the setting sun” (38). In this ostensibly empty “lonely and unfrequented place,” Rip sees the “strange figure” of a ghost (39). This strange rustic figure is not the “fixed, inevitable part of the social scene” created by the aesthetic of picturesque rustic portraiture and the landscape is neither distanced nor softened but altogether too close and too awesome. In fact, “there was something strange and incomprehensible about the unknown, that inspired awe and checked familiarity,” Irving writes (39). Rip can’t move West and he doesn’t want to go home. And so he goes to sleep. Irving writes Warner’s “long silence and sweeping amnesia.”

Time stops for Rip Van Winkle in this incoherent space, and not in the time-full “always-already” eternal tense of the national symbolic. It just stops, and thus Irving complicates the official language and imagery of western movement toward preordained unity. Narrativized historical discourse, producing the end known in the beginning/destiny made manifest, White argues, is more characteristic of oneiric than of waking thought. Significantly, Irving wastes no time on the oneiric imaginings made possible by Rip’s long sleep. Rip has no visions of the battles or migrations carried on overhead. His perspective and prospect, in fact, don’t change at all. “He fell into a deep sleep,” Irving writes, and then without pause or space for dream: “On waking, he

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53 Major landforms in the United States, including the Appalachian Rangelands of which the Catskills are a part, run north-south. Rip was looking west to the territories, called the “Big Country” in the contemporary vernacular and labeled the “Western Territory” in the Ordinance of 1785 (Johnson7).
found himself on the green knoll whence he had first seen the old man of the glen” (40). The failure to dream mirrors the problems inherent to America’s expanse of seemingly infinite unmapped space. Space is freedom, Tuan cautions, only if one has “the power the power and enough room in which to act… Fundamental is the ability to transcend the present condition, and this transcendence is most simply manifest as the elementary power to move” (53). Rip doesn’t have the power to move—there are ghosts and savages before him, a shrew behind him, and his limbs grow heavy. (I think here too of overland immigrant Mary Boatman, standing on the banks of the Missouri River, facing west, “savages behind and savages before.”) The space that Irving imagines fails to conform to the idea of the nation. It’s only in retrospect, seeking place, that we’ve made it conform, imagined Rip the father of the nation and failed to look clearly at the heir.

Irving foreshadows the dislocation of Rip’s long sleep in the imagery of young Rip and the village men gathered at the village inn, “telling endless sleepy stories about nothing” and sagely “deliberat[ing] upon public events some months after they had taken place” (37). The men’s stories, and the son’s character, in essence, like the annal, defy causal relationships and suggest the termination rather than conclusion endemic to the chronicle. When Rip wakes, he “resumes his old habits” and “takes his place once more on the bench at the inn door”; the stories, we understand, continue without inevitable conclusion (or conclusion at all). Irving stages the men’s unwitting refusal of narrativized discourse under the portrait, first, of His Majesty King George III and, second, under the portrait of George Washington. We miss the ironic refusal of significant change only if we fail to recognize the close symbolic connection that Irving draws between setting (social space) and discourse. The inn sign functions as a mise-en-scène for the static narrative form. Despite Rip’s exaggerated sense of his own displacement (“Everything’s
changed and I’m changed! … Young Rip Van Winkle once—old Rip Van Winkle now” [45-6]),

there is no national movement here, no re-volution, no re-production.54

In his insistence on a fearful wilderness inhabited by unlikely spirits, Irving effectively challenges the early nineteenth-century construction of the western territories as empty, silent, and waiting the foretold future. He similarly refuses the narrative forms by which official national discourse assigned coherence and form to this empty space.

**James Fenimore Cooper’s “Scale of Looking”: Looking Beyond and Beneath the Nation**

“They tooke a path that steepe upright
Rose darke and full of foggye mist. And now they were within
A keening of the upper earth, when Orphye did begin
To dowt him lest shee followed not, and through an eager love
Desyrous for to see her he his eyes did backward move.
Immediately shee slipped backe. He retching out his hands,
Desyrous to bee caught and for to ketch her grasping stands.
But nothing save the slippery aire (unhappy man) he caught.
…Her last farewell shee spake so soft, that scarce he heard the sound,
And then revolted to the place in which he had her found.” Ovid,

*Metamorphoses*

The Mohicans were the possessors of the country first occupied by the Europeans in this portion of the continent. They were, consequently, the first dispossessed; and the seemingly inevitable fate of all these people who disappear before the advances… of civilization, as the verdure of their native forests falls before the nipping frost, is represented as having already befallen them.” James Fenimore Cooper,

“Author’s Introduction,” *The Last of the Mohicans*

I am troubled by two central rhetorical moments in James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of The Mohicans* (1826): Hawk-eye’s strange, excessive, repetitive insistence that he is a man

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54 Michael Warner glosses a similar moment in Old Rip’s inability to tell himself apart from the “precise counterpart” (Irving 45) of his son. In this uncanny narcissistic confusion, Warner writes, Irving reveals his own anxiety over his failure of progeny: “the uncanniness of the result suggests that it isn't exactly reproduction that people want from what is called reproduction; what they want is a narrative to organize a life course up to and beyond mortality” (Warner “Posterity” 787).
without a cross of blood, an abstract theoretical construction that refuses and disdains the multiple rich crosses of his material experience (unhappy man); and Cooper’s equally strange insistence that the disappearance of the Amerindians is not simply “inevitable”—a stabilizing construction—but “seemingly inevitable”—a more-slippery construction evoking disorientation, the anxious uncertainty of eye witness, and the anxious indeterminacy of feeling. Cooper’s disorientation reminds me of the overland immigrants’ disoriented refrain—”seems to be …. but is in fact”—and of Wai Chee Dimock’s conviction that the boundaries of American literature exceed the tidy boundaries of the nation. Cooper, “the American [Walter] Scott” and his wish-fulfilling alter-ego Hawk-eye, wander, captives-in-the-guise of rescuers, between multiple and contradictory selves (crossed, uncrossed; “‘washed his face and was a white man) and multiple and contradictory futures (inevitable or only seemingly inevitable?). Cooper sets *The Last of the Mohicans* in a “dark and foggy forest … that appears to swallow up the living mass” (13), where moccasins leave no trace, and where knowledge hides. What idea does *this* land carry?

Hawk-eye’s wandering (self) search is historically grounded, both in the self-conscious post-colonial hyper-national moment from which Cooper wrote and also in a hemispheric history replete with those scenes of arrival and receipt that create the creole—the nascent American—on both sides of the encounter. We must, critic Jose Piedra insists, recognize the indigenous people, the European explorers, and their progeny as similarly double-facing and multiply inscribed; we must imagine both a post-Columbian creolized native and a post-Columbian

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55 See also Walter Mignolo re: “the colonial difference”—the place of confrontation between multiple histories, multiple ways of knowing, and that space “where the restitution of subaltern knowledge”—the restitution of the subaltern self—“takes place” (ix).

56 “Creole” is from the Latin creāre, “to create.”
Columbus, their creole status determined not by origins (the stabilizing binaries of race and of place, “here” not “there”) but by the mere fact of their encounter. Hawk-eye thus conceived is not a fixed stable national subject (a man without a cross), no matter how badly he might wish he were, but looks both forward and backwards, Janus-like, colonized and colonizing.

This brings me to Eurydice and her scene of arrival at the upper earth. At the moment of arrival, her identity, like the migrant nascent nineteenth-century Americans at the heart of this project, is determined by multitudes: the man who would love her, the gods who would control her, the reader who would reclaim her. She stands fixed, her identity fully composed by her inbetweenness, absence constituting presence.57

Cooper’s nineteenth-century readers, Orpheus-like, are intimately implicated in Hawk-eye’s wandering (self)search and Cooper’s tale of inevitable loss. Cooper invokes the reader’s memory throughout Mohicans. This invocation calls attention most simply to time’s seemingly inevitable linear passage and the Indians’ seemingly inevitable disappearance; what can be seen in memory, Michel de Certeau tells us, designates what is no longer there (108). This invocation also extends Hawk-eye’s creole experience of confusion, loss, and multiple selves to Cooper’s contemporary moment. In 1826, as Cooper’s reader read the Indians’ presence/read them present, the nascent United States Congress debated Indian Removal. Orpheus’s look, we remember, both fixed Eurydice in memory, in presence, and banished her forever. Cooper and his reader’s look similarly apprehends and banishes. We note how confused subject, object, and referent become here. Eurydice is both subject and object of “the loss of Eurydice.” Her loss is Orpheus’s loss.

57 Per Homi Bhabha. Note that in Bhabha’s conceptualization there’s no between in inbetween; absence constitutes presence.
Chingachgook’s looming aloneness is also Hawkeye’s looming loneliness. All concerned are both coming into being and coming into loss.58

Of Eurydice, Judith Butler continues, “she is coming toward us, she is fading away from us, and both are true at once, and there is no resolution of the one movement into the other” (viii, my emphasis). I read Orpheus and Eurydice’s dark and foggy swallowing path in Cooper’s dark and foggy forest “that appears to swallow up the living mass” (13). I read Orpheus and Eurydice’s love in Hawk-eye and Chingachgook’s love and in this reader’s love for Uncas. I see Orpheus’s complicity (loving, but still…) in his beloved’s erasure in Hawk-eye’s complicity in his beloved’s erasure. Yet, might Cooper’s elegiac lament have instead been Butler’s imagined resolution? An imagining of, or a grasping for, a moment in American experience in which Orpheus’s loss might have been averted? A way that Eurydice’s presence rather than her absence might have been fixed by a gaze differently offered?

Cooper’s (and his critics’) closing-off of discussion and experience within the rigid boundaries of the inevitable nation are countered by an opening-out to those human experiences outside the “imaginary totalizations of the eye” (de Certeau). This reading does not obviate the novel’s power inequities, or its bloody resolution. It merely calls attention to Cooper’s and to Hawk-eye’s profound awareness of the coming-into-loss that attends this coming-into-being. It suggests only that the creole experience was less ordered, less certain, and less-dictated by either blood or geographic origin than traditional readings of Cooper assert. Orpheus “retching out his hands,/ … / But nothing save the slippery aire (unhappy man) he caught” and he is left alone. Over the grave of his son, Chingachgook “grasped the hand that, in the warmth of feeling, the

58 The binaries or origin and of race by which nation is organized slip dramatically in the face of this shared tragedy. This seems really central but I don’t know what to do with it at the moment.
scout had stretched across the fresh earth” and he “was not alone” (429). At this moment, one imagines Cooper’s troubling “seemingly” not only as (seen) proof of inevitability but also as (felt) refusal of that inevitability.

This reading demands that I privilege Hawk-eye’s warmth of feeling and lived experience of communion with the strange other over his oft-voiced cold refusal of that communion; demands that I remember the “pertinence and relevance of how things feel” (New 12). What follows is thus a phenomenological reading of a battle, fought in a space replete with the images of loss and subject incoherence: falling and wandering, absent stable objects or reference points. In this reading, we find only scattered and incoherent pieces of the stable American allegory with which Cooper is so often credited and little evidence that Hawk-eye is a stable man without a cross. We find, instead, pervasive crossings (and pervasive weirdness) that call to mind Dimock’s open-ended national literature, “open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures” (3).

**Looking Beyond the Nation**

As I approach *The Last of the Mohicans*, I imagine myself peering behind critics’ too-common anachronistic reading of an always-already nation and national narrative to a text opened up and cleared out of presumptions of genre and nationalistic intent. Hawk-eye’s hawk-eye presumes imaginary totalizations. Cooper, read as the American Scott, devoted to historical fiction and the dialectical construction of the nation, presumably does the same. How might critical consideration of poetic and mythic experience of space, beyond the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, complicate our reading? It is a strange nation story that does not direct us,
via a centered subject, to a national center structured around an organizing principle (race, for example, and the uncrossed). Cooper, I will argue, attempts to tell this centering story but it slips away from him. He tells of wandering but not of return, of subjects adrift.

In her recent overview of the methods and prescient questions of hemispheric American studies, Teresa Toulouse notes that “many historians concerned with the ‘flowering’ of national(ist) literatures or cultures in the ‘Western’ hemisphere have often used the colonial period only as the ‘seed-time’ of their overarching narratives of national development” (10). *Mohicans* holds a complicated but not irrelevant place in this analysis. It was written *in* the early flowering of American national development (and/or nationalist imagining), *of* the colonial period. The temptation, for critics and historians alike, has been to read the novel as the nation’s birth story, the full flowering of the colonial “seed-time.”

Cleaneth Brooks, R.W.B. Lewis, and Robert Penn Warren, for example, in their seminal 1973 anthology of American Literature *The Makers and the Making*, write that “in a sense, Cooper is the founder of American literature … the first to create a complex and enduring myth of American life” (283). Brooks et al are not alone in this teleological view. Frederick Jackson Turner appropriates Cooper to his metahistory of the (North) Americans’ unique history and identity: “Copper’s preoccupation with the frontier caused him to become ‘the distinctive painter of its life’ and a place [sic] in which to find ‘a new American scene and new native material’” (Turner qtd. in Parmaul 9). Leslie Fiedler follows suit, describing Hawk-eye as “the prototype of all pioneers, trappers, cowboys, and other innocently destructive children of nature, which is the say, of the Westerner” (*Love and Death* 189). In their *O Brave New World* anthology, Fiedler and Arthur Zeiger include *Mohicans* among (North) America’s “Sentimental Heritage,” a section devoted to the genre of “specious happy endings,” in which our great myths … pretend still to be
chronicle and history” (81). The happy synthesis of Magua dead and Duncan and Alice married and procreative, marking the ascension of the uncrossed American man, apparently trumps Chingachgook and Hawk-eye’s heartbreak and Cora’s and Uncas’s sad racially marked deaths.

The historical novel is presented as narrativized discourse—thus myth presents itself as chronicle and history—or as the rhetorical form of the picturesque. This was an aesthetic of controlled wildness and controlled wandering: of wandering and return. Of most relevance to The Last of the Mohicans, the literary picturesque often settles on images of the nation, where wandering is circumscribed by national boundaries and where (imagined) shared origins and history define the wanderer’s point of demarcation and her point of return. The aesthetic would have enormous appeal in the “carnival of confusion” of early nineteenth-century Anglo-America.

According to this rubric, the picturesque landscapes and portraiture and the Manichean self-consciously-historical construction in The Last of the Mohicans should move us toward synthesis and social coherence: toward the American nation. In fact, at first blush, Cooper’s debt to Scott and to Scott’s generic tradition seems clear: Consider, for example, the self-reflexivity and historical consciousness of Hawk-eye’s self-characterization as “a man without a cross,” Chingachgook’s self-characterization as “The Last of the Mohicans,” the author-narrator and the reader’s self-conscious presence as characters in an unfolding drama. Hawk-eye, dies, in The Prairie, with “the light of the setting sun full upon the solemn features”—an affirmation of translatio studii that Turner would applaud. Both Cooper, in his ethnographic voice, and Hawk-eye, when he removes the bear’s mask and reveals his slight-of-hand, affirm the historian’s distinction between the real and the imaginary; thus the confused polymorphous, dissonant subject identity of the extended scenes of shape-shifting is stabilized.
Cooper’s ethnographic voice acts as a form of rhetorical picturesque portraiture in which landscape and thus cultural identity are fixed in a rigid frame of imposed definition and interpretive value. In often-repeated language, Cooper describes the forest as forming “a striking picture, whose frame was composed of the dark and tall border of pines” (289). The reader is introduced to Magua as a native bearing “both the tomahawk and knife of his tribe; and yet his appearance was not altogether that of a warrior. … The colors of the war paint had blended in dark confusion about his fierce countenance, and rendered his swarthy lineaments still more savage” (16). Just as the wandering colors actually stabilize rather than confuse identity, this ethnographic, picturesque framing mechanism effectively controls the wandering and the wildness of the text and enhances the coherence of the narrative structure; we anticipate the well-marked beginning and the resolute end.

Duncan and Alice, or, more accurately, their imagined creole progeny, act, in this Turneresque reading, as the allegorical Americans. A national reading of Cooper demands that we imagine their settlement in America rather than their return to England. In our interpretation of settlement (and we must interpret rather than read, for Cooper is silent on the point, and so are Alice and Duncan) plays to the centripetal/centralizing politics of nation-development, in which dissemination (all those scenes of arrival which are also scenes of departure) is effectively countered by the synthesis of settlement, by Nation.

Consider, too, Hawk-eye’s prescient sight. He reads the world as a story. On the path of the captive daughters, for example, he reassures the anguished father:

we know our path, but it is good to examine the formation of things. This is my schooling, Major; and if one neglects the book, there is little change of learning from the open hand of Providence. …. This is a firm and straight, though a light step …; and there the dark-
hair has made a little jump. No, no; my knowledge for it …. From such undeniable testimony did the practiced woodsman arrive at the truth. (265)

This is “imaginary totalization produced by the eye.” Hawk-eye’s eye is revealed as Cooper’s exaltation of a scopic and Gnostic drive (Certeau).

Consider, finally, the “inevitability” of the Mohicans’ demise, a demise, Lukács argues, that Cooper presents as “affirming the necessary [and thus the inevitable] fate of every primitive culture with which capitalism comes into contact” (346, my emphasis). Lukács, Fiedler, and Brooks et al, perhaps in the hurry induced by their anticipation of the coherent imperial nation, are moving too quickly beyond—in front of (temporally speaking)—the texts’ incoherencies.

Consider, for example, the complication and hesitation of Cooper’s strange “seemingly.” He’s not describing an end known from the beginning—or at least he’s not describing an ending known for sure. Or consider the head-scratching confusion that Duncan inspires as Cooper’s American allegory. It’s Hawk-eye Cooper loves, D.H. Lawrence reminds us, not Duncan, and it’s of Hawk-eye’s wild forest, antithetical to Duncan’s synthetic urbanity, that he dreams. This forest can’t house a white nation; it can barely even be spoken of. This childless man can’t play the patriarch.59

Consider too the confused dialectic of this moment of bloody resolution: “They rose together, fought, and bled, each in his turn. But the conflict was soon decided; the tomahawk of

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59 Robert Clark sees Hawk-eye as the allegorical American. Sir Walter Scott, Clark notes, was the authorial father “of an isolated family, destined one day to rise into a tribe, and in farther progress of time to expand into a nation…” (qtd. 61). Cooper, Clark continues, conformed to Scott’s pattern, “retelling the tale of the patriarch’ across a broad canvas” (62). Clark forgets that Hawk-eye is celibate and that it’s a strange nation story that imagines no heir.
Hayward and the rifle of Hawk-eye descended on the skull of the Huron, at the same moment that the knife of Uncas reached his heart” (135). If this is a moment of national synthesis the allegory is bloodily crossed: the European, the native, and the creole merge.

Moreover, for all the *ad nauseum* reiteration of his pure blood, this uncrossed identity has no referent or site; Hawk-eye is a celibate orphan, without biological referent, past or future. The hand he holds up to David Gamut’s inspection—*situ* evidence, he’s sure, of whiteness—is red, he says, only from the sun and wind. David is not so sure, and neither are we (cf. McFarland 263). Identity, Cooper thus suggests, also comes from place/from sense(ation)/from contact (with the air or with the other). In this, Hawk-eye is crossed and destabilized. Race is unable to order this national imagining.⁶⁰

Consider the complications of Hawk-eye, Chingachgook, Uncas, and Cora’s failed return. Hawk-eye and Chingachgook have no home and can only keep moving. Cora is far from her home and her kin: her wandering terminates but is not resolved. Even Uncas’s body remains in motion: “the whole nation was collected about the temporary grave of the chief—temporary, because it was proper that, at some future day his bones should rest among those of his people”

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⁶⁰ Mitzi McFarland similarly reads the extended disguise and shape-shifting scenes (“comically resilient, yet hostile, places that flatly renounce static categories of existence and elide virulent forms of differentiation [248]) as evidence of incoherence and subject confusion. The scenes, she argues, “are counterposed to bring forth a double-voiced discourse that, however covertly, *undercuts the dominant culture and gives expression to symbolic resistance*” (255, my emphasis). McFarland’s analysis still places Cooper in relationship to the nation (as the site of reference/defining the symbolic resistance). Consider instead that this polysemic voice is not the voice of resistance but instead the normative voice of early nineteenth-century America—the normative voice of the creole, a voice missed in our critical rush toward *unisonance/nation story* rather than toward dissonance.
As national(ist) mode both the picturesque and narrativized discourse are dedicated not to wandering but to that *return* or resolute end that centers both eye and identity.

Finally, there is a critical difference between reading the world as a story and the world telling itself as a story. While Hawk-eye proves adept at reading the signs *on* the land—”from such undeniable testimony did the practiced woodsman arrive at the truth” (265)—he despairs of reading the land itself. In a lovely metaphor of incoherent narrative flow Hawkeye describes a river’s “perversity”:

> it falls by no rule at all, sometimes it tumbles; there it skips; here, it shoots; in one place ‘tis white as snow, and in another ‘tis green as grass; hereabouts, it pitches into deep hollows, that rumble and quake the ‘arth; and thereaway, it ripples and sings like a brook. …

The whole design of the river seems disconcerted. First it runs smoothly, as if meaning to go down the descent as things were ordered; then it angles about…. (62)

The passage is noteworthy for its geographic indeterminacy: “here” gives way suddenly to “there” which gives way as suddenly to “thereaway”: a world without stable referent. Each moment of seeming intent in this incoherent landscape is qualified and equivocated: “sometimes.” If this world speaks itself as a story it’s not a story we can easily follow. It’s only the critics turned West, looking for nation story and rivers that run smooth, who insist that it is. This river “angles about” and directs our critical glance awry, away from what Walter Mignolo calls “the linearity in the geohistorical mapping of Western modernity,” beyond and behind Frederick Jackson Turner’s relentlessly national frontier dialectic and his full appropriation of Cooper, to an earlier scene of arrival. I find contingency here, in Cooper’s relentless genre crossing, and comparability with colonial histories older than Cooper’s and other than the nation’s.
**Crossings**

Phenomenologists argue that reality is contingent not on language but on experience. This moment in modern philosophy maps to Cooper’s tortured representation of the seen (hawk-eyed) and the wondrous unseen. This novel so devoted to clear sight and knowable sign is equally concerned with obtuse and unknowable sound and in this concern the singular and totalizing voice associated with nation story and America’s nineteenth-century canonical stories gives way to the awkward plurality of multitudes (Simpson 182). Cooper’s purloined psalmist David Gamut travels with hawk-eyed Hawk-eye. Two ways of knowing are thus juxtaposed. Despite Hawk-eye’s disdain for the value of his trade, Gamut conveys an understanding or knowledge beyond language/beyond the seen or the real. His music carries Hawk-eye “back to boyhood”: the known and remembered past sleeps in the hollow object of this sound. The melody’s low, murmuring, and indistinct syllables “wrought … sweet influence on the senses of those who heard it” (99): the gift or donation of previous generations and the cultural conditioning of phenomenological experience.

More telling to Cooper’s imagining of the creole experience than this experience of resonance, Hawk-eye’s ears also fail him, and always in a moment of dissonance that suddenly interrupts the remembered sounds of David’s music. Cooper places Hawk-eye in a moment and space of memory and then refuses that return, banishes the remembered. At these moments, Hawkeye (crossed) finds himself stuck and off balance between the remembered and the unknown. Safe behind Glenn Falls, the river’s incoherent sound as mask, Hawk-eye and party “devour with greedy rapture” David’s familiar “low, dying chords” when suddenly “a cry that seemed neither human nor earthly rose in the outward air” (67). Hawk-eye cannot translate the horse’s scream, noise from a soldier’s Old World he does not know. “What it is, or what it is not, none here call
tell,” he despairs, “though two of us have ranged the woods for more than thirty years!” (67). And he cannot place in either space or time the “yells of the savage” that, first, “mingled with every fitful gust of wind that issued from the interminable forests of the west” (10), and that later, at the moment of the girls’ capture, “burst” upon Gamut’s long and full notes, and “spread … in every direction (100): excessive sounds from a New World that he cannot grasp. Both the horse’s scream and the yells convey indeterminacy; they lack either or both historical referent (“what it is or what it is not, none here can tell!”) and fixed site (“interminable forests,” “… in every direction”). To be surrounded by sound one cannot place in either time/history or in space is to encounter the sublime: the embodied physical experience of being physically interrupted and unmoored. This sublime experience, as demonstrated in its dissonant violent intrusion upon the unity and unisonance of beauty and memory, resists containment (resists the nation?) and ideological incorporation. The unknown and unknowable sounds hang in the air, strangely apart from anything coherent.

Bodies continuously do the same as Cooper repeats this sensual indeterminacy in the more-fully embodied imagery of bodies walking through and unmoored in space. The entire novel is a travel log of walking: of a journey from the native forests to the European fort and thence from the fort to the forests. (And the creole, of course, is literally centered within this narrative structure, neither of the old world nor of the new, but in between.) To walk, Certeau notes, is to be dislocated (is “to practice the ellipsis of conjunctive loci” [101]) and to affirm, refuse, transgress, or respect physical frames (99; cf. Altieri 236). To write of walking is to represent the more abstract theoretical conceptualization of slipping loci of enunciation. It is in this context that we must read the growing power of Duncan’s voice and the growing importance of Hawkeye’s authority as the novel progresses, and the inverse weakening of Chingachgook’s, Uncas’s,
and Munro’s command; the Anglo-American appears to find his relative place as the novel progresses, as the European and the Amerindian lose theirs. Cooper consistently contrasts this growing creole authority—authority consistent with nation story—with bodies falling.

Hawk-eye and his companions hover for much of the novel on knife-ridges from which a false step “should precipitate them down any one of the many deep and roaring caverns” (55). Hawk-eye’s Huron victim, in the battle at Glenn Falls, “grasped wildly at the empty air,” before being “lost forever” (88). In the penultimate scene, Hawk-eye, Chingachgook, and Cooper’s readers see Magua’s evil body, in its death fall, “cutting the air with its head downward, for a fleeting instant, until it glided past the fringe of shrubbery which clung to the mountain, in its rapid flight to destruction” (415).

We fall when referents (of place or history) are lost. Thus Jonathan Frow writes of the most disoriented of the postmodernists: “Baudrillard’s is a melancholy vision of the emptying out of meaning [inauthenticity]. His is a historical vision: there was a referent; it has been lost; and this loss is, as in Plato, the equivalent of a moral fall” (126). To fall is to lose one’s grasp on the world. In the act, dream, or memory of falling, the body constantly adjusts and readjusts to “fit” or properly “belong” in a coherence space of fixed physical value. This proprioceptive act has obvious connotative meaning for the creole (European, Amerindian, and their progeny) who at the frontier simultaneously comes into being and comes into loss: an incoherent notion in a conflicted space.

Moreover, at the phenomenological level of proprioceptive experience, we are at greatest risk of falling when space (a “new” World or a “virgin” Continent, perhaps) fails to meet our expectations of scale, balance, and relative value or patterning. Scale and pattern organize local in-
teraction and are literal forces in felt experience. (And so we speak of setting as character.) Ma-
gua’s flight to destruction happens in a grand scale: we never see his body hit. Cooper has drawn
a portrait of a wilderness so bleak, savage, and large, of such endless vistas (imposing “from
every side” [280]) that it almost seems that he falls away from us still. He falls both into and be-
yond history. All connection with the reader’s presence is severed in this eternal and interminable
fall. This is the sight-bound connotation of “seemingly” in Cooper’s “seeming inevitability.” This
connotation assures the inevitable. His historical and geographic distance and his interminable
flight are directly proportionate to cultural difference and to the distance between the present and
a past that cannot be recaptured.

Yet Cooper moves immediately from the exaggerated scale of Magua’s death to the exag-
gerated intimacy of Uncas’s burial, from Magua’s fall to Hawk-eye and Chingachgook’s hand-
shake. This is the sense-bound connotation of “seemingly” that does not affirm but instead re-
fuses the end known in the beginning, announced from the very title. These phenomenological
crossings, in other words, do very different metaphoric work. In one the boundary (between earth
and sky, past and present), when crossed, reifies absence and distance. In the other, the boundary
(Uncas’s grave lying like a line between Indian and White, present and future), when crossed, af-
firms presence: “you are not alone.” This moment of coming into being, for Hawk-eye and for
Chingachgook, is one of cultural cross. If Hawk-eye is the American allegorical, he allegorizes
changeability, fungibility, and interplay.

Uncas lives in cultural memory to tell the story of the Almo Massacre. “When fictional
characters begin migrating from text to text, they have acquired citizenship in the real world and
have freed themselves from the story that created them,” Umberto Eco writes. Uncas carries nar-
rative.
CODA: LOST AND FOUND

I have always loved America; it is something precious in the memory in blood and cells which insists on story, poetry, song, life, life. Simon Ortiz, *from Sand Creek*

I said in the Introduction that my concern with the hard site lines of places and the hard sight lines of experience was not a merely conceptual concern. I cited as example the National Park Service’s insistence on integrity of location and hard boundaries for all National Register of Historic Places-eligible sites and cited as alternative Wai Chee Dimock’s recent exposure of the global networks and soft boundaries evident in ostensibly national literature. I then moved to other less bureaucratic or less fictive examples of authentic ‘inauthentic’ places at New Zion, the Silent City of Rocks, and along the extent of America’s overland trail. I opened each of these examples with an epigraph of the lost—lost balance and perspective; lost bones “too terrible to contemplate”; lost subjects; lost material effects buried in an accumulation of matter and of time, their presence now felt only as affect or glimpsed in the hollow of words. Silence, Jacques Rancière writes of the distribution of the sensed, is “the sound of meaning immanent in things” (92) and silence keeps company with the lost in each of these places: the silence of rocks that won’t speak and of the dead we can’t hear, the silence of those with no words to speak what they have done or seen. I concluded that generic land types (simultaneously real and representation) carry stories that function as material things, heritable and transportable along complex kinship lines. I now turn to a more-recent material example, masterfully researched and described by historian Ari Kelman: the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site where competing stories “loom” (8) like an unseen but felt material presence.

The Sand Creek Massacre Historic Site was to be the first unit within the National Park system to call a US military attack on a sleeping Indian village filled with noncombatants sheltered by both treaty and the American flag by its name: massacre site not battle ground. The goal
of Sand Creek historic-site designation and memorialization, National Park Service archaeologists and historians assured the descendants of Black Kettle’s band of Cheyennes and Left Hand’s band of Arapahos, was to finally recognize the western tribes as subjects with a voice rather than as mere objects against which American westward expansion—American Progress—could be measured and manifested.

The 1864 Battle of Sand Creek had long stood as an emblem of American Progress, and the defeated tribes its measure. Commanding officer and “Fighting Parson” Colonel John Chivington reported the deaths of “some four to six hundred” Indian combatants responsible for depredations against travelers on the Platte and Arkansas river overland routes. Asked by his military superiors for the names of these enemy combatants, Chivington instead drew the composite sketch of generic Indian enemies so common to accounts of the Indian Wars: “it is impossible to determine what party or band of the tribe or the name of the Indian or Indians belonging to the tribe so at war [all] are guilty of the acts of hostility” (qtd. in Kelman 14). “Several” white scalps and the thwarted westward expansion they so-graphically represented, Chivington testified, provided material evidence to justify the “gallons” of Indian blood shed (‘gallons’ being a unit of Indian measure of particularly horrific power here); thus souvenirs of death transformed meaning into materiality.61 Those contemporary accounts that called the massacre by its name attributed it to a bad man rather than a contested space and so, for example, in an 1868 military report Samuel Bonsall described “Chivington’s Massacre” not Sand Creek’s. Despite immediate and sustained contemporary military and Congressional concern over the manner of the killings and the

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61 The number of scalps changes frequently in Chivington’s various tellings: from the single male scalp referenced in the formal report written to his superiors the day of the massacre, to the “several” men’s and women’s scalps later reported to the Denver press, to the 19 of which he testified to Congress.
merits and morals of Chivington and his men, “The Battle of Sand Creek” was included on a 1909 Colorado State Capital memorial commemorating Colorado’s role in the Civil War and the preservation of national union and American progress. Sand Creek’s Kiowa County marked this potentially profitable high point in its history with two stone monuments, one on a remote county road overlooking the “Sand Creek Battleground,” the other on a more-heavily traveled State Highway just outside of Chivington, Colorado. This second marker described a “regrettable tragedy of the conquest of the West,” listed with precision the number of white men dead and injured but made no mention of Indian dead or mutilated, and presented the name of the engagement not as a question but as the official Manichean title of inevitable conflict—’Sand Creek: ‘Battle’ or ‘Massacre.’

As in the Silent City of Rocks’ Almo Massacre, the Indians remained silent in this story of American Progress. Literally denied national-subject standing by federal law that did not recognize Indian citizenship until 1924, their voices are conspicuously absent from the Congressional hearings that ultimately condemned Chivington and his men’s “gross and wanton outrages.” The Capitol obelisk renders the massacre a component of the Civil War and thus erases local experience, local boundaries, and the Indian dead in favor of totalizing nation(al) story. The monument stone that elides the question (mark) is written in the passive voice that also elides the subject narrator and makes the object world speak and speak itself as a story in which the end is known from the very beginning. As at the City of Rocks, it is this nation story of Indians-as-objects, the park service hoped, that would be undone with the lifting of the veil from white-men’s perfidy, the opening of the metaphorical curtain that had proclaimed “The End” “Keep Out,” and the material introduction of Indian voice. Appropriately, in 1997, just months before President Clinton signed the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site Study Act into law, the highway
monument authoritatively titled Sand Creek: “Battle’ or ‘Massacre.’” —end stop—“disappeared from the Kiowa County landscape” (Kelman 55).

Yet the Indians’ subject status quickly proved problematic. Granted voice and story, they refused to tell their story through the narratives of others. Their full presence, the Cheyennes insisted, included the voices and standing of their still-silenced and unseen ancestors: the something that does not allow itself to be made present. National Park Service “hard” geomorphological and archaeological evidence placed both Black Kettle’s village and the bulk of the blood shed three-fifths of a mile upstream from the deep bend in Sand Creek long held in Cheyenne oral tradition and memory as “the place” and formally sanctified as sacred ground. The deep embracing bend, the sheltering crook of the arm of the creek, though it “looked right, felt right,” proved “completely sterile” of artifactual evidence. The integrity of location demanded by federal law, through which materiality is transformed into meaning rather than the other way around, the park service said, lay precisely here. “Not everything has to fit into a box,” Cheyenne tribal representative Steve Brady countered loudly, “and some things really shouldn’t, even if they can” (qtd. in Kelman 133). Cheyenne heirs of massacre stories “passed from one generation to the next, heirloom[s] akin to a sacred text” (Kelman 47), placed Black Kettle’s village outside this box of hard evidence, in the soft form of the circled creek where their ancestors had described

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62 In 1993, anonymous amateur artifact collectors, intent on securing souvenirs of the Sand Creek tragedy, reported to Colorado Historical Society chief historian David Halaas that their metal detectors had been silent over the course of a two-day search of the large bend in Sand Creek where both victims and victimizers had “placed” the bloody encounter: “the ground was completely sterile, there wasn’t any evidence at all that a massacre happened there.” Halaas and historian Andy Masich investigated and while they attested that the bend “looks right, feels right, and meets all contemporary descriptions” they also affirmed the absence of battle-related artifacts (qtd. in Kelman 44-45).
their home and their loss and where they heard their ancestors’ anguished death cries carried across many years and generations (Kelman 5): the sound of meaning immanent in things. It happened here, they state. We know it happened here. As at Almo—“it happened. We know it happened”—this native history is sensed, a matter not of physical effect on the land and personal effects left as artifacts but of affect: how things feel.

Significantly, affect does not replace effect in this telling—as concept overlays the material in the process of American Incarnation—but rather incorporates it. As in the emigrant journals, positivism and poetics collide in metaphoric representations that are also inherently experiential. Federal geomorphologists and archaeologists may have found part of the Sand Creek site, the Cheyennes argued, but only part of it. They misplaced Black Kettle’s village not because evidence doesn’t matter but because it does. The scientists had looked at only part of the evidence. They ignored the silent sound of meaning immanent in things and the hollow places in which the past sleeps.

Chastised and chastened, the National Park Service proposed an awkward compromise that Kelman describes as “built atop a bedrock of certainty, but flexib[le],… will[ing] to tolerate doubt” (165): a site boundary large enough to encompass the circle of Sand Creek and the arti-

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63 Northern Arapaho tribal representatives, descended from Little Hand, supported NPS findings. NPS officials understood this support to be less an affirmation of their scientific methods than affirmation of tribal distinctions. Northern Arapaho representatives had “wearied” of Cheyenne “sensationalism” and “hostility” (Kelman 154-155) and had been angered by a Cheyenne representative’s insistence that “their people weren’t even there” (Colleen Cometsevah qtd. in Kelman 155). The Southern Arapahos shared tribal representation with the Cheyennes.
fact finds (Kelman 151). Flexibility fails against bedrocks of certainty. Soft forms demand back-
drops of uncertainty. Despite their stated willingness to tolerate doubt, the National Park Service
continues to present site confusion as the product of a racial divide: “two … clearly distinct ways
of looking at things” (Rick Frost, head of the NPS “search” team qtd. in Kelman 110), Indian
memory versus White history, the Indian past and a White present (Kelman x, 140). In the final
Congressional report describing the search for the lost massacre, two competing maps represent
this racial divide in visual form. One depicts NPS historians’ and archaeologists’ massacre site,
the other the Cheyennes’ and Southern Arapahos’.

The mobility and collectability/inheritability of generic landscape types in the stories of
Mormon and Anglo-American immigrants, stories in which poetic patterns prove more powerful
than the manifest “appearances of the world” (Chapters 1 and 3); the translation of the Mountain
Meadows Massacre to the Silent City of Rocks (Chapter 2); and the soft forms and uncertain
backdrops of nineteenth-century nation story (Chapter 4) all suggest that this racial divide is not
so deeply entrenched. The City of Rocks, Mountain Meadows, Sand Creek and the contested
massacres that they stage demonstrate a shared affective response to landscape. At each place
and in each story, artifacts transfer meaning into materiality rather than the other way around.
This transference is not race dependent. Each massacre exceeds not only the spatial boundaries
of geography but the temporal boundaries of history; or, rather, none of the massacres are histori-
cal events. All are what Colorado State Historian David Halaas, speaking specifically of Sand
Creek but fully evoking Almo, describes as an “emotionally and psychologically present event”
(qtd. in Kelman 109). Thus they belong, Della Mullinix 82-year-old president of the Sons &
Daughters of Idaho Pioneers, might add, “to the public.” At each place, the hard trail lines of ad-
vance and dissemination disrupt embracing circles. The poetic orientation of sense is made materially manifest and integrity of association and feeling prove as significant as integrity of location.
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