“Singled Out for Loss”: Narrating Lost American Origins, 1925-1991

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A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

University of Virginia
December, 2015

Abstract

"'Singled Out for Loss': Narrating Lost American Origins, 1925-1991" argues that narratives of American national origin, far from being static, singular historical experiences, reflect a process of constant and continuing revision. Twentieth century authors map transnational foundations of America through the construction of narratives formally and thematically centered on loss, which highlight the unstable nature of national origin itself, and offer a deep ambivalence about both national identity and loss itself. Even in the act of restoring forgotten histories of origin that tie America to elsewhere materially, narratively, and culturally, the texts maintain an aesthetic of loss in an attempt to resist reinscribing the power dynamics of linear history and American myth that they hope to destabilize. William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* (1980), Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* (1925), and Agha Shahid Ali's *A Nostalgist's Map of America* (1991) plot a diverse experience of American spaces, each text restoring violent and troubling histories to the origins of America. Whether in the novel, memoir, or through poetry, narrating lost histories undermines the stability of national identity by questioning the singularity of founding America and the authenticity of claims for ancestry.

The material world—space, landscape, artifact, architecture—serves a significant role in restoring lost histories in the texts, but the texts also demonstrate the ways in which the material world can be used either in service of undermining naturalized identity categories, or in fact, in solidifying those categories. Throughout the texts, America is "Singled Out for Loss," a line from Ali's poem "Beyond the Ash Rains"; the title suggests the ways that losses—cultural, material, imaginary, bodily—have been a necessary aspect of

founding America, and are marked as such throughout the texts. However, the title also indicates the way that by restoring lost and troubling histories of origin, the idea of the American nation remains in many ways exceptional, "singled out" in part through these connected histories of loss at its foundation. I argue that despite suggesting alternative sites of American origin, ranging from ancient to recent experiences in Asia, the Caribbean, and the Americas, the texts resist flattening multicultural inclusion of those new stories of origin in part by the focus on history as a narrative, performative process—an often ambivalent one that resists a singular experience. As the texts critique the narrative and material complexity of founding the nation, I contend that they offer a model of how to leave space for "lost" violent or troubled origins without reverting to simplified narratives of American exceptionalism, achieved in part through the focus on loss as a central feature of national origin.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is a project that almost remained incomplete, and so first I want to give immeasurable thanks to my director, Eric Lott, for believing in my dream to return to this project and finish my Ph.D. Being supported by Eric in restarting work on the dissertation made me believe I could finish it, which in turn made it possible—and for that I am beyond grateful. Eric, your feedback has been immensely helpful throughout the years spent on this project, and I will treasure the thought that you put into helping my work progress. It has been such a privilege to work with you. To my amazing committee members, Alison Booth and Caroline Rody, I give equally huge thanks for a similar belief in me, and in the project—even through the roughest of rough drafts as my work restarted. That Alison and Caroline so willingly picked up work on the project after the intervention of several years means the world to me, and speaks so highly of their amazing support, both professional and personal. To read their feedback on the dissertation is so gratifying, most especially when it offers me very needed critique. Commentary from you both on my project means more than you know, and I thank you for taking the time to offer it. To my outside reader Sarah Corse, your willingness to read my dissertation and offer such helpful feedback in such a short window of time is so greatly appreciated. It was an absolute pleasure meeting you, and I am very thankful that you agreed to serve as a reader for my defense. Thank you for offering me an insightful view of my work from a different perspective.

For the professors with whom I studied, taught, and worked at the University of Virginia—Elizabeth Fowler, Victor Luftig, Steve Cushman, Michael Levenson, Jahan Ramazani, Karen Chase, Paul Cantor, Rachel Most, Karlin Luedtke, Gordon Stewart, among

many others who have crossed my path in some way—I am incredibly grateful for allowing me to be a part of your professional life. To experience such a supportive professional community, and to witness your engagement with your work has been a gift to me. Thank you to everyone in the English Department, faculty, staff, fellow graduate students, and undergraduates, for the multitude of ways you have touched and influenced my professional and personal life. I have such gratitude for being included in your community during this time in my life. Immeasurable thanks to the true friends that I made here, who supported my work life and home life more than they will realize: Gwen Kordonowy, Melissa Schraeder, Bethany Mabee, Lily Sheehan, and all the other welcoming peers I met through the years and got to know, whether on a teaching staff or outside of department life. You are all amazing, kind, impressive, thoughtful people and I am lucky to have gotten to know each of you. Fran Connor, our lunches over the years were the highlight of my week. Thank you for making this process seem possible, and even inevitable, and thank you for the humor and kindness you added to my life during school. I will so fondly remember this time.

Finally, to my family: Beth and Cliff Haury, Mom and Dad, without your unceasing faith, support, and love, my life would be so very different. I have no words to express my gratitude for the ways you have held me up, big and small now and always—thank you. To my husband, I cannot adequately thank you for the constant shifting and adapting and juggling and loving that made this dissertation happen amongst the craziness of our family life. Thank you for this, and I love you. To my sweet babies, Asher, Clementine, and Lola, this project is dedicated to you. You can do anything that you set your mind to in life. Love, Mom.

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Introduction: Nation Lost and Found

> You showed me the relics
> of our former life, proof that we'd at last
> found each other, but in your arms I felt
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> singled out for loss.
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>
> I will feel lost,
> Unhappy and at home
> -Seamus Heaney, "The Tollund Man" (43-44)
>
> All seeing is hooded with loss
> -Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked* (16)

"An Originary Present"

Benedict Anderson famously offers a reading of "the biography of nations" as tied to personal biography in *Imagined Communities*, where he argues that biographies, both personal and national, implicate loss as the generative impulse:

> All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives. After experiencing the physiological and emotional changes produced by puberty, it is impossible to 'remember' the consciousness of childhood…How strange it is to need another's help to learn that this naked baby in the yellowed photograph, sprawled happily on rug or cot, is you. (204)

Growth of this "consciousness," whether that is of the self or the nation, brings about this amnesia that narrative seeks to overcome; the loss, he claims, is exacerbated by the profusion of material evidence for the existence of continuity with that earlier consciousness—evidence that would at first seem to resist loss. Instead, what the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali calls the "relics of our former life" (11-12) the material "proof" (12) of history that marks the continuity only further underscores the

absence of memory and the loss of the past: “in your arms I felt / singled out for loss” (13-14) Ali writes in “Beyond the Ash Rains.” Anderson cites the material history of a person’s youth such as “birth certificates, diaries, report cards, letters, medical records” (204)—together which, he claims, “simultaneously recor[d] a certain apparent continuity and emphasiz[e] its loss from memory” (204). In a reversal of how we might view material evidence with respect to the story of nation or self, the material relics of history do not preserve memory, but further estrange the subject: they emphasize how the old consciousness is fully unrecoverable.

Loss and narrative are in fact the two central pieces of Anderson’s formulation of identity for both self and nation. This undermines the understanding of history as a process of gain, where we might conceive of national history as the constant accumulation of new evidence or artifacts to be interpreted with respect to the nation. Instead, he suggests history is a process that serves to make sense of loss. The material objects or documents of the past cannot speak for themselves in terms of their inclusion in the story of history, nor can they contend with the jarring absence from consciousness of nation or self. He suggests that the “estrangement” of the material evidence of the past self from memory creates the very concept of identity; you must be told, “yes, you and that naked baby are identical” (204), something that “because it cannot be ‘remembered,’ must be narrated” (204). Thus narrative history is spurred on by identity and starts from a place of loss according to Anderson, a suggestion furthered by Peggy Phelan in her book *Unmarked*: “Identity emerges in the failure of the body to express being fully…Identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other…In that declaration of identity and identification, there is always loss, the loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for

self-seeing, self-being" (13). While the advent of self-as-other in the estrangement Anderson details is what constructs the self, Phelan posits that there is an impossible loss inherent in conceptions of the self. Taken together, these ideas of Anderson and Phelan suggest that the idea of loss needs to be seriously reconsidered in regards to narrating national identity. This is particularly the case when considering American narratives that directly address loss—specifically narratives that seek to reinscribe the transnational in the foundations of America and seek to address historical "amnesias."

Homi Bhabha, paying homage to Anderson in *Nation and Narration*, elaborates on the parallel between nations and narratives, positing, "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (1). His reliance on a horizon here as defining the boundaries of national origin mixes the temporal with the spatial: origins lost in "the myths of time" abruptly shift to the nation as an imagined space, becoming something that is only mapped "in the mind's eye" of a participant. This suggests a visual, spatial understanding of nation that is at odds with a historical, temporally focused one. Anticipating those who would decry the emphasis on symbolic language in his discussion of national origin, Bhabha contends, "Such an image of the nation—or narration—might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force" (1). The nation is then indicative of two "impossible" things here—the "impossibly romantic" framing of it as an imaginative space, dependent on the mind of the one imagining it in order to map its origins, and also boundaries, and also the "impossible unity" it engenders, as Anderson's *Imagined*

Communities explores. The nation, Anderson proposes, "is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (7).

Narrating lost stories of the nation, as the texts in my project seek to do, challenges the way history has traditionally been conceived, as linear and progressive; the restored narratives paradoxically seek to preserve loss as part of the restoration they perform. Offering a formal way of understanding historical narrative, Anderson suggests an important rupture in the connection between personal and national biographies, which arises from the realities of the self, bounded by the temporal limitations of birth and death—a framework that is not available to the nation. Instead, the narrative of nation must be told in opposition to the way we might conceive a personal biography, which would be told "'down time,' through a long procreative chain of begettings" (205), forging a chain of events or circumstances that created the nation as it is. Instead, the nation must be narrated "'up time'…marked by deaths, which, in a curious inversion of conventional genealogy, start from an originary present" (205). The biography of nations maps a reversal of time whereby historical events are framed in context of their ties to other events in the history of the nation—for example, Anderson suggests that in this type of framing of history, "World War II begets World War I" (205). Seizing on his idea of "an originary present," I want to suggest that the texts included in my project together destabilize the notion of a fixed national origin, in part by means of the ways they connect the past to this originary present of the historical moment of narration. Rather than

restoring a missing piece to a larger singular narrative of America, the texts undermine the stability of history by emphasizing its utter dependence on narrative—which is disfigured by the particular originary present of each history. This filtering of historical loss through the present desires and needs, in turn, allows for a remarkable ambivalence in presenting the nation, and in presenting the amnesias that comprise significant parts of national origin.

"I First Saw His Twisted Face / In a Photograph"

To introduce my project on narrating the losses of American history, I will first turn to the work an Irish poet—a geographic leap, but hardly a thematic one. I undertake this leap to situate the competing discourses of materiality and narrative among the American texts of the project, and provide a better understanding of the narratives of nation the texts in my project hope to restore. Seamus Heaney is intent on contending with the losses of history and the ideas of nation in his poetry in particularly vivid encounters with material history in his verse. Through these encounters, his poetry suggests viable cross-cultural narratives of foundation for Ireland, but not without questioning the poet's or author's role in exploiting the violence and losses of the past in service of uncovering a usable language to address the present. Turning first to Heaney here sheds light on one of the ironies of my American project: I suggest that American exceptionalism is often reinscribed even by those who wish to undermine it, precisely because of the emphasis on rupture, loss, and violence that the text suggest are hidden in the history of the American nation. America is in some ways "singled out for loss" among others, in peril of utilizing an ideology of exceptionalism itself while mapping a cross-cultural foundation for the nation. My turn to Heaney offers a cautionary step before proceeding to American texts; America is not

"exceptional" in its loss, per se, nor its employment of loss in the service of national narrative—nor in its attempts at the restoration of historical loss. Rather, the struggle to restore the losses of American history should be read as contingent on similar discourses of nation developing globally throughout the twentieth century. At the same time, America serves as a unique site of exploration because its foundation and origin are relatively recent, and therefore less culturally stabilized, which places the nation in a unique position of having to actively narrate its founding.

Steeped in the violence of Northern Ireland during the "Troubles" that began in the late 1960's, Heaney's "The Tollund Man" from his 1972 collection *Wintering Out* offers a way of framing contemporary violence as a troublingly, seductively familiar reflection of past violence. The poem itself was written about the body of a man discovered in a Danish bog, who scholars believe to have been sacrificed in a fertility ritual (Heaney 57). The body was remarkably preserved in the bog environment, offering details of his hands, his hair, his cap, and the noose around his neck. His internal organs were intact, and in pictures you can clearly see the expression on his face and his closed eyes. Heaney first makes a material connection to the discovery in Denmark by means of the shared geographic feature of the bog. In his essay "Feeling into Words" he locates the bog as the spatial symbol of Ireland in his work:

> I began to get an idea of bog as the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in and to it…since memory was the faculty that supplied me with the first quickening of my own poetry, I had a tentative unrealized need to make a congruence between memory and bogland and, for the want of a better word, our national consciousness. (54-55)

To Heaney, the bog is the corollary to the American frontier in its mythic and spatial possibilities (notwithstanding the many subsequent challenges to the American myth of the frontier offered by American Studies scholars[1]), offered by him as a founding myth equivalent to the settlement of the West in American imagination—because, as he writes in "Bogland," "We have no prairies" (1). Instead, "Our pioneers keep striking / Inwards and downwards" and "Every layer they strip / Seems camped on before" (25-26)). Physical space becomes temporal with the image of excavating what is "camped on before" rather than below. History is made material and, as Heaney specifies, through that materiality, the land then "remembered everything that happened in and to it" (54), suggesting a comforting surety. Nothing is ever lost where "The wet centre is bottomless," ("Bogland" 28), infinitely preserving the relics of the past, and, seemingly, the past itself.

Heaney first saw photographs of discovered bodies taken from bogs in Northern Europe when they were published in P.V. Glob's *The Bog People*, translated into English in 1969—which was coincidentally the year that initiated renewed sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. Heaney summarizes that Glob's book "was chiefly concerned with preserved bodies of men and women found in the bogs of Jutland, naked, strangled or with their throats cut, disposed under the peat since the early Iron Age times" (57). Heaney connected with the visible evidence of their sacrifice, and of the violence done to their material bodies that, in his work, are portrayed as mystically preserved. In his utilization of the bog people as symbol in his series of "bog poems," Heaney takes something that is at once local—the geography of the bog in his homeland of Northern Ireland—and forges a cross-cultural understanding with ancient cultures throughout Europe that were also

[1] Frederick Jackson Turner's speech "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," given at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, established the frontier as crucial symbol for American history and

connected to bogs, physically and spiritually. Heaney frames the preserved material bodies as miraculous and powerful, holding within their transformed remains the secrets of history and of the earth itself.

However, this privileging of material history is made problematic within Heaney's bog poems, where the deaths, burials, and preservation of the bog people are, in the end, only imagined by the speaker. What is material is shored up by means of narrative; the physical presence belies the loss of historical memory, and the witness of the poet is uncertain. Further undermining the material experience of history is the reality that Heaney's initial encounter with the bog bodies comes through the representation of the bodies in photographs from Glob's book rather than a direct physical encounter with them. It is that visual encounter as they are presented in *The Bog People* that spurs Heaney to use the bog bodies as symbol in his poetry, as he is taken by "the unforgettable photographs of these victims [that] blended in my mind political and religious struggles. When I wrote this poem ["The Tollund Man"], I had a completely new sensation, one of fear" (57-58). The photographs of the bog people graphically represent the discovery of the preserved bodies, but photography obscures their materiality. The "sensation…of fear" that Heaney experiences upon writing "The Tollund Man" seems initiated by the fact that Heaney encounters the bog people through photographs in a scholarly book. Roland Barthes argues in *Camera Lucida* that photography and violence are in themselves linked, which then heightens the representation of violence in the sacrificed, preserved bodies of Glob's photographs: "The photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed" (Barthes 91). The fear and the violence together are magnified because of

this inability of the image "be refused" on the part of the viewer, and the insistent way Barthes claims it "fills the sight." At the start of the Irish "Troubles," Heaney asserts that his poetry turned to "a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament" (56), which he locates in what he calls the "emblems" (57) of the bog people that were first literally an image for Heaney—they were photographic representations before being turned into a symbol in his poems.

The violence represented in the photographs of the bog people is magnified, then, by the photographic medium itself, particularly in the way that the preserved bodies suggest no end to the marks of violence, which is still borne by them. In addition to suggesting the violence of the photographic image, Barthes connects photography directly to death:

> For Death must be somewhere in a society; if it is no longer (or less intensely) in religion, it must be elsewhere; perhaps in this image which produces Death while trying to preserve life. Contemporary with the withdrawal of rites, Photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. (92)

Of course here it is a very ritual, literal death presented in photographs that haunts Heaney, doubling and complicating the role of photographing these preserved bodies. Here the photographer does not try "to preserve life," but rather to "preserve" preservation—no longer in the bog, the remains are not protected from decay; once they are dug up, made visible and available as symbol of the eternal survival of the ritual violence done to them,

ironically then they are materially lost, even if the photograph captures their preservation upon removal from the bog.[2]

Further, Heaney's encounter with material history through the bog people in the photographs of P.V. Glob are complicated by the process of identification and disidentification with his subjects, which Heaney takes up in poems such as "Punishment." There he suggests that he is culpable in the ritual death he envisions, at least in part, by aestheticizing the violent sacrifice. "The Tollund Man" itself is a vow to one day bridge the distance between the speaker and the preserved man with a voyage in the indeterminate future, "Some day," where he wants "To see his peat-brown head" (1-2), which is the only part of the body preserved and displayed to the public. The connection to present day violence, then, comes through his photographic encounter with the preserved, intact body of the Tollund Man, not a material encounter with his head. He frames this wholeness of the body against "The scattered, ambushed / Flesh of labourers" (25-26) and "Tell-tale skin and teeth / Flecking the sleepers / Of four young brothers, trailed / For miles along the lines" (29-32). The contemporary, ongoing violence in Northern Ireland causes the speaker to consider praying for "Him to make germinate" (24), as if to redeem the meaning of the violent, fragmenting deaths by means of this symbol of wholeness in death. Heaney's speaker then envisions the "sad freedom" (33) of the Tollund Man on his way to be sacrificed and how he will enjoy that same sad freedom as he drives through the country where the Tollund Man and other bog people were discovered. Heaney dislocates his

[2] In order to display the bog bodies, museums and collections have had to find ways to prevent decay in the remains, which can greatly alter the appearance of the bodies in addition to destroying archeological evidence. For a discussion of these modifications and their impact on study of the bodies, see Heather Gill-Frerking, "The Impact of Historical Post-Excavation Modifications on the Re-Examination of Human Mummies." *Papers on Anthropology* 23.1 (2014): 63-75.

speaker as he makes this connection, imagining him surrounded by people but "Not knowing their tongue" (40). This presents language as a physical, bodily act in the use of the tongue as symbol of that linguistic rupture. Yet through this rupture, which distances him from understandable language is where home, also at a distance, becomes most clear for the speaker: "Out here in Jutland / In the old man-killing parishes / I will feel lost, / Unhappy and at home" (41-44). The surprising trio of linked feelings seem antithetical to one another—being both "lost" and "at home" presents a paradox—but through this grouping Heaney suggests a difficulty in locating the speaker's identity with respect to different forms of it: national, local, cultural, and linguistic, among others. To be "at home" in "man-killing parishes" suggests a familiarity with violence certainly, and "parishes" as a term to refer to the places the bog people were found reflects the religious register of the contemporary violence for Heaney's speaker, but also the ritual, religious violence done to the Tollund Man. By anticipating dual feelings of loss and home in "The Tollund Man" as he envisions encountering the preserved "peat-brown head" (2) of the man, Heaney suggests the concepts of loss and home are interdependent in unexpected ways.

What obsesses Heaney about the Tollund Man and the bog people, then, is the overpowering material experience of history embedded in these ancient, preserved bodies. Remarkably, it is the photographs that grant Heaney access to material history: "I first saw his twisted face / in a photograph" (32-33), he says of another bog body, "The Grauballe Man," in which the body is transformed from photograph to "perfected in my memory, / down to the red horn / of his nails" (38-40). The body is "hung in the scales / with beauty and atrocity" (41-42) in the course of the poem. The loss of life is coupled with the loss of the man's sacrifice to recorded history; the loss seems overturned by the preservation of

the physical body so long after death, but the "beauty" Heaney finds in that preservation is undercut by the "atrocity" that is weighted with it in the scales. Heaney's work offers an ambivalent presentation of his own project, utilizing the bog and the bog people as symbols of "our national consciousness" while suggesting that the act of doing so contributes to the atrocity of their sacrifice.

"The Past is Happening Quickly"

Heaney's work uncovers the seductive nature of material history in the recovery of lost stories, but his poetry also suggests the ironic instability of the material artifact in restoring lost history. Here, I want to focus not on the Irish context, but instead consider narratives of American spatial foundation. I argue that twentieth century narratives seeking the origins of America reflect a process of constant and continuing revision of national origin, and indeed ambivalence about narrating foundations of the nation. American authors throughout the twentieth century map transnational foundations of America through the construction of narratives formally and thematically centered on loss, which highlight the unstable nature of national origin itself. Even in the act of restoring forgotten histories of origin that tie America to elsewhere materially, narratively, and culturally, the texts maintain an aesthetic of loss in an attempt to avoid reinscribing the power dynamics of national history as traditionally conceived.

Rather than chronologically, the four chapters of the project are organized by a spatial logic, in two sets: the first two chapters share a desire narrate ways that the nation has been materially constructed, while the final two chapters share a common geography of the Southwest, and within that geographic space, a desire to locate usable narratives of the past. The first chapter, "'So I Went to the West Indies': Narrative and Mastery in William

Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" builds upon recent critical examinations of the role of the Caribbean in Faulkner's 1936 text to argue that the relationship between Faulkner's American South and the Caribbean is not merely a narrative perceptible to the reader or the critic, but is actually understood by the central figure Thomas Sutpen. This is significant in Faulkner's work—which seeks to restore the lost history of the Caribbean in the formation of the nation—because it asserts a consciousness of narrative power that develops in Sutpen himself. Faulkner's narrative technique of linking disparate geographic spaces through temporally disfigured stories leads to a reversal—instead of the United States occupying Haiti, as it did in the time of Faulkner's writing, Haiti has occupied the very narrative that would seek to "*Tell about the South*" (Faulkner 142). Haiti is at the narrative center of the text, and is the key to Sutpen's developing an understanding of history as a narrative process; it is also the key to the mastery he seeks to achieve in the United States. Looking at Sutpen's presentation of Haiti in the novel, which is accessed through layers of intervening narrators, times, and spaces, and thus interwoven with loss—disruption and narrative uncertainty, among other techniques—reveals that Sutpen's grand design to become a member of the Southern aristocracy is actually developed through a solidarity with revolting slaves. The novel restores the loss of that history, and yet it resists the narrative of Sutpen's solidarity with the revolting slaves, demonstrated by how Sutpen and his Southern slaves are perceived by local and national communities in the text.

Absalom, Absalom! centers the material construction of the nation, seen in the building of the plantation Sutpen's Hundred, which is inextricably tied to Sutpen's experiences in Haiti. Yet, material space in the novel is shored up through narrative. With a

similar focus on the material construction of the nation and the need for narrative to lay claim that nation, Maxine Hong Kingston's 1980 novel *China Men* works to restore the lost stories of her Chinese grandfathers and their American identities. In "'Not a Distant Ancestor but Grandfather': Family History and National Narrative in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men,*" I suggest that Kingston redefines citizenship as she claims it for her grandfathers, painstakingly presenting her grandfathers' material interventions in the American nation in order to do so. Grandfather Ah Goong builds the first transcontinental railroad while great grandfather Bak Goong labors to form a sugar plantation in Hawai'i. Kingston's construction of the grandfathers as "American ancestor[s]" (146) often turns from their material experiences to a focus on her own narrative and narrative technique as critical to forging national identity. Even as Kingston restores the losses of her grandfathers by means of recovering their material histories in America, she underscores that all history is actually narrative in the end rather than material, destabilizing the material citizenship she offers the grandfathers. The text thus resists the material power of the grandfathers by means of a focus on the narrative power of their narrator granddaughter. However, the narrator ultimately transfers narrative power back to her grandfathers by insisting that aspects of their history are lost: the full story simply cannot be told by her. Her grandfathers' own narrative power remains unrealized in the space text, but by maintaining some loss within the restored history of her grandfathers, *China Men* is able to both celebrate the inclusion of Kingston's grandfathers as American citizens and also critique the systems that prevented their own narrative inclusion in the story of the nation.

Chapter 3, "'Simply by Juxtaposition': Possession and Loss in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*" turns to the geographies of the Midwest and the Southwest and an

examination of Cather's narrative aesthetics, which rely on a method of "juxtaposition." This juxtaposition is featured in formal ways by the three parts of the novel, which cuts the story of Professor Godfrey St. Peter into two bookends for "Tom Outland's Story" as the section at its center. Bringing this technique to the forefront raises questions within the story about the inevitability of appropriation in Tom Outland's search for ancestors in the ruins of a cliff-dwelling city. I content that Cather is ambivalent about the constrained vision that juxtaposition as a technique relies upon. The text seems to provide a meaningful model of reading cultural loss—in this case, the personal and deep connection of the central character Tom Outland to the artifacts of the Native American civilization that he uncovers. However, Outland's romance with the Blue Mesa and the lost civilization there is claimed as ancestor for America, and the lost narrative of the original culture is overwritten by ways of Outland's juxtaposition of his meanings on its own. Outland's story suggests the problematic ways that "juxtaposition" is deployed as seemingly a neutral cross-cultural method that can link different objects or ideas together, but in fact the method can elide responsibility for perpetuating the losses of the past into the official narrative of nation. Cather presents Tom Outland's desire for ancestors as both persuasive and dangerous at once. Outland experiences his own loss of the material past when the artifacts he clung to are sold without his knowledge, but instead of undermining his connection to the Native American ruins, the loss of the items amplifies his feelings of connection. Cather suggests that loss is a central feature of persuasive national narratives, particularly ones that seek to restore complex national roots.

I conclude the project with a continued mapping of the American desert where Tom Outland experiences his own deep romance with the past. I turn to the poetry of Agha

Shahid Ali and his search for connection and loss in America as corollary to Tom Outland's search for American ancestors in Cather's novel. "'Every Silence in the World / Has Conspired with Every Other': Cross-Cultural Loss in Agha Shahid Ali's *A Nostalgist's Map of America*" traces the narrative of lost history that Ali offers in the collection, which ruminates on the connection between the desert landscape and loss from start to end. Ali seeks a cross-cultural ancestral home and is devastated by the losses of a history that he claims as his own, even as he also insists, "the desert refused my history, / refused to acknowledge that I had lived / there, with you, among a vanished tribe" ("Beyond the Ash Rains" 1-3). Ali's insistence on collective loss throughout *A Nostalgist's Map* works to establish history as a process of loss. That loss paradoxically becomes necessary for the construction of nation; loss is what forges connection in his work. Ali suggests an ethical challenge to both narrating loss and also remembering, however. In "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel," a poem that engages with the history of the Bisbee Deportation, where striking miners were deported from Bisbee, Arizona in 1917 illuminates the problematics of calling upon histories of loss, and, in this case, histories of exile the poet hopes to connect with. In searching for connection, Ali is at risk of in fact fetishizing a narrative of loss, exacerbating the circumstances of the Bisbee Deportation in the poem in order to make his connection to the exile. Narratives of loss and geographies of loss in Ali's collection together suggest the possible appropriative dangers of shared loss as community identity, but also suggest ways of taking responsibility for loss through the employment of those histories.

In his poem "Snow on the Desert," Ali offers a moment of immensity, as the history of the natural world descends upon the speaker to make him realize, "the past is happening

quickly" (28). Ali's image of a speeding past suggests the ways in which it is always simultaneous to the present, always embedded in the material experiences of the texts considered here. The past becomes a spatial experience, accessible through material relics, but that material experience fails to fully console—as we see when Ali's speaker claims in the epigraph above that even the physical connection of being held "in your arms," supported by "the relics of our former life, proof that we'd at last / found each other" is not enough—loss persists. Being "singled out for loss" emphasizes the experience of marginalized histories, lost to larger national narratives, but it also suggests that the material and narrative recovery of lost history insists on the persistence of loss rather than the elimination of it.

Chapter 1
"So I Went to the West Indies": Narrative and Mastery in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

"So I went to the West Indies," Thomas Sutpen declares in William Faulkner's 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!,* locating the "West Indies" at the center of a story that ostensibly seeks to "*Tell about the South*" (142). In the 1990s, critics began investigating what Randy Boyagoda terms "the South, and its South" (71) in *Absalom, Absalom!*—specifically, the time Thomas Sutpen spends as an overseer on a sugar plantation in Haiti and the way the geography of Faulkner's "West Indies" are significant to the spatial and ideological geography of the novel and larger issues of United States culture.[3] As Barbara Ladd recalls, "Until a few years ago, one found in the commentary on *Absalom, Absalom!* little dealing with the significance of Sutpen's ties to the Caribbean" ("Creole Poetics" 31). Ladd says part of the shift has come through a parallel shift in the underlying view of nationalism and national identity that has allowed this new look at the work. Most significantly, this includes a redefinition of "the South" to include a global South, encompassing the Caribbean and other areas, rather than limited to the South as a region of the United States. Ideas of nation space and national identity, simultaneously, have shifted to focus on transnational foundations rather than "nationalistic models" of interpretation in texts such as *Absalom* (Ladd 31).

[3] In *Absalom*, Faulkner uses the term "West Indies" in reference to what is clearly Haiti, given references to the "besieged Haitian room" and "the Haitian night" (204) and how he "got to Haiti" (205), but Barbara Ladd warns that "for some scholars working in the field, the 'West Indies' properly speaking refers to former British holdings in the region; the 'Caribbean' to areas colonized by France and Spain" ("Creole Poetics," note 2). That is to say, though Faulkner calls it the "West Indies," we might more properly call it the "Caribbean," as she does in her essay, given Haiti's historic links.

This critical attention to the Caribbean in Faulkner has greatly expanded the understanding of how—and where—the United States as a nation is defined. Additionally, the focus expands the understanding of how Sutpen forms his "design" that is central to so much of the story: "I had a design. To accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family—incidentally of course, a wife. I set out to acquire these" (212). His design is to become part of the Southern aristocracy, that is, the master of a plantation. As Ladd points out, his money, the architect for the house, the slaves for building the house and running the plantation all come from Sutpen's time in the "West Indies." Additionally, the first wife that disrupts his "design" by virtue of her being ultimately defined as not white by United States law and culture of the time, and his son from this marriage that is therefore also not white also are directly from the West Indies. Sutpen's possible achievement of his design is then materially dependent on the Caribbean, but so too is the destruction of the design. I suggest that analyzing the space of Haiti in the text alongside Faulkner's focus on narrative—that is, the importance of storytelling and the power of it to Sutpen's design, as well as Faulkner's complicated technique in narrating Haiti—leads to a surprising revelation: Thomas Sutpen's oppressive design in *Absalom, Absalom!* emerges from solidarity with revolting slaves.

This upends an assumption that what Sutpen learns in Haiti is how to differentiate himself or define his racial, class, and social identity in opposition to slaves—that he learns how to master by asserting superior power and differentiate his identity because of it. *Absalom*, granted, is an undeniable story about mastery; after all, it is a story about slavery and literal mastery of bodies in the Southern plantation system. Tied in to this mastery, Faulkner presents an attempt to conquer American spaces by means of storytelling,

mastering space by way of narrative. Throughout the text, Faulkner seeks to make visible not only the erased physical labor of slaves, but also the often-invisible material and imaginative reliance of the United States on the Caribbean and the global slave trade. That is, the novel struggles against the erasure of how dependent America is on elsewhere in order to come to being. Faulkner highlights this dependence through a simultaneous focus on story and space—narrative and geography are interdependent. *Absalom, Absalom!* critiques United States imperialism by suggesting that America as a story and space has been possessed—seized, conquered, and constructed—by elsewhere, even as the American empire at the time of the composition of *Absalom, Absalom!* occupies other places. The occupation of America is made most apparent by the narrative form of the novel, where storytelling yokes together spatially and temporally disparate locations. By this narrative form, the novel implicates story itself in the foundation of an American empire, and reverses the power dynamics of empire—instead of America occupying, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the American narrative is possessed by the ghosts of the Caribbean.

Myth, Language, and Power: Sutpen and the "Wild Men"

Thomas Sutpen begins life as a poor mountain boy living in the Virginia mountains, but aspires to the life of a rich Southern plantation owner, which he experiences when his family relocates to the Tidewater region of Virginia. To transform from the boy of his poor roots and elevate his social and economic status, Sutpen undertakes a radical process of self-making in the course of *Absalom, Absalom!*, which requires the transformation of his material space but also requires him to understand the importance of narrative to the formation of identity. Sutpen becomes a larger-than-life figure in the course of the narrative, often called "the demon" (215) by several of the narrators; he is even "*bigger*

than this whole country" (230) in the eyes of Wash Jones, the poor white man who lives in a dilapidated fishing camp on the hundred acre plantation that Sutpen constructs in the Mississippi swamp. Despite his mythic presence, it is not actually brute power by which Sutpen masters his slaves, as the narrators recollect in the course of the text: "General Compson told his son, Quentin's father, while the negroes were working Sutpen never raised his voice at them, that instead he led them, caught them at the psychological instant by example, by some ascendancy of forbearance rather than brute fear" (27). Quentin Compson, the central narrator of *Absalom*, is a young son of Jefferson who spends much of the novel narrating Sutpen's story from his dorm room at Harvard University. Quentin recollects what he has heard from his father (who himself heard from Quentin's Grandfather, who heard stories directly from Sutpen), as well as recalling what he has heard from Sutpen's former sister-in-law and once-betrothed, Miss Rosa Coldfield, whom he was summoned one day to listen to. The way Sutpen interacts with his slaves (a group itself that becomes mythic, transforming into "the legend of Sutpen's wild negroes" (27)) upends notions of him as a larger-than-life demon that rules only by fear and threat. The work that Grandfather Compson witnesses is not motivated by a raised voice; the "brute fear," which is an animalistic response to a threat, is replaced by a more complex "psychological" reaction of "example" by Sutpen. That is, Sutpen rules quite surprisingly by means of shared experience and understanding. Faulkner claims that Sutpen "led" the slaves rather than ruled them, through an "ascendancy" or superiority of "forbearance," which indicates restraint or control. It is that forbearance with which the slaves identify, suggesting that the slaves are connected to rather than in opposition to Sutpen's identity.

The way Sutpen interacts with his slaves is an indication that the "wild negroes" that Sutpen acquires for the building of the plantation Sutpen's Hundred are not as wild or as foreign as the town first presumes them to be when they arrive mysteriously in a wagon one day. Language is one of the first clues the text gives to both the ways the slaves were mythologized by the town, and also one of the ways they were deeply misunderstood: "The negroes could speak no English yet and doubtless there were more…who did not know that the language in which they and Sutpen communicated was a sort of French and not some dark and fatal tongue of their own" (27). The French creole that they speak would indicate that they too come from Sutpen's "West Indies," even if the town at first reads their presence as being at odds with European civilization; ironically the "dark and fatal" tongue is the heritage of European civilization, not a language or culture to them alone as the town assumes. Even after two years in Mississippi, the language is still a barrier to the slaves being understood, and still adds to their legend: "Sutpen spoke to him [the slave] in that tongue which even now a good part of the county did not know was a civilised language" (44). This repeated misunderstanding on the part of the town as to the language of the slaves and the way in which they are "civilised" indicates the deep blindness the citizens have for the way the "civilised" has created these supposedly "wild negroes." Quentin Compson imagines that on the day they arrive, the slaves are characterized by "attitudes wild and reposed" (4). These would seem to be descriptors at odds with one another—one indicating a franticness of movement or response, the other a laid back and patient response. Quentin even imagines them "huddled quietly" (4) in the wagon in what seems to be a very passive description that undercuts the "wild" he also insists on as descriptor. As the narrators strain to categorize the "*strange*" (5) group of "imported slaves" (28), the

descriptions work to both make them exotic, but also demonstrate that the group is not as "wild" as the town first assumes. Despite the ways the text reveals complexity to the "wild" group of twenty slaves, "his adopted fellow citizens still looked on [them] as being a good deal more deadly than any beast he could have started and slain in that country" (28), and some of the legend about their skills in tracking and hunting portrays them in an animalistic way throughout the text, even suggesting cannibalism is an accepted cultural value among them.[4] Yet in other ways we glimpse their ties to European colonial culture, suggesting that this heritage of Caribbean imperialism may be the very reason they are perceived to be "wild"—not because of some dark, inscrutable land of origin as the town assumes, but because of the colonial practices that made them slaves. Sutpen's slaves demonstrate cultural sophistication that reads against the repeated insistence of them as "wild niggers" (193) in the text, creating competing narratives of their origin and culture.

Miss Rosa Coldfield is the first narrator to offer details on the ways in which the slaves are "wild," though some of her details are later revealed to be incorrect assumptions. The slaves, like all the characters in the book, come to us through a highly mediated experience, told through multiple narrators and multiple stories. Quentin or his Harvard roommate Shreve McCannon, with whom Quentin shares the story and retells it, never see

[4] When chasing the architect through the swamp during the course of chapter seven, the slaves are repeatedly compared to the dogs in their responses to hunting the architect, but it is when he is finally caught at last that the text suggests the slaves expect and intend to eat the captured architect as prize: "Grandfather said how maybe the niggers believed that by fleeing the architect had voluntarily surrendered his status as interdict meat, had voluntarily offered the gambit by fleeing, which the niggers had accepted by chasing him and won by catching him, and that now they would be allowed to cook and eat him, both victors and vanquished accepting this in the same spirit of sport and sportsmanship and no rancor or hard feelings on either side" (206). Notice, however, that Grandfather's ideas about why the slaves are "making a racket now" (206) at the catching of the architect are all preceded by a "maybe"—the story he tells is entirely supposition, suggesting further the misreading of those in the town about Sutpen's "wild" slaves.

the slaves directly in the present time (as they were slaves in the past, and no longer are at the time of Quentin's narration); they exist only in recollections of the past events for the two. The difference in Miss Rosa's details and those we learn later reinforces the way that the novel foregrounds the narrative construction of myth, and indeed, narrative construction of race and culture in the assumptions that Miss Rosa and others make about the slaves. Before we learn that the slaves are speaking French, Rosa tells Quentin that they communicate "in that tongue in which they slept in the mud of that swamp and brought here out of whatever dark swamp he had found them in and brought them here" (17). The language itself she describes as arising from a "dark swamp," associating it with an image of muck and place of wilderness, as well as with inscrutability—the "dark" language cannot be understood. Further, Miss Rosa's view of the power dynamics between Sutpen and the slaves relies on an assumption of his own ferocity and ability to incite fear. Rosa says Sutpen is "a man who rode into town out of nowhere with a horse and two pistols and a herd of wild beasts that he had hunted down singlehanded because he was stronger in fear than even they were in whatever heathen place he had fled from, and that French architect who looked like he had been hunted down and caught in turn by the negroes" (10). Ironically, Christianity of some sort would likely have been a big part of the colonial practices of Sutpen's Caribbean, undercutting Miss Rosa's sense that the slaves and Sutpen "fled" from a "heathen place"; the assumptions she makes about the slaves as symbols of what is wild and dark prove incorrect as the narrative progresses. Sutpen is not "stronger in fear" as we see in his dealing with them on the plantation, and the way she describes the slaves as "wild beasts" that he "hunted down" in a "herd" further distances the slaves from what she sees as civilized, known, and understood—and indeed, human. Instead, we see

that they are a product of civilization, the hidden product that supports the racial, cultural, and economic practices in the "civilized" world, specifically the United States, through their ties to the Caribbean and colonial empire.

Rosa is not alone in the assumptions about the slaves, however; the legend of the slaves among townspeople associates them with dark magic, and there were some townsmen "who believed apparently that the wild niggers which he had brought here had the power to actually conjure more cotton per acre from the soil than any tame ones had ever done" (57). In reality, it may be the Caribbean colonial origins of the slaves that are responsible for what seems to be their ability to "conjure" cotton. The hard laboring and violent Caribbean practices may be responsible for the "more cotton" that Sutpen's Hundred is able to grow, which is hardly mystical but instead very material. In that case, Sutpen's success as a plantation owner would also rest on those colonial practices that produced them rather than his mythic presence, or that of his slaves. However, this, along with their actual origins, is lost behind the legend of the "wild" slaves, which are narratively constructed by the town as primitive, serving as Sutpen's hunting dogs to drive out the game: "the legend of the wild men came gradually back to town, brought by the men who would ride out to watch…who began to tell how Sutpen would take stand beside a game trail with pistols and send the negroes in to drive the swamp like a pack of hounds" (27). The slaves work tirelessly to drag the plantation of Sutpen's Hundred from the swamp; they are the physical labor that makes the system possible, but in many ways the town reads their differences as indicative of wildness or ties to the animal world, reading against the other evidence of cultural sophistication.

The violence between Sutpen and revolting slaves in Haiti, a scene that occurs about half way through the novel, is reflected earlier in the text in scenes where Sutpen fights his own slaves on Sutpen's Hundred—a scene chronologically after his experiences of slave revolt in Haiti. Quentin references his Grandfather's knowledge of these fights with his slaves, telling Shreve that "Grandfather himself had seen [Sutpen] fight naked chest to chest with one of his wild niggers by the light of the camp fire while his house was building and…still fought with them by lantern light in the stable" (203). Significantly, the insistence that he "still" fights with them, something witnessed by Grandfather, suggests that the fighting is not to be read as an anomaly arising out of the difficult living circumstances around the construction of the plantation. The fighting was not play and not gentle in Grandfather's recollection: "no bones about the fighting either, no handshaking and gratulations while he washed the blood off and donned his shirt because at the end of it the nigger would be flat on his back with his chest heaving and another nigger throwing water on him" (203-04). Miss Rosa tells how her sister Ellen, Sutpen's second wife, discovers these fights between Sutpen and the slaves, having previously thought that the white men gathered to watch two slaves fighting each other: "Ellen seeing not the two black beasts she had expected to see but instead a white one and a black one, both naked to the waist and gouging at one another's eyes as if their skins should not only have been the same color but should have been covered with fur too" (20-21). Ellen, like the other townspeople, sees an animalistic capacity in both Sutpen and the slaves, something she ties directly to race—that the skins should be "the same color"—black—but also "covered with fur."

The portrayal of Sutpen's fights with the slaves demonstrates the way the text insists on reading both through the lens of the community. Miss Rosa recalls this as a

"spectacle, as a grand finale or perhaps as a matter of sheer deadly forethought toward the retention of supremacy, domination, he would enter the ring with one of the negroes himself…naked and panting and bloody to the waist" (21). Though she sees it as assertion of brute "supremacy, domination," the fighting would seem to suggest an allegiance and connection, rather than disconnection, between Sutpen and the slaves in the same way that we later hear his endurance of pain in the Haitian revolt yokes them together. Miss Rosa repeats that both are "naked" and "bloody," though it is unclear with whose blood. It is true that we do not see Sutpen lose to a slave—so he must be physically dominant, and must also assert domination, the text suggests—but with the shared violence on the body as both men bleed in these fights, Faulkner indicates the continuation of Sutpen's process of identification with the slaves.

In addition to language signifying the ways that Sutpen's slaves are misunderstood in the text, language plays a crucial role in Sutpen's own experiences in the Caribbean and hence the development of his design. According to Quentin's father, language is the root of the mistake in Sutpen's design. This concentration on language suggests on the one hand a link to the power of narrative, but on the other hand references the cross-cultural origins of the nation. A multi-lingual and cultural knowledge is required of Sutpen in the Caribbean. This comes by means of the creole French that Sutpen must quickly learn once he arrives in Haiti. Once there, Sutpen "realised that he would not only need courage and skill, he would have to learn to speak a new language, else that design to which he had dedicated himself would die still-born" (200). Sutpen must learn to speak the literal language of Caribbean empire or not participate in it; his "design" to ascend the American class system is constructed as entirely dependent on this possibility of Caribbean fluidity. The image of the

design that would "die still-born" directly ties language to the production of children, of heirs, to which Sutpen is so devoted and on whom Sutpen rests his hopes for success. Sutpen himself indicates how important language is to his experiences of empire and the construction of his design; the only thing Sutpen tells to Grandfather Compson about his first six or seven years in the Caribbean is "about the patois he had to learn in order to oversee the plantation, and the French he had to learn, maybe not to get engaged to be married, but which he would certainly need to be able to repudiate the wife after he had already got her" (200). So it is two languages in reality rather than one that he must learn, the mixed patois of the slaves and the formal French of the owners that Sutpen needs to speak in order to then become part of that economic and cultural class—he must learn to speak the right language for each identity and space. Mr. Compson tells Quentin that Sutpen forms his plan "in a country and among a people whose very language he had to learn and where because of this he was to make that mistake which if he had acquiesced to it would not even have been an error and which, since he refused to accept it or be stopped by it, became his doom" (41). That is, because he had to learn the "very language" of the people there, he is unable to understand the culture, not having been formed by it. The planter and his family claim that the daughter Sutpen is to marry, and also her mother, is of Spanish origin, but she is actually part black—something not acceptable to Sutpen's design to solidify a legacy for his family in the United States. The "mistake" he makes is in some ways cultural and inevitable from his interactions in the Caribbean; Sutpen is trying to shore up an identity in the United States as a white Southern aristocrat, and the Caribbean identity of racial and cultural mixing is the space in which he can attain this, but it is also the space in which that dream of cultural and racial purity has no resonance. He longs for the fluidity of

the Caribbean culture to overcome his poor class origins and reject naturalized identity categories. However, Sutpen then rejects that same fluidity of identity in relation to race when trying to establish a specific position in the United States, a country that at his time also rejects and denies that fluidity in a legal, cultural, and moral sense—most particularly in terms of race.

Chapter seven of *Absalom,* where Sutpen "went to the West Indies," maps a complex, hemispheric geography of America through its intersecting narratives. Instead of telling only the story of Haiti, the chapter yokes together at least four major narratives in the text: Sutpen's young life in West Virginia and Virginia, Sutpen's time in Haiti, Sutpen's time constructing the plantation Sutpen's Hundred in the Mississippi swamp, and a retelling of Sutpen's death at the hands of Wash Jones on Sutpen's Hundred (which we have just heard in chapter six, with a few new details here). The spaces in which these stories are told range from the Mississippi swamp, the Harvard dorm room of Quentin Compson, and, before that, Quentin's home in Mississippi, where he hears many of the stories from his father. He then tells the stories to Shreve, a Canadian to whom he feels joined "in a sort of geographical transubstantiation" (208)—meaning that the geographic connections range from all the way down in Haiti up to Canada in this chapter alone.

In the course of chapter seven, Quentin and Shreve at Harvard retell how Sutpen tells his story of origin to Quentin Compson's Grandfather in the Mississippi swamp. The men are chasing the literal architect of Sutpen's design, that is, "the French Architect" (4) who is in the middle of building the plantation house Sutpen's Hundred and has escaped into the wilderness. Precisely speaking, the "captive architect," "manacled among" (4) the slaves when Sutpen arrives the second time in town to bring the slaves, is in fact a French

colonialist from Martinique: "Years later the town learned that he had come all the way from Martinique on Sutpen's bare promise" (26). Never paid during his time working on the house, the "bare promise" of Sutpen, that spoken agreement that they form, signifies the value the architect and Sutpen place on words. That as an architect he is materially responsible for creating Sutpen's Hundred, the plantation that would fortify Sutpen's identity in the American racial and class system, indicates the deep ties in the text between the Caribbean and the material foundations of America.[5] That the architect is literally "captive" and "manacled," at least in Quentin's telling of his arrival, suggests the ways that Caribbean imperialism is enslaved to the foundation of the United States, in both a material and ideological sense. The symbol of the enslaved architect becomes more comic as the novel progresses, with his always-formal dress against the untamed Mississippi swamp and against the rugged, hard living that the architect, the slaves, and Sutpen all endure as the plantation is built, which peaks in his escape. Quentin narrates to Shreve that it was in the swamp that Sutpen "told Grandfather about it…That time when the architect escaped, tried to escape into the river bottom and go back to New Orleans or wherever" (177). Quentin signals that the space and circumstances in which the story emerged from Sutpen to be told to Grandfather Compson is crucial in understanding the narrative itself, and arises in a sort of mythic construction of Sutpen's identity. The escape and chase of the architect through this murky swampland recalls for Sutpen the story of founding his design. This suggests a

[5] Barbara Ladd suggests, "it is certainly of some ironic import that the architect for Sutpen's mansion should be a colonialist Frenchman from Martinique, because in so many ways the slave culture that the Anglo planter in the Deep South inherited (if not the slave culture he envisioned) was established upon a West Indian—predominantly French and Spanish—foundation" ("Creole Poetics" 143).

strong tie in the text between physical and narrative space, and foregrounds the role of material space in solidifying narratives of and about America.

The architect is fundamental to Sutpen's dream of constructing a place for himself in aristocratic society. By building Sutpen's Hundred, the townspeople can no longer resist Sutpen's presence. That the architect is not a Frenchman but rather a French colonialist highlights the absolute dependence that American identity has on colonial practices in the Caribbean and elsewhere. The ridiculous image of the French architect being pulled muddy from the swamp by Sutpen's "wild" (4) slaves at the end of the chase, in his ripped frock coat, mocks the supposed civilized heritage and history that serves as a master narrative in the construction of America. Instead, the image points to the ways in which savagery and slavery, and colonial practices, do not just happen to arise along with the construction of America physically and ideologically, but are indeed inseparable from it. To make the divided, bounded, American nation, violence is an inevitable result of the possessive spatial and narrative practices. The architect is "a small, alertly resigned man with a grim, harried Latin face, in a frock coat and flowered waistcoat and a hat which would have created no furore on a Paris boulevard, all of which he was to wear constantly for the next two years—the somberly theatric clothing and the expression of fatalistic and amazed determination" (26). His "theatric" costuming signals not only the ways in which he is out of place, but the theatricality of the whole enterprise—Sutpen constructing a house in order to construct an identity, finding with the house the proper stage set to support and solidify Sutpen's place in society.

When the architect is finally caught by the dogs and the slaves and pulled from the swamp after the chase, language again comes to the forefront. Quentin recalls his

Grandfather explaining that as he is pulled upright "out of his cave" (206) the architect begins "making them a speech in French, a long one and so fast that Grandfather said probably another Frenchman could not have understood all of it. But it sounded fine; Grandfather said even he—all of them—could tell that the architect was not apologising; it was fine" (207). That he "was not apologising" and that this "sounded fine," "was fine," indicates a kind of sport to his chase, which is preserved by the very fact that he does not apologize—it preserves the spirit of revolt and determination in which he ran. Even though much of the speech is lost in translation because of the speed and length, the men there, "all of them," even those who do not speak French, understood the meaning. The architect, caught after "fifty-odd hours of dark and swamp and sleeplessness and fatigue and no grub and nowhere to go and hope of getting there," was nonetheless "not scared worth a damn" and "not beaten by a damn sight" (207). Through his actions at the end of the chase, he too seems bound to Thomas Sutpen and his own unflagging pursuit of his design. The escape and the chase of the architect solidify his place as proper constructor of Sutpen's design, and solidify the mythic presence of Sutpen in the community. The figure of the architect juxtaposed with that of the "wild" slaves further calls into question the ways the town and the text envision civilization and culture.

"He never even give me a chance to say it": Sutpen and Narrative Mastery

Quentin insists on narrating Sutpen's history in a way that reflects how it emerged between Sutpen and his Grandfather, meaning that he is not only telling a story in chapter seven, but also telling a story *about* telling a story. Quentin and Shreve fight over control of the narration often—there are many instances where one asks the other to "Wait" (222) as they untangle the stories. Quentin insists, "I am telling" (222) at one point when Shreve

tries to narrate instead. When Shreve does take over from Quentin at another point, he commands, "you wait. Let me play a while now" (224), indicating with this "play" the uncertainty of the narrative they are telling, and the performative nature of their shared telling. As they tell the story of it, the text suggests the lessons Sutpen learns in boyhood, in West Virginia and Virginia, underscore the way in which his crisis that led him to Haiti is actually a narrative one—and therefore so is the "design" that answers the crisis. A boy of around fourteen (but unsure of his own age), living in the Tidewater region of Virginia, Sutpen is sent to a plantation house with a message from his often-drunk father; the message itself is lost to retelling in the novel. At the door, he is told by a well-dressed slave "never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back" (188). With patched, rough clothes, bare feet, uncombed hair, he is nevertheless completely unaware that appearance is either anything important, or that his appearance has any meaning for marking his identity. Further, the spatial enforcement of identity—keeping him separated from the domestic space of the house in policing the entrance to the front door—emphasizes the materiality of identity construction and maintenance. It is this grand "innocence" of class identity, in Sutpen's own retelling, that is shattered as he realizes "the terrible part of it" (191)—that his message is never given to anyone: "*He never even give me a chance to say it. Not even to tell it, say it"* (192). Rather than being turned away from the door itself causing the crisis, causing insult or embarrassment, it is the realization that he has no narrative power that haunts Sutpen.

This first realization leads to the loss of his innocence—Sutpen realizes his own inability to matter in a narrative sense as he expands on not being able to "tell it": "*He never gave me a chance to say it and Pap never asked me if I told him or not and so he cant even*

know that Pap sent him any message and so whether he got it or not cant even matter…I not only wasn't doing any good to him by telling it or any harm to him by not telling it, there aint any good or harm either in the living world that I can do to him" (192). Sutpen places his insignificance in narrative terms, that "there aint any good or harm" he can do narratively in his current identity status—even as he envisions killing the slave at the door as one option of responding to the crisis. The realization of his narrative insignificance comes "like an explosion—a bright glare that vanished and left nothing" (192). Thomas Sutpen seeks narrative inclusion, that his "telling" will "matter." That Shreve and Quentin fight over telling his story years later, and even argue over telling the story of *how* Sutpen told Grandfather, signifies that Sutpen achieves this narrative mastery that he once wished for. Quentin recalls that in Sutpen's telling, "he was not talking about himself. He was telling a story" (199). He speaks in distant terms about the character Sutpen, who has come to have narrative meaning through his experiences in Haiti.

The narrative form of *Absalom* highlights the possession of one space and story within another, and compounds the focus on characters learning to master story. At the same time, the narrative form highlights means of evading the surety of linear narratives that support possession or conquering of the physical spaces. What is significant about Faulkner's particular take on modernist aesthetics is how the specific constructions of space are tied to one another by storytelling, and how that storytelling speaks to the constructions of an American identity. Faulkner actively seeks to dramatize the process of possessing in the attempts to solidify the physical spaces of empire and the imaginative spaces of nationhood. The formal narrative structure of the novel evidences the sense of being possessed in the way in which Faulkner connects the imagined landscapes within the

novel, embedding a vast geography within the story of a single chapter. Further, the narrative structure maps a hemispheric geography of America by utilizing narrative space and form to make claims on the possessions of America. This includes what haunts the stories and spaces of the nation, and what possessions of spaces and other civilizations make that very nation possible. Considering formal aspects of narrative in his classic 1978 study *The Spatiality of the Novel*, Joseph Kestner explains that novels, which are a necessarily temporal art that must be approached first and foremost through "successiveness," utilize the "secondary illusion" of simultaneity to create the "complete realization of the form" (19). In retelling Sutpen's time in Haiti in chapter seven, Faulkner transposes multiple spaces and narratives at once to create the "secondary illusion" of simultaneity, where all the stories are happening at once for the reader.

The novel reveals the always already failed nature of Sutpen's attempt to forge his identity by means of seizing control of material space, physically and imaginatively. Even as Thomas Sutpen seeks to master spaces around him, his mastery is dependent on, in Joseph Roach's term in *Cities of the Dead*, the surrogation of space and history. Roach defines surrogation as the substitution of imaginative alternatives into "cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure" (2). Loss, the fictional reconstruction of that loss, and, finally, a reclaiming of cultural inheritances are the means by which the characters seek to become part of the official discourse of the nation. Sutpen demonstrates the need to possess and the need to inherit the spaces and replace the stories of the past with performative substitutions of the original resonances. The novel undermines the claims on constructing empire, demonstrating through the choices of narrative space and narrated spaces the failures of physical and narrative possession.

The plantation Sutpen's Hundred is constructed as a way to bolster a wished-for identity for Sutpen. Possession of the physical landscape there becomes crucial to the possession of Sutpen's story—that is, the achievement of his design. The moments of possession in the novel necessitate Roach' sense of surrogation, or the performative replacing of one culture for another to forge a coherent whole to a nation or group. In the novel this surrogation takes the form of finding—but also rejecting—connections to imagined pasts through encounters with physical spaces of America and elsewhere. Thomas Sutpen seizes possession of the material space of Sutpen's Hundred, Miss Rosa tells Quentin, "from a tribe of ignorant Indians, nobody knows how" (10). However, we later learn more when Quentin's father tells him about Sutpen, "if he had misused or injured anybody, it was old Ikekemotubbe, from whom he got his land—a matter between his conscience and Uncle Sam and God" (33). Not just "from a tribe," but from a specific, named person, takes away some of the mythologizing of Miss Rosa's account of Sutpen's seizure of the land. With the inclusion of "Uncle Sam," colloquially personifying the United States, Quentin's father suggests a more insidious, institutionalized exploitation of Ikekemotubbe, with the country failing to protect his land and interests or explicitly setting up a system by which Sutpen is so easily able to take the land. We also learn that "It was the Chickasaw Indian agent with or through whom he dealt" (25) in making the deal to secure "a hundred square miles of some of the best virgin bottom land in the country" (26). Rather than useless or wasted land, the landscape of Sutpen's Hundred is the "best," preserved from development through its ownership by Ikekemotubbe. In describing the construction of Sutpen's Hundred, Miss Rosa informs Quentin Compson in her drawing room at the start of the novel that Sutpen "Tore violently a plantation" (5) from the land, and Quentin

imagines "the wild blacks and the captive architect huddled quietly, carrying in bloodless paradox the shovels and picks and axes of peaceful conquest" (4). Sutpen's later story of his own formation in Haiti reveals that those "bloodless" tools are indeed those of conquest, but are in fact tainted with blood. However, this reality is covered with the fiction of empire and the conquest of material land as outside of the economy of human blood and suffering. Sutpen inhabits the land as though it were empty of meaning and life, ignoring the original histories of the land itself by recreating a foundational story, by this absence able to "drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing" (4).

The material history of the land during the time of the "Indians" from whom Sutpen took the land is written over by the fictions of fresh foundation. The story of loss or extinction of the Indians from whom Sutpen took the land makes room for a new narrative of "peaceful conquest" on the part of Sutpen and his slaves. It also makes room for his lineage and claim to the physical land of America. As Lucy Maddox argues in her book *Removals*, the extinction of the Indians was imagined, particularly in nineteenth-century literature, as a means to possess and to construct the American nation. The loss of story and of physical space, and the exclusion of Native Americans from the larger master narrative of the United States as a nation except as imagined ancestors for the nation, was central to forming the distinctly American identity. Claiming Native American roots in literature, even if the narratives told were ostensibly about the loss of Native American culture, served to differentiate American and European cultural identity.[6] According to Maddox, the imagined extinction of the Native Americans allowed for an imagined heritage

[6] For a thorough accounting of the Indian presence and symbol in American literature, see Lucy Maddox, *Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991. In particular, see "Civilization or Extinction?" 15-50.

that was centrally unifying for American spaces and selves. Sutpen's mysterious seizing of the land and domination of the narrative dramatizes the way that there is a gap even in the narrative of loss.

"A theatre for violence": Haiti and the Space of Revolution

Given his ultimate attempt at mastery of narrative in the text through his time in Haiti, I argue that Sutpen himself (and also Quentin, given his control over retelling the story) demonstrates an acute awareness of United States imperial involvement. Moreover, Sutpen reveals an awareness of the seemingly contradictory means by which he himself constructs an American identity based on this imperial involvement in the Caribbean. Susan Stanford Friedman insists, "the local and the global are always already interlocking and complicitous" (110). This complicitous nature intimates the falseness of Quentin's description of Thomas Sutpen's ability to come "*out of nowhere and without warning upon the land*" (Faulkner 5) of Sutpen's Hundred in Mississippi in the imagined scene of its origin. Sutpen's storytelling reveals that coming "out of nowhere" is fundamentally dependent upon his experiences in Haiti, bloody and bodily experiences that allow him to return to America with a new possession of space. Faulkner's narrative interconnections and Sutpen's imperial knowledge are actually founded on "the black bones and flesh and thinking and remembering and homes and desires…ravished by violence" (202) in the Caribbean.

Many critical examinations of Haiti as Thomas Sutpen's space of masterly development have explored Faulkner's misdating of the Haitian slave revolution in the novel to a date much later than it would have historically occurred. Richard Godden details, "In 1791 slaves revolted on San Domingo…By 1804 the Americas had their first black

national state, the independent republic of Haiti" (685). Godden traces that Sutpen "went to the West Indies" (Faulkner 193) in 1823, later quelling the plantation uprising in 1827. According to Godden, most scholars "urge error" (685) on reading the anachronism—that Faulkner simply makes a mistake with the misdated revolution. However, he proposes, "In the South, Haiti is synonymous with revolution, and whether that be positively or negatively viewed it is not something about which Southern authors with an interest in antebellum history lightly make mistakes" (686). The anachronism, to him, "looks suspiciously like an act of literary counter-revolution" (Godden 685), which rewrites the outcome of Haiti's successful revolt at first glance, turning it into a failure (given that Sutpen "subdued" the revolt in the novel (204)). This means that "the hero…earn[s] the properties upon which he will eventually base his plantation 'design,' improperly. There were neither slaves nor French plantations on Haiti in 1827" (685). Ultimately Godden argues that alteration of dates is a result of Faulkner's "wish to foreground the continuous potential for revolution within the institution of slavery" (686). To introduce the idea "that slavery is an undeclared state of war, in which black revolution is a permanent risk" (687), Godden concludes, "he needs Haiti, the only successful black revolution" (689), a cultural reference that would have been well known at the publication of the novel in 1936.

Significantly, John T. Matthews counters that the dating is not an "anachronism" at all, but rather that Haiti stands as the grand example of Sutpen's "innocence" (183) in the narrative: "Sutpen may not register that the black plantation workers he oversees are not technically slaves; he cares only that they may be treated that way" (253). Faulkner's dating, he contends, could be read as a portrayal of the labor systems in Haiti at the time, and that "although Quentin describes what seems to be a slave insurrection, neither he nor

Sutpen uses the term *slave*" (252). The deliberate failure to see—and to tell—on the part of Sutpen and his narrators demonstrates how, "For Sutpen, to look is to overlook" (238). Matthews' phrase reflects back on the way Faulkner describes Sutpen in Haiti, "overseeing what he oversaw and not knowing that he was overseeing it" (203). Matthews posits overlooking as an alternative to the "innocence" (Faulkner 203) proposed by the *Absalom* narrators, surmising that it is precisely the skill to overlook that leads to the creation of a successful Southerner, and a successful aristocrat. Yet in this reading, Sutpen's encounter with revolt in Haiti is in fact given less weight, as it is prior to the violence that he "overlooks" signs of the oncoming revolt, hints of unrest and violence that he does not know how to interpret. That the "planter-in-training learns how not to pay attention" (254) in Haiti is not borne out by the work, since Sutpen does not learn how to "overlook"—he was already doing a good job at that in his own examples of "innocence"—but rather he learns that he *has* overlooked the significance of the story around him.

Matthews suggests that for many Faulkner scholars themselves, "to look is to overlook" as they continue to read *Absalom* and other novels based on "assumptions of US exceptionalism, imperial indifference to prenational colonial origins, the peculiarization of the slaveholding South by the rest of the country, and other forms of self-conceptual insularity" (238). In the end, Matthews claims, the failure of the *Absalom* narrators to clarify the historical condition of the "West Indies" in Sutpen's time reflects "an extensive cultural apparatus dedicated to preserving masterly innocence in new-world colonial Souths, and US imperial innocence in the postcolonial world" (239). Despite the called-for attack on "self-conceptual insularity" and "assumptions of US exceptionalism" on the part of critics who had long ignored the transnational construction of nation in *Absalom*,

Matthews' attack on the narrators themselves as evidence of this "cultural apparatus" to preserve innocence overlooks the mechanics of Chapter seven and the way Haiti is framed in the text. Sutpen's storytelling—where and how the interlocking narratives arise—read against accounts of his innocence on the construction of imperial power. Rather than innocent about the ways in which constructions of the United States are dependent on elsewhere, and particularly on violence and losses elsewhere, Sutpen is directly in possession of a more foreboding construction of American imperial identity. It is not just that he goes to Haiti and learns there what he needs to know as an American slaveholder, but rather the way he connects the story of his past to the accounts of his present construction of Sutpen's Hundred and the escape of the architect. Faulkner's narrative choices indicate Sutpen's knowledge, not innocence. He does not "overlook" on the role of the Caribbean in the South and in larger American identity; narrative acts are crucial in forming and solidifying that identity.

Absalom, Absalom! was conceived and written during the 1920s and 1930s, when the United States as an empire began to fully emerge. Matthews makes a strong argument that Faulkner's work represents an "anxiety that modern US imperialism was tending to revive and refurbish colonial plantation pasts in its plans for new territories" (240), thereby calling for a re-examination of these colonial pasts to understand the empire of the present in the 1930s. He outlines another level of analysis that Faulkner scholars employ on the place of Haiti in his work, recognizing that when Faulkner wrote *Absalom, Absalom!* prior to publication in 1936, America was at the end of a nineteen-year military occupation of Haiti that was formative in the U.S. as empire. Thus Haiti was not just a site of successful

slave revolt, but also a site of United States occupation, thereby adding another contemporary resonance to the geography in the text. Mary A. Renda summarizes:

> The United States invaded Haiti in July 1915 and subsequently held the second oldest independent nation in the Western Hemisphere under military occupation for nineteen years. While in Haiti, marines installed a puppet president, dissolved the legislature at gunpoint, denied freedom of speech, and forced a new constitution on the Caribbean nation—one favorable to foreign investment. (10)

As Renda foregrounds, the U.S. empire has at stake far-reaching economic interests, which support its own formation and foundation while denying "freedom of speech" and self-governance to other independent nations. In recalling the revolutionary past of Haiti and connecting Thomas Sutpen to colonial struggles as well as to the role of Haiti in America's empire building, Faulkner demonstrates the long continuity of United States involvement in the Caribbean. According to Renda, at the time of Faulkner's writing of the novel, "Americans redefined the boundaries of their national community in part through discussions of Haiti" (21). The slave revolution led by Toussaint L'Ouverture in the late eighteenth century became an important narrative for Americans considering the question of slavery, "proof that people of African heritage could govern themselves, on the one side; proof that they could not, on the other" (Renda 29). The military occupation of Haiti in the early twentieth century shaped both "individual subjectivities and imperialist discourses" (Renda 307) in the United States, though ultimately Renda concludes that while "Haiti helped to redefine America as an empire and no longer 'merely' a republic…U.S. attention to Haiti provided cultural resources to African Americans for their challenge to the dominant association between whiteness and American identity" (305). Renda stresses, on

the other hand, that the occupation also "enabled the deployment of a cultural line of defense against domestic black and feminist challenges to the status quo…discussions of Haiti contributed to a defense of white supremacy conceived in terms of gender and sexuality" (305). Faulkner's recreation of Haiti in *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1936 reflects both historical resonances, first, as the eighteenth-century site of violent, and ultimately successful slave revolt that led to the establishment of an independent black republic in the early nineteenth century, and second, as the twentieth-century site of U.S. military and cultural involvement that aided in the development of the United States as an empire.

No matter Faulkner's intention with regard to dating the Haitian revolution long after its historical occurrence in 1791, Haiti clearly has cultural meanings intimately bound both to slave revolt and empire foundation in *Absalom*. Haiti appears through layers of mediation in the text; it is embedded in a story told in Cambridge, Massachusetts, about a story told in the Mississippi swamp, about a story that happened in Haiti, all made simultaneous in the narrative space. As Renda theorizes, historically Haiti impacted both "individual subjectivities and imperialist discourses" (307); similarly, Thomas Sutpen's "individual subjectivity" is a means of examining "imperialist discourses" of the United States in the pre-civil war era in the text. How those discourses are remembered and retold—by Sutpen, Quentin's Grandfather, Quentin's Father, Miss Rosa, Quentin, and Shreve—intimate the ways in which the Caribbean and colonial violence is inextricable from nationalistic narratives.

In the course of telling about Haiti, space itself becomes a central focus of Faulkner's narrators in chapter seven. This allows the imagined material space to bolster the stories of identity formation that they tell. In her book *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies*, Mary Pat

Brady draws on Doreen Massey to declare, "space depends crucially on the notion of articulation" (7). That is, space must be spoken into being, socially and linguistically signified, much along the lines of how Faulkner describes Quentin's imagined construction of Sutpen's Hundred, that Sutpen "creat[es] the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*" (4). This reference to biblical origin shows Quentin's naturalization of this speaking of space into being, and the further tying of Sutpen's own construction with an originary construction of the spaces of the country, naturalizing but also mythologizing his presence as God-like through this spoken command. Brady suggests that space is never outside the realm of language: "the concept of spatial articulation highlights the sociality of space and the spatiality of language" (7). Narrative is thus crucial in the production of presumably material spaces; Brady emphasizes that in using space and spatial concepts metaphorically, "literature illustrates and enlarges the shaping force of narrative in the production of space, highlighting the discursiveness of space, its dependence on cultural mediation" (8). Race, class, sexuality, and gender "emerge simultaneously, if unevenly, through both the discursive and the spatial, and in this conjunction become something almost hyperreal, or naturally natural" (8-9). Brady argues in her book that Chicana literature, specifically, contests the naturalization of identity "by refusing a too-rigid binary between the material and the discursive" (6) and thereby articulates a powerful model for literary resistance to naturalized categories of identity, such as those of class and national identity faced by Thomas Sutpen.

Through his encounter with Haiti, Sutpen learns the power of articulating space and self, but in the end he is destroyed by his failure to allow for other narratives of fluid identity construction. He rejects his son Bon, who he sees as permanently tainted by virtue

of his mother being part black, given Sutpen's desire to become part of the white ruling class in the United States. Sutpen's son Henry kills Bon before he can marry Sutpen's daughter, Henry's sister, Judith—not because it would be a brother marrying a sister, but because of race: "*So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear*" (285), Bon tells Henry after Henry learns about Bon's origins and forbids the marriage. In the end, Sutpen is murdered by Wash Jones for rejecting Sutpen's baby born to Jones's granddaughter—all because the baby was a girl and not a boy. A daughter of a lower class white woman, born out of wedlock, the child has no value to Sutpen or his design—an insult quickly realized by Wash Jones, who fundamentally believed in a connection to, not distance from, Sutpen and his own humble origins and story of ascending class boundaries.

Significantly, Faulkner's literary implication of the connections between the South, and the Caribbean is not altogether unique—the theme was employed by Herman Melville as early as 1855. As Alfred J. Hunt recalls, Melville first utilized the theme, in Hunt's words, "that the South was not wholly American but was largely African" in origin (7). In his story "Benito Cereno," Melville fictionalizes an account of a slave revolt aboard the ship the *San Dominick*. According to Eric J. Sundquist, "it has been easy for readers since then to miss the full implications of Melville's invocation of Caribbean revolution or to misconstrue the historical dimensions of his masquerade of rebellion" (138). When fictionalizing the story of revolt on the ship, Melville, alters the historical date of the events from 1805 back to 1799, placing the tale squarely in the revolutionary period rather than after independence, which was gained in 1804 (Sundquist 140). Sunquist's essential reading of Melville rests on his portrayal of slavery as masquerade: "By reconfiguring the machinery of slavery as a masquerade, exposing its appeal to natural law as the utmost artifice, Melville suggested

that there was *no future*, as it were, for the experiment of American democracy so long as the paralysis of inequality continued" (139). Setting his story in revolutionary Haiti, or San Domingo as it was known before 1804, "does not prophesy a civil war but rather anticipates…an explosive heightening of the conflict between American democracy, Old World despotism, and Caribbean New World revolution" (143).

"Benito Cereno" is the story of an American captain happening upon a ship where a slave revolt has occurred, and as details of the revolt are gradually revealed, Melville creates a "pervasive aura of paralysis…revolutionary gestures held in perilous suspension, replicat[ing] in narrative form a crisis in temporality in which past, present, and future…seem one" (Sundquist 143). As in Faulkner's work, in Melville's story time also collapses on itself and the story must be unwound in a way proper to accommodate the story it is trying to tell. Sundquist sees "Benito Cereno" as a way in which "Caribbean revolution" comes into focus, and in fact "yokes it to America's paralyzed revolutionary moment. The two worlds are layered upon each other, made simultaneous, as the black world of the American and French political fathers" (175). He refers to the unfolding scene of revolt as "theater": "The theater of the ship is replicated in the theater of Delano's mind, each a stage on which revolt and repression play out the parasitic dialectic of slavery" (149).

The theatricality of the South, and by implication, the nation, is frequently referenced by the *Absalom* narrators as well, suggesting a deeply performative construction of national identity and Southern identity. Shreve opens chapter seven of *Absalom* by calling the South "fine, isn't it. It's better than theatre, isn't it. It's better than Ben Hur, isn't it. No wonder you have to come away now and then, isn't it" (176). Shreve's

repetitive claim of "isn't it" coupled with his comparison of the South to "theatre," and indeed epic, creates a sense of performativity in Shreve's questioning of Quentin, and of an awareness of the narrative production of "the South" as a place. Shreve's "theatre" is reflected in several ways in chapter seven, the first of which is when Quentin retells the story of Sutpen telling General Compson (Grandfather) about his time in the West Indies. The story he tells is set in "a spot of earth which might have been created and set aside by heaven itself, Grandfather said, as a theatre for violence and injustice and bloodshed and all the satanic lusts of human greed and cruelty, for the last despairing fury of all the pariah-interdict and all the doomed" (202). Haiti is constructed as a distinctly performative site, the stage on which to play out the basest human interests, flattened from its historical reality into the setting for the Sutpen's narrative construction of self. Grandfather's intimation suggests that "human greed" comes inevitably with "violence and injustice and bloodshed," when they find a place to play out. The "captive architect" (4) in his "theatric clothing" (26) further reflects this focus on theatricality and performance in Sutpen's construction of identity.

Narrative can work to highlight performativity when the story concentrates on narrating the material world, demonstrating the ways narrative underlies the physical world. Mieke Bal suggests, "In many cases…space is 'thematized': it becomes an object of presentation itself, for its own sake. Space becomes an 'acting place' rather than the place of action…The fact that 'this is happening here' is just as important as 'the way it is here,' which allows these events to happen" (136). "Thematized" space in chapter seven of *Absalom, Absalom!* extends from Sutpen's Hundred to Harvard, a Virginia plantation to Haiti as "the way it is here" becomes the determining factor in what events can occur.

Thomas constructs Sutpen's Hundred to fight against being told on a Virginia plantation as a child, at the genesis of his awareness of class, "never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back" (188). His response—constructing a spatial replica of the plantation house from which he was turned away—demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of "thematized" space. Sutpen works on a narrative level, recreating his narrative of self and altering what can "happen here" by recreating "the way it is here," reforming his identity by reconstructing the space around him.

Materiality is thus crucially important in the text and in Sutpen's own understanding of his identity, even in narrating his experiences as a young boy. Material objects become a means of understanding the discursive realities of the plantation system and Sutpen's role in it when he first discovers his "innocence" of the social system. He is able to relate the experience at the front door of the plantation house with his own life experience from the mountains by comparing it with someone who owns and shows off a fine rifle, lording power over those without a rifle. In the end, "If you were fixing to combat them that had the fine rifles, the first thing you would do would be to get yourself the nearest thing to a fine rifle you could borrow or steal or make" (192). Not the rifle itself, but the "nearest thing to a fine rifle," a simulation of it is enough; the appearance of power in material objects and land—or space—leads to the actual power: "to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what he did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with" (192). Gaining narrative power and voice is a matter of owning a fine house and a spot of earth, the stage-set necessary for a story of grandeur to be told. This focus on materiality to bolster identity suggests at once that identity is shored

up through material experience, but simultaneously undermines that same identity, which is based on a fluid construction of who can obtain it.

The slaves that help to construct Sutpen's Hundred are inextricably linked to the United States empire via the Caribbean. Because of this, Matthews concludes that the *Absalom* narrators "ignore historical truths they are in a position to admit plainly" (250). Yet, because the West Indies are constructed as a space through a series of lenses—looking through the window frame of Harvard, the window pane of the South on to the landscape of Haiti—the omission speaks to the way the Americans in the novel view themselves and their connection to the larger world. The nation, not just the South, is responsible for the construction of a discursive American space that violently naturalizes identity categories. I contend that "to admit plainly" the historical truths of Haiti or of the United States South is an impossibility in Faulkner's work, which highlights the complexity of origin and connection of national roots and identities. Because of his narrative structure in which one string is always inextricably tied to every other string you might pull, one space dependent on every other space, things are never as simple as plain "historical truths" in *Absalom.*

Faulkner's skirting of precise historical realities, which leaves Haiti as a shadowy place with a history of violence and oppression in the novel, allows the characters to demonstrate the power of discursive spatial construction. Maritza Stanchich claims that at stake is "the American myth of individuality and freedom, and its imperialist designs. America as empire is the foundation of this 1936 novel, though references to colonialism are minimal" (603). Stanchich sees Faulkner's use of the Caribbean constructs and "ancestry of ideology" (603) through constructions of race at home and abroad. American white supremacy is "expanded into imperialist policy" (603) through Sutpen "boldly

set[ting] out to construct his supremacy in Haiti" (604). She views Sutpen as shoring up "his class through race supremacy" (604). Significantly, however, Sutpen's actual, formative interaction with slaves of the plantation revolt creates less of an image of brute superiority and racial supremacy than fundamental connection to those in revolt—it is through violence enacted on his own body that the revolt is subdued.

"That besieged Haitian room": Telling Sutpen's Story

The architect's escape into the swamp around Sutpen's Hundred in chapter seven begins a long series of the word "So," which summarizes and concludes as the story is constructed by Quentin and Shreve. "So I reckon they never did know what the architect was there for" (177), Quentin concludes of why the slaves didn't notice or care that the architect went off. "So he did, jumped up in broad daylight, in his embroidered vest and Fauntleroy tie and a hat like a Baptist congressman" (177), he continues, painting the absurd picture of the architect's European-style, formal clothes against the unformed American swamp. Sutpen takes after the architect as a sort of performance, inviting neighbors and gathering dogs to aid in the search that results in the revelation of Sutpen's design: "so he told Grandfather something about it" (178). In reflecting on "the problematics of repetition" (336) that arise in Faulkner, which are particularly foregrounded in chapter seven of the novel, Hortense Spillers calls for "a discursive drowning…that requires the reading of a Faulkner novel as we would a poem, line by line" (347). Spillers contends that in all his retellings, "Faulkner seems to achieve striking emotional intensity and affect by accumulation in repetition, analogy, and correspondence or correlation in lines and scenes that do not always 'go' somewhere, although they stir up quite a commotion" ("Faulkner" 341). The commotion leads to a forgetting of the intricate

narrative devices that construct the story: "For long stretches of time, we actually do 'forget' that we are centered in *performance* and *performativity as narrative* and that, paradoxically, a world is *not* being brought to stand before our very eyes" (347). There always remains a distance between the reader and the space, sometimes through more than one narrative layer and, like in the case of the "wild" slaves, a layer of mediation that makes it almost impossible to untangle. Thus a consideration of repetition in the complicated revelation of Sutpen's origins focuses on the performative aspect of narrative that also helps to enact performative identities.

Sutpen's story begins in the West Virginia, or more properly, Virginia mountains, placeless, as Shreve protests, "Because…there wasn't any West Virginia in 1808" (179), as Quentin begins to tell about the West Virginia origins. From the start, the narrative recalls the constructedness of American space, pointing to the discursive nature of borders and identities in Sutpen's "West Virginia"-that-wasn't origins. The family "tumbled" down the mountains and into the tidewater plantation system, "So he knew neither where he had come from nor where he was nor why" (184), a spatial image of fluidity and uncertainty in his very origins. The repetition of "so" allows Quentin to give shape and connectedness to the narrative of Sutpen's life. When asked by his father to go to the plantation house with the message one day, Sutpen approaches, "and so to the house, the portico, the front door, thinking how at last he was going to see the inside of it" (185). When Sutpen is told "never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back" (188), it ensures that he knows his place in the plantation system as a poor white. Because space is central to the naturalization and the policing of identity, Sutpen begins to realize that to counter this assigned identity, he would need "the nearest thing" (192) to what the planters had to

combat them. After we hear of Sutpen's explosive realization, the ongoing narratives collapse:

> "He went to the West Indies." Quentin had not moved…"That was how he said it. He and Grandfather were sitting on a log now because the dogs had faulted. That is, they had treed—a tree from which he (the architect) could not have escaped yet which he undoubtedly mounted because they found the sapling pole with his suspenders knotted about one end of it that he had used to climb the tree." (193)

The moment of revelation that Sutpen's design was dependent on the "West Indies," not how or why, but just that "He went" occurs as the men believe they have trapped the architect, who in reality is traveling from tree to tree, using skills learned as an architect. While they wait for him to come down, Sutpen is inspired to reflect back on Haiti and "he told Grandfather some more of it" (193). Quentin again emphasizes,

> He went to the West Indies. That's how he said it: not how he managed to find where the West Indies were nor where ships departed from to go there, nor how he got to where the ships were and got in one nor how he liked the sea nor about the hardships of a sailor's life…He just said, "So I went to the West Indies," sitting there on the high log with Grandfather while the dogs still bayed the tree where they believed the architect was. (193)

The anaphora of "nor" creates an almost biblical rendering of the story, emphasizing just what we do not find out about his experience going to the West Indies. The repetition of "he"/"I" "went to the West Indies," circles back repeatedly on the moment of departure, creating the spatial "secondary illusion" that Joseph Kestner identifies as the means by

which a temporal art becomes spatialized and simultaneous. More than the formative moment at the door of the plantation house as a boy, the moment when he "went to the West Indies" remains frozen in the chapter, repeated five times. This implicates it as the formative moment of empire for Sutpen, and the origin of his design. Though "the West Indies" at first seems geographically vague in the text as Sutpen declares his departure, Quentin refers specifically to "the Haitian night" (204) (among a very few other specific mentions of Haiti in the chapter). The centering of Haiti in this way suggests an America not new to imperial encounter but where Sutpen's declaration that he "went to the West Indies," and the repetition of it by the other narrators, automatically carries the weight of Haitian history and American complicity.

Sutpen learns of the West Indies as a place of possibility directly from official United States discourse in the small amount of schooling he receives, further tying his experiences there to a larger narrative of United States imperialism and supremacy. Sutpen explains to Grandfather, "I had had some schooling during a part of one winter, enough to have learned something about them, to realise that they would be most suitable to the expediency of my requirements" (194). Though illiterate, Sutpen absorbs the West Indies as a discursive space through the schoolteacher's readings:

> he read to us and I anyway listened, though I did not know that in that listening I was equipping myself better for what I should later design to do than if I had learned all the addition and subtraction in the book. That was how I learned of the West Indies. Not of where they were, though if I had known at the time that that knowledge would someday serve me, I would have learned that too. What I learned was that there was a place called the West Indies to which poor men went in ships

> and became rich, it didn't matter how, so long as that man was clever and courageous. (195)

Not knowing where they are or much of what they are, before Sutpen constructs his own Haiti, the "West Indies" are constructed in the official American discourse as a place available for economic exploitation, a place of flux and wealth, where "poor men went in ships and became rich" through dubious means ("it didn't matter how"). More important than math—admittedly crucial to the economic success of an illiterate man—is the discourse of Caribbean geography that Sutpen learns. The story of history becomes a weapon for Sutpen in achieving his design. As Stanchich sums up, "The seed of imperialist white supremacy has been firmly planted in the mind of an insecure, young, white pre-Civil War Southern male, a mind that doubles for the American national conscience" (606). Sutpen's departure for Haiti is not an aberration, but rather continuous with nationalized constructions of race and power. In the final declaration of his departure, Sutpen implicates the schoolteacher's lesson directly in his departure: "I remembered what he had read to us and I went to the West Indies" (196).

Significantly, it is revolt that is emphasized in Sutpen's Haitian experience, and the details of his development and transformation in Haiti are left hazy; this further implicates the slave revolt there as the central experience in forging his design. Sitting on the log talking to Quentin's grandfather, suddenly, "without telling how he got to where he was nor even how what he was now involved in…came to occur" (198), Sutpen transports "himself and Grandfather both into that besieged Haitian room as simply as he got himself to the West Indies by saying he decided to go to the West Indies and so he went there" (199). The narrative leaps suddenly from the fact of his arrival to revolt. It is "because of that

innocence" that Sutpen "did not know, comprehend, what he must have been seeing every day" (203) leading up to revolt. The violence inherent in what is to come is not narrated by Sutpen. Before the moment of siege, the servants suddenly disappear, termed "half breeds" (203) as though they were animals by Quentin and the narrators. The term indicates that they are racially mixed, and though working in the house and not laboring in the field, they are not much accepted in either place. The body appears on the third day, and its appearance in a prominent, previously searched location shocks even Sutpen: "sitting there and telling Grandfather how at last he found the half breed, or what used to be the half breed, and that he (Sutpen) had seen as much as most men and had done as much as most, including some things which he did not boast about: but that there were some things which a man who pretended to be civilised saw when he had to but which he did not talk about, so he would only say that he found the half breed at last and so began to comprehend that the situation might become serious" (204). The extremity in the violence performed on the body is unspeakable even to Sutpen, someone who admits his own participation in "pretend[ing] to be civilised" and participating in what we can assume are other acts of naturalized violence (that he has "done as much as most"), but even "telling" about, narrating, this violence is too great an affront to the performance of civilization. Compare that violence with how Quentin describes the space of Haiti, "burdened still with the weary voices of murdered women and children homeless and graveless about the isolating and solitary sea" (204). The space itself is portrayed as materially inflicted with violence, "a soil manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation" (202), creating a space built on "the torn limbs and outraged hearts" and "old unsleeping blood that had vanished into the earth they trod still cried out for vengeance" (202). Faulkner

signifies an immeasurable loss of life and space of violence in this image of soil fed by blood, and the very specific, material, graphic images of dismemberment and bodily suffering.

Quentin hypothesizes that the "niggers and torches in front of them" on the hunt for the architect "called to [Sutpen's] mind the picture" (199) of the "besieged" room where he and the planter load muskets and fire from the windows. The Haitian slaves are now on Sutpen's side as he works with them to chase down the white architect, unlike when he hides in the besieged room in the West Indies after the slaves "rushed at him with their machetes" (201). The lack of information sets up a hazy scene of burning sugar fields and threatened violence: "No more detail and information about that than about how he got from the field, his overseeing, into the besieged house…than how he got from the rotting cabin in Virginia to the fields he oversaw" (201). Narrative loss is built into the storytelling of Sutpen, the connection of spaces made all the more solid through this loss and collapse.

Sutpen's retelling drops them squarely in the midst of the violence, directly into the besieged room. To Sutpen, the revolution is at first "a spectacle, something to be watched because he might not have the chance to see such again" (201), theater from which he learns how identities are constructed and solidified. In his "innocence" in Haiti, according to Quentin and Shreve, Sutpen doesn't know that "the sheen on the dollars was not from gold but from blood" (201-202) until after he experiences the besieged house. Again, the image of the bloody dollars points towards the inevitable ties between greed and violence, between economic exploitation of places and physical violence to bodies. It is not merely his experience as a plantation overseer, but rather his experience of slave revolt that

teaches him the implicit geopolitical connections between the system of money, power, and land, and actual human blood.

In Quentin's retelling, the history of the Haitian island lurks in the material space, ready to burst into realization—it is a haunted space in the text, which only portrays Haiti through the specific lens of violence and colonialism. We do not see Haiti outside of its historical significance to the United States in Sutpen's time. Buried along with seeds that produce economic wealth in Haiti is "the planting of men…the yet intact bones and brains in which the unsleeping blood that vanished into the earth they trod still cried out for vengeance" (202). As "Grandfather said," and Quentin retells, Haiti is

> a little island set in a smiling and fury-lurked and incredible indigo sea, which was the halfway point between what we call the jungle and what we call civilization, halfway between the dark inscrutable continent from which the black blood, the black bones and flesh and thinking and remembering and hopes and desires, was ravished by violence, and the cold known land to which it was doomed, the civilised land and people which had expelled some of its own blood and thinking and desires that had become too crass to be faced and borne longer, and set it homeless and desperate on the lonely ocean. (202)

Quentin-via-Grandfather constructs a binary of "cold known land"—America with its solidified discursive construction and the "dark inscrutable continent" of Africa that America has constructed, not able to be seen or understood as opposed to that known space of the United States nation. Even while presenting the binary, Quentin undermines it by noting it is merely "what we call the jungle and what we call civilization," and that the

island as the "halfway point" between being "ravished" and being "doomed" (neither a good option, it would seem), the island reflects the "blood and thinking and desires" of so-called civilization that are "too crass" to present openly. Thus Haiti is constructed as essentially a means by which the "civilised land" can remain "cold" and "known" while engaging in the "desires" it has theoretically expelled. Significantly, the black bodies are humanized here, unlike in many portrayals of the "wild" slaves; the "black blood, black bones and flesh" are connected to "thinking and remembering and hopes and desires"—all of this, the mind and the body together, are "ravished by violence." This suggests again that the "wild" way the town sees the slaves is deeply influenced by the result of the violence done to the wholeness they used to possess. The narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* openly engage with Haiti as a theater of the desires America cannot quite openly play out within its borders, making it a necessary part of constructing civilized life in the United States. Haiti is a spectacle for Sutpen, the space where revolt and resistance plays out before his eyes and he eventually formulates his own revolt against the naturalized hierarchies of American constructions of class.

In the end, Stanchich argues, "The book serves largely as an exercise to exorcise not only the demon of Sutpen but the evil premise of America" and in so doing undermines "American myth," and yet, "no fundamental change occurs. The revolutionary alternatives are placed out of reach by a myth too powerful to be conquered by the narrators" (614). However, in positing an alternative to naturalized identity categories and spatially demonstrating the interrelation of America and elsewhere in order to construct those discursive identities, I argue that ultimately there are "revolutionary alternatives" to these naturalized categories, precisely to be found in narrative reconstruction of that myth.

Recalling the link between material and discursive space, and moreover the triangular relationship between space, narrative, and identity, it is the very articulation of alternative constructions of United States imperial power that recovers "revolutionary alternatives." Sutpen's mastery of narrative both dramatizes the formation of empire and undermines those material foundations. Faulkner, then, accomplishes the simultaneous dramatization of the failures of empire and empire's spectacular, persuasive pull through his focus on materiality of narrative and space.

Importantly, Quentin reconstructs Haiti as "a little lost island," "a vacuum into which no help could come, where not even winds from the outer world came but only the trades" (204). It is, at the moment of crisis, seemingly cut off from a connection with the larger world as Sutpen blindly oversees the plantation, "not knowing that what he rode upon was a volcano" (202). Whereas Matthews argues that in Haiti Sutpen learns to overlook, to consciously avoid the hidden histories of a place, the danger that his insularity produces actually teaches Sutpen that he must not overlook, teaches him to watch the spectacle. It is why he knows, why he can see instantaneously that Bon is his son when Henry befriends him and moreover that his design, which he knew to be built on faulty foundations of fluidity, is utterly destroyed as he tries to shore up its foundations. As the waiting volcano begins to erupt in the revolt, it is no surprise that violence of the revolution is enacted on the body of "the half breed." The violence done to those in between racial identities serves as a protest against violent constructions of race; it suggests that the person who is in-between racial identities must be eliminated, and racial borders solidified, before the revolution can begin. Once it does, the besieged planters "fired at no enemy but at the Haitian night itself, lancing their little vain and puny flashes into the brooding and blood-

weary night and throbbing darkness" (204). The land of Haiti and the revolting slaves become inextricably linked in the retelling as the violent material history in the buried bones and blood come bubbling to the surface against the colonizing forces.

Quentin takes great pains to recount just "how he [Sutpen] told it" (204) to Grandfather, tracing the way in which Sutpen himself constructs the Haiti that then filters through the gaze of the other narrators in *Absalom*. The besieged planters reach a moment of desperation, "on the eighth night the water gave out and something had to be done so he put the musket down and went out and subdued them. That was how he told it: he went out and subdued them, and when he returned he and the girl [Eulalia] became engaged to marry" (204). The repetition of "he went out and subdued them" reflects back on when "he went to the West Indies," creating a mythic sense of mobility in Sutpen's character. When Grandfather protests that he said he didn't even know the name of the girl to whom he suddenly became engaged after he "subdued them," Sutpen replies, "you see, it took me some time to recover" (204), marking again the violence that Sutpen endures to "subdue" the revolt. The constant jumping forward in Sutpen's narrative, along with the repetition of images, phrases, and words creates a sense of simultaneity, interconnection, and inevitability. What is lost in his narrative is "how he did it. He didn't tell that either, that of no moment to the story either; he just put the musket down and had someone unbar the door and then bar it behind him, and walked out into the darkness and subdued them" (204-205). Sutpen's narrative reconstruction of himself is storytelling, a purposeful building of mythic moments around the history of violence in the space. Haiti has taught Sutpen to be the master of his story at the very least, acknowledging the discursive means through which the material is given solidity.

The moment of subduing that Quentin imagines undeniably results in violence on Sutpen's body but is otherwise left to his speculation. Quentin guesses that Sutpen did it "maybe by yelling louder, maybe by standing, bearing more than they believed any bones and flesh could or should (should, yes: that would be the terrible thing: to find flesh to stand more than flesh should be asked to stand)" (205), imagining that the scene unfolds with the "demon" Sutpen submitting to extreme torture rather than exerting brute force over those in revolt. It is at this moment that rather than form a rift, the revolutionaries and Sutpen are joined through the bodily torture that he, as they, have been able to endure. Yet, Quentin is invested in constructing Sutpen as wholly separate from those he faces, picturing the slaves "themselves turning in horror and fleeing from the white arms and legs shaped like theirs and from which blood could be made to spurt and flow as it could from theirs and containing an indomitable spirit which should have come from the same primary fire which theirs came from but which could not have, could not possibly have" (205). Significantly, Sutpen remains silent on the details subduing the revolt in telling Grandfather about it, allowing Quentin to construct him as the demonic, mythic figure that "could not possibly have" been human. Sutpen's body is marked with physical scars from the encounter, indicating that endurance of pain, even in Quentin's imagining, is at least part of the means by which the revolt is "subdued." While Quentin pictures "fleeing," the scars mark mutual understanding through bodily pain.

The extreme suffering marks Sutpen with scars, but also alters his appearance, as the town sees when he first arrives: "he looked like a man who had been sick. Not like a man who had been peacefully ill in bed and had recovered to move with a sort of diffident and tentative amazement in a world which he had believed himself on the point of

surrendering, but like a man who had been through some solitary furnace experience which was more than just fever" (24). Later in the text, as we learn about the revolt and his period of recovery, this "solitary furnace experience" has transformed even the way he appears to others, showing that he "fought through it at enormous cost not so much physical as mental, alone and unaided and not through blind instinctive will to endure and survive but to gain and keep to enjoy it the material prize for which he accepted the original gambit" (24). The only detail of the way in which he is injured is marked by the scars, "one of which, Grandfather said, came pretty near leaving him that virgin for the rest of his life" (205). Injured near the groin, he almost loses the ability to father children, which he considers so crucial to the design of establishing this dynasty for the Sutpen family. This threatens the wholeness of his body and masculinity, both crucial to his design.

Quentin narrates, indeed imagines, how Sutpen's body suffering and bleeding more than it should ends the Haitian revolt that he encounters there and "Then he stopped" (205). When Shreve ask him to "Go on," Quentin refuses to give any more of the story—more of which he does know—because "He [Sutpen] stopped talking, telling it" (205) to his Grandfather. To Quentin, space and time in which the narrative is transmitted are as essential as the narrative itself. It is after Sutpen "stopped" telling Grandfather in the swamp that day that the group finally catches the escaped architect, who is now the disheveled, comic representation of Western civilization: "they…hauled him out of his cave under the river bank: a little man with one sleeve missing from his frock coat and his flowered vest ruined by water and mud where he had fallen in the river and one pants leg ripped down so they could see where he had tied up his leg with a piece of his shirt tail" (206). Sutpen's enslavement of the architect to build his own identity indicates his deep

understanding of the ways in which "civilization" of Europe and America are founded upon violent histories. His survival of the revolt in Haiti leads Sutpen to the full realization of the power of narrative in constructing a self, a realization first put to the test when the slave at the plantation door "*never even give me a chance to say it"* (192).

In the end, Haiti as a real place outside of this "theater" of violence and the specific story of how Sutpen "subdued" (204) the slave revolt are left in obscurity. The choice of "subdued" on the part of Sutpen to tell his story suggests some passivity in how he engaged with the revolting slaves, as opposed to a word that might suggest brute force or violence on the part of Sutpen. He "put the musket down" (204), realizing his weapon would not protect, but would be a sign of opposition and mean certain death for him. Haiti teaches Sutpen solidarity with the slaves in revolt of the identity to which they have been defined, bolstered in outrage by the materiality of "torn limbs and outraged hearts" and "old unsleeping blood" (202). As a site of violence and of identity formation, it functions in the way Quentin imagines the endless rippling out of history:

> *Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky* (210)

In Quentin's spatial image, the pebble sinks in the first pool but leaves an impact in the second pool. The first "has fed, did feed, let" the second pool exist with that "different temperature" and "different molecularity." These differences come based on the experience

of the first—"having seen, felt, remembered"—what has happened in the first pool, and therefore "reflect in a different tone" what is actually "unchanging." As Quentin envisions the interconnected pools in chapter seven, Faulkner's narrative links Haiti and the United States in this same way: the United States came into being based on the Caribbean, is born from it in that umbilical connection, formed by what it "has fed, did feed, let" happen to the nation with such a "different molecularity" than the Caribbean. The United States as a physical space and an imaginative one arises out of the experiences of the first pool, what has been "seen, felt, remembered" in the foundations of violence at the root of United States culture. Slave revolt in Haiti forms and forges the experiences of the United States, just as it forms and forges the "demon" Thomas Sutpen, who revolts against his own solidified identity, but denies the slaves to whom he is bodily linked that same right.

Chapter 2
"Not a Distant Ancestor but Grandfather": Family History and National Narrative in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*

Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* reclaims an American identity for her Chinese grandfathers through their physical connection to and material presence in America. The story "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains" makes explicit claims for citizenship for grandfather Ah Goong despite the fact that he was not a citizen by a legal definition: "he was an American for having built the railroad" (145). The directness of that claim, coupled with Kingston's insistence that Ah Goong is one of the "binding and building ancestors" (146), "an American ancestor, a holding, homing ancestor of this place" (151) belies a complicated relationship between Ah Goong's material presence in America, where he constructed the first transcontinental railroad, and Kingston's project to rewrite a history of loss for early Chinese experiences in America. The narrator's insistence on Ah Goong's citizenship would seem to end his story with triumph, securing that citizenship through a narrative redefinition of it. Beyond that, Kingston's text works to secure his status as an "American ancestor"—not just as a citizen but also as an originator of the nation. However, Kingston's redefinition of citizenship for her grandfathers brings the narrator and narrative power in *China Men* into greater focus. Kingston wishes to emphasize that the formation of any history relies on narrative.

The repeated insistence on citizenship for her grandfathers makes the interventions of the narrator more visible, and through this, the story is made distinct from the kind of invisible narrative work performed in traditional historical narratives. We know who is writing history here, and she tells us why; the narrator lays bare her stake in the story unlike in other supposedly neutral histories. Kingston famously said of *China Men*, "What I

am doing in this new book is claiming America" (Pfaff 14), though scholars such as Caroline Yang have pushed back against large numbers of critical readings that, in her view, "are limited to claims that *China Men* re-inserts excluded Chinese American history into the larger narrative of US history" (65). Instead of reading Kingston's claims for American ancestry for Ah Goong as merely "claiming America" for China men who have been excluded from its official history, I argue that Kingston's acts of narrative interpretation in "claiming America" are meant to highlight the forming power of invisible interpretive acts in traditional narratives of nation. Through this, Kingston suggests a narrative process that can be put in the service of countering traditional narratives, and offers a complicated view of restoring her grandfathers' narratives without rendering the grandfathers themselves powerless over their own stories.

Yang decries the "statist narrative of liberal citizenship" that serves as the "prevalent, seductive way of reading" (66) sections of *China Men*, where the story seems to serve as a celebratory narrative of development of American citizens and a new, inclusive nation space that admits the China men. The historical reality is that the grandfathers Kingston presents had no access to legal citizenship; the celebration of their inclusion, in Yang's view, hides the contexts of their spatial and political realities. Similarly, in her important work *Immigrant Acts* Lisa Lowe explains that American culture can serve "as the key site for the resolution of inequalities and stratifications that cannot be resolved on the political terrain of representative democracy," but that the culture "performs that reconciliation by naturalizing a universality that exempts the 'non-American' from its history of development or admits the 'non-American' only through a 'multiculturalism' that aestheticizes ethnic differences as if they could be separated from history" (9). That is to

say that the official narratives of the nation might admit the "non-American," but only insofar as universal connection is emphasized, and contradiction, conflict, and difference from the larger national narrative is minimized. Both of these critics trouble the understanding of Kingston's "claiming America" through her material redefinition of citizenship, and point to the losses of other contexts that arise from redefining these grandfathers as citizens.

Lowe and Yang here provide a key to read against some of Kingston's own language in the text, which strives for a narrative of citizenship and claiming, but is complicated by the way Kingston frames the stories of her grandfathers within the frame of the contemporary experiences of the narrator. Lowe proposes a way of understanding "the cultural productions emerging out of the contradictions of immigrant marginality" as texts that "displace the fiction of reconciliation, disrupt the myth of national identity by revealing its gaps and fissures, and intervene in the narrative of national development that would illegitimately locate the 'immigrant' before history or exempt the 'immigrant' from history" (9).[7] These texts of "immigrant marginality" fracture the sense of a unified narrative of national identity in the way that Kingston's work also ultimately does, but Kingston's text is ambivalent in her constructions of the "immigrant" grandfathers as the source of fracturing that narrative. I contend that the narrator's presentation of what happens to the grandfathers as they materially construct the nation complicates some of the more direct

[7] On the subject of using the term "immigrant" in regards to the Chinese workers in America, Caroline Yang contends, "the practice of labeling the Chinese in the nineteenth century as immigrants has become quite commonplace. This practice effectively casts Asian American history as mainly a history of immigrants, which misses the opportunity to study that history as a history of different racializations, particularly involving the racialization of African American, white, and Asian workers. What is more, the Asian immigrant figure upholds the notion of US exceptionalism girded by the US self-promotion as a nation of immigrants and masks the workings of empire as the effects of globalization" (66)

claims Kingston makes about their American identity in the course of the story. The narrator directly calls them American ancestors and citizens while undercutting the triumph of their inclusion in these categories.[8] I argue that Kingston leaves space for the men about whom she writes to remain outside of history, even the history of her making, through this narrative resistance: loss remains as a part of national origin, and therefore they remain outside of the oppressive nature of traditional narrative forms that forged the history that was so unkind to difference. The narrative embraces the loss of by means of moments of uncertainty where the narrator refuses to speak with the voices of the grandfathers. Kingston allows power to transfer from the narrator back to her grandfathers and their ultimately unknowable experience, which the text actually works to maintain rather than eliminate. The text thus redefines what it means to "clai[m] America," suggesting the power of the narrator, but the simultaneous power of the grandfathers, who ultimately remain outside of both historical and personal knowledge.

"In the wilds of America"

The proximity of the narrator to her "Grandfather" is of crucial importance, in part because of Kingston's engagement with the oral culture of Chinese "talk-story" in forming the narrative of the China men. This gives the narrator access to the materials of the story through memories of hearing them from relatives. A personal, direct link of ancestry undergirds the claims that she makes for Ah Goong, and the significance of these close ties of ancestry is illustrated when Ah Goong goes to the theater in Sacramento sometime after

[8] Brook Thomas argues that Kingston's novel maintains a center of nationalism, despite what it might show about that nation: "Redefining what it means to be an American without abandoning the term itself, Kingston distances herself from at least some border theorists…she counters border theorists' romance with displacement with an awareness of how important a sense of belonging is for people occupying a land with others" (712). "*China Men*, *United States* v. *Wong Kim Ark*, and the Question of Citizenship. *American Quarterly* 50.4 (1998): 689-717.

his completion of work on the transcontinental railroad, towards the end of the section "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains." He unexpectedly sees performed before him on stage a familiar rather than foreign sight—a Chinese opera: "Ah Goong recognized the hero, Guan Goong; his puppet horse had red nostrils and rolling eyes. Ah Goong's heart leapt to recognize hero and horse in the wilds of America" (149). Significantly, the unexpected moment of recognition and cultural encounter arises through theatrical performance, something that it itself transient. It is "the wilds of America" because for Ah Goong, America has been without a recognizable culture until this point, where the performance brings him a new cross-cultural understanding. The trip to the opera centers on Ah Goong's spatial and cultural perspective instead of that of the reader. Kingston foregrounds this explicit performance as a reflection of her own narrative and historical modes of performativity.

Significantly, the opera trip places Ah Goong at a specific event, opposing the other descriptions at the end of the chapter for how Ah Goong was "disappearing" and give accounts of where "he was not" (148) or where he "perhaps" was (149). Ah Goong's movements following the completion of the railroad are uncertain and haphazard, so in locating him so specifically, the text signals this performance as a significant event. Culture is portable for Ah Goong through the experience at the opera, and though he sits with those unfamiliar with Chinese opera, they transform him as well: "He called out Bravo like the demons in the audience, who had not seen theater before" (149). Rather than focusing on traditional modes of watching and appreciating the Chinese opera, Ah Goong adapts to those around him—even as he acknowledges they lack access to the experience in its original context. He calls out "Bravo" and performs an important moment of cultural

adaptation and transnational embedding offered in *China Men* by locating a "real" experience of Chinese culture even inside a vague, hazy, dissolving American landscape at the end of the chapter.

Kingston emphasizes familiarity as Ah Goong watches the opera, locating a site of home in the inhospitable "wilds" of a country where he cannot legally become a citizen. Kingston gives an in-depth overview of the plot and characters of the opera and the hero Guan Goong, but then turns to reflect on the impact of the performance on Ah Goong: "Ah Goong felt as warm as if he were with friends at a party" (149).[9] When boys dressed as women enter the scene of the opera, the performance of culture becomes a substitute for what Ah Goong has lost in America, and "Though Ah Goong knew they were boy actors, he basked in the presence of Chinese ladies" (149). That he "basked" suggests a transformative aspect to the experience, joy and pleasure from the performance that is not demonstrated previously in his story. It also suggests a performative aspect to being "ladies" as well, if it can be so easily enacted by those who are not. The substitution of the boys for women is celebratory in the sense that alternatives to original cultural experience show the possibility of being sustaining for him; for Ah Goong, authenticity is not the key to that transformative cultural experience. However, given the complicated relationships of gender in the text, and the difficulty of articulating both masculinity and femininity in the experience of the "China men" in America, this particular substitution highlights the problematic nature of gender as it relates to locating this American ancestor. Since Chinese

[9] Charles L. Crow gives context to this scene: "Usually dramatizing episodes of the 'little tradition' of folk or non-academic literature, Chinese opera was a popular, not an elite form" (363). According to Crow, the opera Ah Goong watches tells a recognizable story, "Oath of the Peach Orchard" from *Romance of Three Kingdoms* (363). "Maxine Hong Kingston" in *Updating the Literary West*. Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian UP, Western Literature Association, 1997. 360-366.

women were legally excluded from the possibility of American experiences, which Kingston details in her chapter "The Laws," Ah Goong's substitution highlights the differing claims of masculine and feminine experience to be deemed American. Simultaneously, it highlights the problematics of Kingston's project in "claiming" America if claiming is to rely on what is authentic in terms of historical experience and cultural identity. There remains ambivalence about what authentic can mean in terms of representing a national experience.

Ah Goong himself is not troubled by the boys transformed into women, and is instead transported by the unexpected experience of cultural familiarity—one that Kingston indicates is intensely personal, and even familial. He "felt refreshed and inspired," and is astounded that "Guan Goong, the God of War, also God of War and Literature, had come to America—Guan Goong, Grandfather Guan, our own ancestor of writers and fighters, of actors and gamblers" (149-150). Most striking in the cultural familiarity is the claim of direct ancestry that he makes to the figure that has also "come to America"—the narrator claims a direct linkage for Ah Goong, and thus for herself. This suggests that just like Ah Goong, Chinese culture itself "had come to America" in a way that substantially alters the idea of American culture. Kingston repeats the closeness of the link between Ah Goong and Guan Goong to emphasize its importance: "Our own kin. Not a distant ancestor but Grandfather" (150). Kingston's work in *China Men* relies on that same insistence, that Grandfather Ah Goong is "Not a distant ancestor," but a story narratively reachable through her own connections of people and stories. The narrator claims authority to imagine and

narrate them.[10] Earlier in the chapter, Kingston details how in her childhood home, "Grandfather's [Ah Goong's] picture hangs in the dining room next to an equally large one of Grandmother, and another one of Guan Goong, God of War and Literature" (126), locating Guan Goong in the narrator's home in the present time. Guan Goong thus remains tied to an idea of home for Ah Goong and his family long after the opera visit.

The encounter with Guan Goong at the opera gives insight into how Kingston locates the origins of the American nation in the recent past rather than in a past so distant as to not have been passed on to the narrator by story. That means that it is a past that is just barely outside the realm of the narrator and those she knows personally. Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* offers a lens for situating the narrative origins of nation in *China Men*, which centers on these direct, temporally recent connections. Bhabha asserts, "a particular ambivalence…haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it. It is an ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality" (2). This cultural temporality of nation is in opposition to an unchanging, timeless and solid national history and myth, which is a fiction. In narrating national origins just outside and beyond the current time of the narrative, as opposed to a foundational moment that occurs far outside of her access in the distant past, Kingston revises what the origins of nation can mean. Instead of founding fathers at the time of the American Revolution, the text suggests that China men in the nineteenth and twentieth

[10] Donald C. Goellnicht emphasizes this narrative reality in "Tang Ao in America," pointing out that for the male voices or subjectivity represented, we should not lose sight of the fact that "all these ancestral stories are imagined by the female narrator" (195). In *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*. Ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim.

centuries are equally founding fathers for all Americans—not just Chinese Americans. Kingston makes the particular claim through material experience: the Grandfathers built the railroads, they labored on sugar plantations in Hawai'i, and otherwise physically constructed parts of the nation. These physical acts offer a national identity that is solid and knowable—you can still see the results of their labor. At the same time, Kingston suggests that there are unknowable narratives that correspond with the acts of material construction of America, and she refuses to imagine them with certainty. For example, accounts of Ah Goong in America after the construction of the railroad contradict one another, suggesting his particular story comes to stand for all of the other untold stories of Chinese grandfathers. Of Ah Goong, who experiences the San Francisco earthquake and fire in 1906, she suggests, "Maybe he hadn't died in San Francisco, it was just his papers that burned; it was just that his existence was outlawed" (151), referring to the laws excluding Chinese immigrants that followed the completion of the transcontinental railroad. Since the reader has seen Ah Goong as an old man earlier in the novel, we are certain he did not die in the earthquake, though "Some say he died falling into the cracking earth" (150). The solid material world falls apart in this image, undercutting the stability of material citizenship that Kingston has just laid claim to. The image also distances the reader from Ah Goong and the intimacy we have with the narrator of *China Men.* Instead of certainty and directness, we hear that "Some say" this is the story—Kingston rejects the chance to narrate Ah Goong's actual experience in the earthquake. The uncertain narrative leaves Ah Goong's story open for a more mythic interpretation rather than just a personal one here, which presents its own dangers in terms of representation. Kingston's story works to

maintain loss as an important part of national identity through this transformation from the personal to the mythic.

"The Binding and Building Ancestors"

Kingston opens the story of her Grandfather's transcontinental railroad work on a mythic note from her own childhood experience, again suggesting that her text is concerned with the relationship between family history and national narrative. The narrator reflects, "The trains used to cross the sky" (125). The first sentence harkens back to an indeterminate past, as though Kingston were about to retell an ancient myth of a sky-bound railroad even though she really returns to childhood memories. The image introduces the problem of myth and history Kingston takes up in rewriting the traditionally accepted story of the railroad to include those who were not, and could not be, American citizens. Instead of telling a legend, the narrator follows the opening line with childhood reflections on the very real and physical presence of the railroad: "The house jumped and dust shook down from the attic" (126). The train literally rattles her home, the space in which she navigates into her own Chinese American identity, shaking from the attic the dusty story of her Grandfather's early life in America. In this sense, the physical reminder of the train clears the way for her to retell the story. The narrator remembers, "Once in a while an adult said, 'Your grandfather built the railroad.' (Or 'Your grandfathers build the railroad.' Plural and singular are by context.)" (126). With the "grandfathers," Kingston signals a multiplicity of the railroad experience: either she means a single child with multiple building grandfathers, or a group of Chinese American children, not just the narrator herself, who share the legacy of the railroad as a powerful physical rooting to the country. The presence of other "grandfathers" indicates the ways that Kingston both calls

on personal history as a crucial experience, but insists that her personal history is one of many to be told.

The narrator and other children begin a myth-making process of their own by fixating on the real, material world around them to understand a larger-than-life history. They imagine "it was that very railroad, those trains, those tracks running past our house; our own giant grandfather had set those very logs into the ground, poured the iron for those very spikes with the big heads and pounded them until the heads spread like that, mere nails to him" (126). By believing that the "giant grandfather" had with his hands constructed "those very" pieces of track, the children make a visible connection to the untold and hidden history of constructing the country, an important contrast to the ceremonial photograph celebrating the driving of the golden spike at the completion of the transcontinental railroad; "Ah Goong does not appear in the railroad photographs" (145). The steel and wood of the railroad offer an alternate history and construct a "giant" of a grandfather, a mythic presence that could have the strength to pound iron spikes flat. The children further imagine, "He had built the railroad so that it would thunder over us" (126). The thundering, mythical train, crossing over the "special spot of earth" (126) where three tracks meet, and where the narrator lives, sends a "message" that she reads as telling her to "go somewhere difficult. Ride the train" (126). As a frame to telling the story of Ah Goong's construction of the railroad, the insistence that she "go somewhere difficult" suggests that Ah Goong's story is actually more difficult to tell than it would first seem. In fact, Kingston's narrative of constructing the railroad is not easily vindicating for her Chinese grandfather. She follows her grandfather's shaping of the American landscape and seeks to represent his material experience of building the railroad, but *China Men* ultimately makes no easy

claims on his American experience because of the ways both the country and the narrative refuse to accept Ah Goong as American.

Kingston starts Ah Goong's story with a description of dismantling of the tracks near her childhood home, undercutting the material triumph of their construction later in the chapter. The heroic image of constructing the railroad that follows in the story is begun with the destruction and disconnection of the tracks (even though not the literal ones Ah Goong worked to construct). It renders the material work in effect useless, and dismantles what she is about to build in narrative: "The railroad men disconnected the rails and took the steel away. They did not come back" (126). Material history in this framework seems very fragile and fleeting. Suddenly, the living, moving force of the trains is cut off, and what is left are the spikes and logs; the family "dug up the square logs and rolled them downhill home. We collected the spikes too. We used the logs for benches, edged the yard with them, made bases for fences, embedded them in the ground for walkways" (126). The fragments of the railroad become physically embedded in the living space of the narrator, part of her everyday material existence, but the family repurposes them for new uses that fit their home space. Kingston's story functions in the same way, putting the pieces of the past to use, but repurposing them for what fits her own needs. The past of the grandfather's material presence in America remains, but the narrator places it within her own "home" in terms of political and social realities undergirding the history. The pieces the family saves from ruin bring her a powerful sense of connection to the past, showing the persuasive nature of the material world. She declares, "I am glad to know exactly the weight of ties and the size of nails" (126). Because of the undeniable nature of the physical, these objects embedded in her world are yoked to her grandfather's creation of the railroad even if their

purpose has been altered. The objects carry a weight of reality to contend with the oppression of forgotten histories.

Like the dismantled tracks that undercut the triumphant construction of the transcontinental railroad, the narrator presents her grandfather in old age at the start of the chapter, offering a stark contrast to his physical prowess in building the railroad. By presenting both the old and young Ah Goong in the chapter, Kingston undermines the ways in which Ah Goong's story can be employed in the service of simple American myths of masculinity, since Ah Goong is a "slow" (126) presence, "without a sense of direction" (126) and largely ridiculed by his family—in particular through several stories about how he is inappropriate with respect to nakedness and sexuality around his family. By the narrator's childhood, he has lost any tie to the land he mapped by train tracks. He is only able to prove "he had found a wondrous country, really gold" through the ring that he brought back, now given to MaMa by her husband, Ah Goong's son. The ring was created from a bag of gold collected during the construction in the shape of "two hands clasping in a handshake" (150), a symbol of fellowship and connection that gestures towards unity and brotherhood that the project of nation building failed to produce. According to Ah Goong, the materiality of the ring is crucial to his own experiences of labor in America in that it "proves that the Gold Mountain [America] exists and that I went there" (128), which stands as another moment of direct narrative interpretation in the text, this time rather than by the narrator, it is by Ah Goong, who interprets the material history of his own story.

In describing the tough railroad work undertaken by the Chinese in building the transcontinental railroad, Kingston suggests that the men alter the solidity and permanence of the landscape itself, seemingly altering natural laws to do so. Ah Goong

tunneling through the supposedly permanent mountain proves that he is ancestor to the nation in that his story provides an alternate mythology for the country. Digging slowly against hard rock, he comes to believe "rock is what is real…This rock is what real is, not clouds or mist, which make mysterious promises" (134). He no longer trusts the ephemeral and beautiful, things that leave him without foundation. Literally buried underneath the ground in the tunnels as he worked to chisel them away, Ah Goong concludes that the real represented by the physically immovable mountain is what endures: "Ah Goong understood the immovability of the earth. Men change, men die, weather changes, but a mountain is the same as permanence and time" (135). That the mountain is "the same as permanence" is almost immediately proven to be false when Ah Goong breaks through it to complete the tunnel. Suddenly, "It was not a mountain before them any more but only a wall" (144). This suggests the extremity of their labor, that what was "permanence" becomes merely a wall, and also offers a mythic reading of the physical feat.

Ah Goong talks about the "Gold Mountain," the name early Chinese laborers gave to America during the gold rush, in a way that reflects registers of nationalistic pride, and in this, he seems to make his own claims on American citizenship separate from the declarations of the narrator. Other Chinese laborers are afraid of being buried "nowhere" should they die while building the railroad, but Ah Goong tells them "this is somewhere…This is the Gold Mountain. We're marking the land now" (138). With the image of "marking," Kingston highlights a tie between his physical labor on the land and her physical labor of marking the page with the story, making a clear and close tie between the act he claims and the written, narrative one she undertakes in order to make those claims. Kingston developed this connection in an interview, saying that her labor of writing

the novel was its own sort of connective railroad: "While I was writing *China Men*, it was so large and it included the story of the Chinese coming here to build the railroads. I saw myself having to build a railroad, but it's done in words. I thought the physical exertion of it was just as hard as if I were building a railroad, building a transcontinental railroad" (qtd. in Lim, "Reading" 159).

Yet against the specificity of Ah Goong's story, Kingston presents anonymous deaths of other Chinese laborers on the railroad. In their anonymity, Shirley Geok-lin Lim claims "they leave absences and vacancies" (305) in both the story and in the community of workers Kingston presents; they are not commemorated in the way Ah Goong imagines they will be on the newly marked land. This sense of lost history and missing men works against the solidity and permanence of the images of rock and mountain, and signifies a resistance to a too easy claiming of the land by Kingston through how she maintains loss as a part of the story she tells. She does not redeem the lost lives and lost stories of the China men even as she tells the known story of Ah Goong. He is considered a "crazy man" (138) among the other Chinese workers who do not share his sense of connection to and creation of America, suggesting that his story is in many ways not representative of a larger group story in terms of what she is "claiming" in America.

Kingston does tie in larger pieces of history to the personal story of Ah Goong, for example, recounting how the Central Pacific hires Ah Goong "on sight" because "there were not enough workingmen to do all the labor of building a new country" (128). This was the historical reality of the time; the railroads turned to recruiting Chinese labor when they were unable to locate enough men to work on the project, as Chrisopher Merrit, Gary

Wiesz, and Kelly J. Dixon recount (669).[11] The railroad is "his railroad" (146) in Kingston's telling because of the labor Ah Goong performs on the transcontinental railroad, and also because of the continued labor of other Chinese workers elsewhere after the completion of that railroad: "China Men banded the nation North and South, East and West, with crisscrossing steel. They were the binding and building ancestors of this place" (146). Despite the national placing of origin farther back with European settlers, Kingston argues that it is the marking of the west in this way that is truly "binding" for America as a nation, and the parallel construction of "binding" and "building" acts to suggest that material interventions in national history can be as significant as political ones. According to Kingston's text, the railroad makes America a unified whole, through both the physical links it connects and the imaginary ones. Creating the "crisscrossing steel" tracks that bind America constitutes, in her explicit statements of ancestry in the chapter, a greater claim to American identity than the "white demon in top hat" who "tap-tapped on the gold spike, and pulled it back out" (145). The final, decorative spike of the transcontinental railroad is gently hammered in but quickly removed, the gold a symbol of endless economic possibilities for the American "demon" that the railroads brought—economic possibilities that arose through the cheap labor made available by the China Men.[12]

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[11] Merrit, Weisz, and Dixon emphasize, "Because the western United States suffered from a constant shortage of labor, exploitation of Chinese labor was viewed as a necessary step by both railroad companies and many politicians in order to complete the nation's transcontinental railroads" (669). "'Verily the Road was Built with Chinamen's Bones': An Archeology of the Chinese Line Camps in Montana." *International Journal of Historical Archeology*.Vol 16.4 (2012): 669. George Kraus documents an interview with a Central Pacific Rail Road employee who claimed ninety percent of the labor force completing the first transcontinental railroad was Chinese. "Chinese Laborers and the Construction of the Central Pacific." *Utah Historical Quarterly* 37 (1969): 49.

[12] See Kraus for details on the wage difference for Chinese and other laborers on the railroad. Irish workers were paid a higher wage, which included their food and lodging, which was not provided to the Chinese workers.

By asserting the importance of Chinese Grandfathers to the physical construction of America, Kingston suggests that national identity can be redefined—it is a changeable rather than permanent identity. Regarding a search for cultural roots, Stuart Hall offers, "cultural identity is not a fixed essence…It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return" (226). In "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains," Kingston reads beyond the official picture of the Golden Spike ceremony that captured the driving of the ceremonial spike into the ground, which has arguably served in American imagination as a sort of "fixed origin" for the connection of the country into a continuous space. Kingston disrupts that stability of the image, one that readers are likely to recognize. Her story reinserts the China men who hammer the real steel spike into the ground. The photograph is shown to be a fixed origin that Americans have misread, exempting the realities of the labor force that made it possible. Kingston's novel works to unsettle our notions of the fixed aspects of cultural identity and what we think we know about it by offering evolving narrative origins for American culture. She suggests that if the stories of the Chinese workers can be restored, there are other stories that might be restored as well, resisting a celebration of a new, but equally fixed, origin in the story of the China men.

Caroline Yang emphasizes that the significant work performed by *China Men* is actually the "exposing the unrecognized narratives of the US empire-state that has been founded on the exploitation of differentiated racialized bodies and the occlusion of their labor" (82). With this I agree—but only insomuch as labor is put in the service of laying claim to new, inclusive national origins. On the other hand, Yang insists that ideas of "excavating a lost past or validating Asian American citizenship or redeeming Asian American immigrant history" (82) are problematic due to the dangers of this validation

possibly occluding the historical realities of the China men. In this case, we read against the ostensible claims of the narrator in the scene that details the Golden Spike ceremony that would transform it into a ceremony of citizenship. There, Kingston shifts the meaning of the congratulatory speeches by including her grandfather among those praised, agreeing with the speech that "'Only Americans could have done it,' they said, which is true" (145), thereby upending notions of "Americans" as defined by legal citizenship; it is here that Ah Goong achieves material citizenship in the text. The juxtaposed claims also place her grandfather in the realm of the mythic as part of "The Greatest Feat in the History of Mankind" (145), a claim that at once transcends national claims, but is also predicated on them (that is, this is a great feat for all mankind—seeming to think beyond the national—when it in fact just reinforces the greatness of that national achievement by suggesting the exceptional nature of America). After the pictures are taken of the memorialized moment of the spike, "one China Man held the real spike, the steel one, and another hammered it in" (145), thereby marking the racialized labor that Yang focuses on in her critique. Writing a revised history of the completion of the transcontinental railroad at this ceremony, Kingston privileges the material closure of the project by the two China Men through their real spike that carries material weight and anchors the last bit of track in place.

However, Ah Goong's legacy as a builder of the country goes unrecognized even by the narrator's family, who she says "did not understand his accomplishments as an American ancestor, a holding, homing ancestor of this place" (151). Kingston chooses to close the chapter with focusing on him as an utterly pathetic figure: "He was a louse eaten by lice. A fleaman…The family called him Fleaman" (151). There is a sense of dissolution in the way the chapter ends, as the chapter insists yet again on his claims for America, all the

while focusing on his state as homeless, trash-eating, and flea-ridden, and rejected by his family. As a "holding, homing" ancestor, Ah Goong holds onto an American identity through marking of the land, but his presentation at the start of the chapter—as an old man excluded from family photographs, and excluded specifically from telling stories to the family—undercuts the legacy, as does the image of the "Fleaman" that he becomes at the end of the chapter.

When Ah Goong, striving for "real" citizenship in the nation, buys his citizenship papers with his bag of gold, "He was already a part of this new country, but now he had it in writing" (142), signaling the work of Kingston's book to fill in for the papers he pays for—that the written record is a crucial aspect of claiming history. Yet, though he attempts to shore up his fleeting American identity through the proper discursive channels of the documentation of citizenship, he has purchased a worthless piece of paper that actually ensures nothing, which can complicate our understanding of her own textual record. In this, Kingston contrasts the indeterminacy of the paper record against the fierce materiality of the physical American landscape constructed in part by Asian American grandfathers. At the end of "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains," Kingston narrates the earthquake in San Francisco and subsequent fire in the Hall of Records, where "every paper a China Man wanted for citizenship and legality burned" (150), at first portraying the fire as a tragedy in the loss of these paper records. However, in how the fire destroys the paper records, it means that "Every China Man was reborn…a citizen" (150). This turns the tragedy of not being able to prove citizenship and legality into a positive, turning indeterminacy from a disadvantage into an advantage; Kingston's narrative does the same. The story of Ah Goong becomes muddled in the story of the earthquake, as the narrator

wonders, did he die "falling into the cracking earth" (150) or was it "just his papers that burned?" (151). Kingston reconstructs Ah Goong's citizenship papers in the chapter, explicitly legitimizing his claim to American roots and hers as well. She does this not through law but rather by re-envisioning what constitutes an American identity. She simultaneously problematizes the category of citizen by arguing for the connection between materiality and American self. Similar to the loss of citizenship papers in the fire, Kingston makes sure to note, "there is no record of how many died building the railroad" (138). She herself resists writing that record or offering a more concrete telling of the history—loss turns into a strategy of preservation through the freedom to construct the self, maintaining the history of the China men as a history of loss that serves as a significant national origin. Kingston offers a way of taking responsibility for the losses of history while not eliminating their presence.

"A lonely impulse of delight"

As triumphant as the narrator's claims for Ah Goong's citizenship at the Golden Spike ceremony might seem to be, *China Men* is not a simple additive of ethnic experience to the story of nation and nation building. Instead, Kingston questions what can be included in the ideas of national history and myth. In his ecocritical take on *China Men*, Robert Hayashi argues that the text strategically resists traditional tropes of the frontier or wilderness so tied to Western expansion and visions of American empire. He claims instead, "The land is full of stories, full of ghosts—not a once virginal place outside of culture" (69-70). The insistence on the social construction of the space in the story, through the ties of that space and materiality to the stories of that materiality, undermines American myth of empty land to be conquered and included in nation. Taking this further,

Hayashi connects the idea of wilderness to social and racial constructs, and racialized labor: "the doctrine of America as pure wilderness was a means to exclude" immigrants and particularly immigrant labor such as the Chinese railroad workers (68). Others, such as David Leiwei Li, emphasize the ways that "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains" resists a reading that celebrates flexibility and inclusiveness of the American nation: "In the celebration of her China Men devoting their lives to westward expansion, Kingston sees that they are not victors but victims. Their talents and prowess are always abused and their masculinity threatened" (490). In his reading, the railroad linking the nation is of particular importance symbolically, insisting as it does on the connection of American space in a single, whole country. It fails to transform racial politics and policies in that "the linking of the continent fails to make the hoped-for connection between the Chinese and the American" (491). Solidifying power over American space in *China Men* serves to further close off the nation instead of allowing for a transnational celebration of the cultures of those who joined to construct it. Yet, even if represented as victims, Kingston asserts victory not within the personal story of Ah Goong, but as a sort of ironic reading of "true" American roots: cheap, disenfranchised, "foreign" labor actually constructed America, and accepting that to be the case does not negate the pull and persuasion of America as a nation in *China Men*, either for the families represented as seeking inclusion or for the reader. These complex and contradictory images of and ideas about the nation are juxtaposed. It isn't an either/or—victim or victor—but a both/and that Kingston represents.

Cross-cultural connections are built into the nation, not in a universalizing sense of multiculturalism, but in a violent, brutal, and material sense. That the history is brutal, that

no one knows how many China men die in the building of the railroad, or the extent of the suffering of others through extreme labor, works to counteract what we assume we mean by "history" and historical fact. Building off of Li's notion, Kingston's project then relies on an ironic undercutting of the connection that the railroad makes, spatially and imaginatively, in forming the nation. Li insinuates that a reading which focuses on the success of Kingston "claiming America" for her grandfathers misses a crucial part of her process and claims about the American nation—the connection she hopes to make "between the Chinese and the American" must be a failure, in terms of the way the men are "victims" of law and history in their experiences. In this, Li also suggests, as Yang does, that celebratory readings of the construction of the railroad in the text must be limited.

The ambiguity of Kingston's portrayal of masculinity is an impassioned critical strand in discussions of *China Men.*[13] A particular scene has garnered much critical attention in terms of the intimate look at her Grandfather—that is, when Ah Goong masturbates high above a valley in a hanging work basket. Ah Goong is high in the air and at the mercy of elements as "The basket swung and twirled, and he saw the world sweep underneath him" (131). He thinks, "it was fun in a way, a cold new feeling of doing what had never been done before. Suspended in the quiet sky, he thought all kinds of crazy thoughts, that if a man didn't want to live any more, he could just cut the ropes or, easier,

[13] For more on Kingston's portrayal of the masculine and criticisms of it, see Elaine Kim's section on Kingston in *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*, pages 197-213. For criticism, see Frank Chin, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake" in *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*, ed. Jeffrey Paul Chan, et al. New York: Meridian, 1991. 1-92. Also relevant to Kingston's figuring of gender: King-kok Cheung, "The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?" in *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsch. New York: Routledge, 1990, and Viet Thanh Nguyen, "The Remasculinization of Chinese America: Race, Violence, and the Novel," *American Literary History* (2000).

tilt the basket, dip, and never have to worry again" (131). He feels freedom from the new vantage point, but it is a suicidal freedom from labor, undercutting a positive reading of freedom here. After witnessing workers fall to their deaths, seeing that "The winds that pushed birds off course and against mountains did not carry men" (132), Ah Goong experiences dreams of falling that wake him at night. Though that would seem to suggest fearfulness, after this experience he instead becomes playful as he is lowered in the basket, urinating from it and proclaiming, "I'm a waterfall" (132) as he watches "a part of himself hurtling" (133) down. On what she describes as a "beautiful day, dangling in the sun above a new valley," suddenly Ah Goong becomes aroused: "He curled up, overcome by beauty and fear, which shot to his penis. He tried to rub himself calm. Suddenly he stood up tall and squirted out into space. 'I am fucking the world,' he said" (133). On the one hand, his declaration represents Ah Goong seizing on a masculine discourse that would gender and sexualize his interactions with the landscape, similar to frontier rhetoric, transforming fear into desire. In this way, his claims to material citizenship are very specifically gendered as male experience. On the other hand, his power in the scene as he proclaims that he is "fucking the world" is undercut by his relative material and spatial powerlessness in the dangling basket. In fact, it recalls the image of an aged Ah Goong among his family in the childhood memories of the narrator.

Does Kingston, then, undermine the very material experience by which her characters claim America in suggesting Ah Goong's claims over the landscape are in some ways ironic? Narrative control over the scene would suggest not. The position of the narrator is complicated here with respect to speech, and control of the story—especially given the intimate portrayal of her grandfather's sexuality. Ah Goong uses direct, blunt

speech in the scene, and speaks in the first person; the speech interprets what he is doing as he does it. Many times, Kingston's narrator imagines what a character thought rather than allowing for similar direct speech. That he exclaims "I am fucking the world" highlights the performance of masculinity, suggesting a performativity not just for masculinity, but also for the very "masculine" myths of the untouched American land that require a sort of gendered experience of them. Though the scene is focused on the masculine, Kingston undercuts ideas that masculinity is in some ways inherent, and inherently tied to American citizenship, in how he must perform it to become this American ancestor.

Robert Hayashi argues that Ah Goong's masturbation scene is "an act symbolic of his sexual and political irrelevance" (66), that is, highlighting rather than resisting his powerlessness. In reading the first section of *China Men*, "On Discovery," as a commentary on her own problematics of narration, Yoon Sun Lee offers that Kingston is acknowledging the way in which the female narrator is limited by male subjectivity. In "On Discovery," which is often read as an "allegory of the emasculation of Chinese immigrants by American legal and social structures" (467), Kingston rewrites the story of a famous Chinese novel. In her rewriting, Tang Ao suffers in "the Land of Women" that he found by mistake when looking for "the Gold Mountain" (Kingston 3). He suffers at the hands of the women; he was "not on guard against ladies" (3) and so they take him prisoner, preparing to present him to the queen after transforming his body with footbinding, ear piercing, women's food and other outward marks of womanhood. Instead of reading this as only suggestive of cultural emasculation of the China men that *China Men* would then redeem, Lee argues that the scene is representative of the narrator's point of view: "the female captor—ultimately the

narrator who imagines this transaction—will always feel herself to be excluded from a hypothetical realm of motive and opinion without access to which the male subject under investigation may never be adequately understood" (468). In this, Lee sees that Kingston acknowledges an already-failed aspect of her own project: "In their very zeal to decipher him, the women have merely remade the father in their own image" (469). Here, based on the allegory, I would take issue with whether or not the women portrayed by Kingston strive to decipher Tang Ao. Rather, Kingston seems to indict herself, not only for Lee's sense of the "riddle" of "masculine interiority" or "male consciousness" (471) that remains outside of her knowledge, but suggests that deciphering of that male subject was not her project at all. In other words, as the women in "On Discovery" remake Tang Ao, it isn't that they aimed to understand him, his interiority, or his masculinity and failed to do so, but instead, they aimed to represent him from and through what is known to them rather than capture his authentic experience. He experiences physical and psychological pain as he is forced into the performance of womanhood, feeling shame at the washing of his foot bindings: "He felt embarrassed. The wrappings were like underwear, and they were his" (4), which suggests a trauma that Kingston is aware of inflicting through the particular revelation of the private in the novel (that is, the "wrappings" that "were like underwear"). In utilizing this myth of performing gender as the beginning for *China Men*, Kingston makes no apologies for the way she remakes the China men, their experiences, and their interiority in the text to follow. "On Discovery" suggests that this story has at its heart performance—granted, a performance that is a painful experience for Tang Ao—but the performance of history in the novel nevertheless represents what has thus far remained unrepresentable about the experience of China men in America.

As a result, in Kingston's text many men, including her own father, are largely silent in regards to their histories in America and China. The narrator offers to her father that she will "tell you what I suppose from your silences and few words, and you can tell me that I'm mistaken. You'll just have to speak up with the real stories if I've got you wrong" (15). Essentially, the narrator makes a disclaimer as to the authenticity of the stories or the representations of the men, making clear that this is "what I suppose" of the truth of the experience. Patricia Linton reads this silence on the part of the male characters as an important part of Kingston's technique and meaning, and as something that thematizes the difficulty she has in presenting the stories of others:

> *China Men* does not challenge the inevitability of appropriation; on the contrary, the only way to avoid appropriating the lives and the language of others is to remain silent. But in *China Men* silence is always distressing; neither characters, nor communities, nor even landscapes are allowed to rest until speech has been teased out of them. The narration proceeds by accretion until it has succeeded in telling the story that its narrator wants to hear. (41)

Linton thus posits that the narrator's power over the story acts in a forceful way similar to the myth of Tang Ao, where he is tortured into compliance with the performance of femininity.[14] Here the narrator compels the transformation from silence to speech. With this accretive narrative process, the details emerge bit by bit, in the same way Tang Ao's transformation must occur as a process in "On Discovery." The story "that its narrator wants to hear" is painful to tell, and often slow to emerge as well; Linton asserts that the

[14] Kingston's transformation of traditional Chinese myth was a substantial topic of criticism after the publication of *China Men* and also of her earlier work, *The Woman Warrior*. Frank Chin was at the forefront of accusations against Kingston for alterations on Chinese myth in *The Woman Warrior* in particular.

novel does not strive to avoid appropriation of the men's stories, but rather accepts appropriation as the only possible way to tell those stories; they are crucial to redeeming and reforming the history of China men, but also of women of Chinese ancestry in America and elsewhere.

As the result of this difficulty reading masculinity in the novel, critics have had vastly different readings of Ah Goong "fucking the world." While Hayashi and others read his ejaculation into the sky as acting out his irrelevance, Lee sees resistance in his sexuality, finding the masturbation to indicate "An arbitrary and objectless impulse of defiance as much as an act of desire," pointing out that he is "passively lowered and abjectly suspended" (479). Rather than an emasculating, powerless act, Lee identifies mixed markers of how to read the scene, carrying on as it does with traditional coding of the land or frontier in a feminine way, and thereby seeming to engage in the discourse of masculine conquest and power. It is all the while made ridiculous by Ah Goong's very physical, material precariousness in the basket on the side of a mountain. She sees the "oscillation between helplessness and empowerment" in the scene, and that "his position is equivocal enough so that his act can be read as a rebellion against any logic of instrumentality" (479). In her reading, Ah Goong regains some power because of the senselessness of the act, focusing on the feeling in his body rather than using it in the service of any particular purpose or goal—or even an act for or with any other person. Leilani Nishime offers the consensus that in "fucking the world" the land becomes both sexualized and feminized, put "in terms of possession, [which] is characteristic of a great deal of the writing about Western expansionism and the Frontier. Not only is it troubling in terms of the environment, but it raises concerns about finding a place for women when this male-

centered language underlies Kingston's version of Chinese-American historical myth" (78). I would argue that this is precisely Kingston's point—that the project of remaking history and reclaiming America necessarily is performed through this masculine claim on the material space, landscape, and bodies in America, which were only historically accessible to male Chinese laborers, not accessible to Chinese women. Kingston captures that gendered aspect of the history, and the unfairness of that kind of claim and the gendered assumptions that underlie it, in this scene of Ah Goong masturbating. Whether it is read to be parodic and powerless or resistant and empowering in terms of his power dynamics of his interaction with nature, the scene pushes the often unfairly gendered experience of history to the forefront of the narrator's claims.

On its own, the story of "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains" reconsiders the way history is made, and what American space and American identity can contain. The chapter on her railroad grandfather Ah Goong ends with dissolution, failure, and homelessness, and also with a forced return to China, the relatives borrowing funds to bring the "Fleaman" home (151) after his second trip to America. It also ends, though with some uncertainty in the story, with regards to what exactly happens to Ah Goong in that period of his return; the narrator muses on his possible death in the earthquake in 1906, and the sight of him as a father in America: "He had also been seen carrying a child out of the fire, a child of his own in spite of the laws against marrying" (151). That he had "been seen" suggests an outside observer at a distance from Ah Goong and the story of this experience in America. This offers a dramatic shift in the intimacy of the lens on Ah Goong from the masturbation scene. Kingston lets go any close up focus at the end of the chapter, refusing to end the chapter on a moment of triumph or celebration for Ah Goong in regards

to the work on the railroad. However, she still makes an overt claim for Ah Goong's American roots in the last paragraph of the chapter, despite the images of his placelessness that would contradict it: he was "an American ancestor, a holding, homing ancestor of this place" (151). The choice of "holding, homing" suggests, for one, a physical presence and importance for Ah Goong—he is "holding" on to the nation and this Chinese American experience, holding place in the nation for a history that is not altogether celebratory in terms of the nation as a whole, its discriminatory laws and practices, and the brutality of the labor necessary to physically construct it. "Homing" suggests that he can create home, that his story helps to make a home for others—and also suggests a travel and return, of finding the way to return in much the way of an animal instinct, like that in a homing pigeon. He can find and return to this location, this place to which he belongs, even through what is unfamiliar, and others reading can return to that experience as well.

"He would abandon none of them"

China Men focuses on two main "American ancestors" in the course of the novel whose interactions with America predate the narrator's childhood memories: one is Ah Goong, the railroad grandfather, and the other Bak Goong, great grandfather and another laborer, but this time in Hawai'i. This grandfather is "The Great Grandfather of the Sandalwood Mountains," the term of the Chinese laborers for the Hawaiian Islands. In setting up the laboring pair of the great grandfather and grandfather, and their physical interactions laboring to create American space, American industry, and American economy, Kingston foregrounds the roles that were available to the China men in America at the time, and highlights the dominance of physical labor as central to the experience of China men in early American life. Bak Goong labors in Hawai'i, on sugar plantations, prior to Hawai'i

actually being included as part of America, which is additionally suggestive of American empire and empire making in her then claiming him as American ancestor. Kingston frames the chapter by offering an intriguing statement of lineage from her contemporary experience: "About a year ago, I mailed fifty dollars to China to a cousin who is black, they say, and not strictly a cousin" (85). She reveals that the cousin comes from her maternal side, and that her maternal grandfather marries again while traveling: "Like his father before him, my maternal grandfather had brought a third wife back from his third trip West, Bali or Hawai'i or South America or Africa" (85). The "father before" is Bak Sook Goong, who appears in the chapter with Bak Goong, and who indeed brings a third wife back from Hawai'i: "Bak Sook Goong brought his Sandalwood Mountain wife back with him. She would become sister of his two other wives. He would abandon none of them" (118), which ends the chapter with a bookend to the opening on this multiplicity of wives and families. That the "third trip" brings this "third wife" suggests that the grandfather is forced to live many different lives and hold many different simultaneous identities because of his experiences as a laborer. The multiplicity through his marriages suggests a gendered way of asserting several different cultural inheritances simultaneously, the wives representing the assertion of cross-cultural connection in that he "would abandon none" of the experiences.

The woman and her grandfather have "one black boy child, who is MaMa's half-brother," who in turn produces a son—the cousin who asks for the bicycle. As with how Ah Goong's story ends, Kingston allows for complete uncertainty here, refusing to identify even the region of origin of the cousin's grandmother. The woman remains far distant from the story, seemingly indecipherable to Kingston's narrator and her relatives; the woman

"fell mute" after no one answers talking, and she "jabbered like a monkey" (86). The animalistic representation of her speech and the uncertainty of her origins—Bali or Hawai'i or South America or Africa—in conjunction with her racial otherness as "the black grandmother" stands out in the text, which so often works to uncover racial othering and misinterpretation happening to Asian American ancestors in America. So why does Kingston not redeem the way her relatives make this woman an indecipherable "other" and instead engage with that same language of othering?

A clue comes from the narrator, who is actually happy about the harassment she receives from the cousin, and, following her sending money to the cousin, happy about harassment for additional money from the cousin's father (who is the son of the black grandmother). In the view of the narrator, the black grandmother is actually redeemed by the demands because she "ended up with a son and a grandson who are articulate" (86). Clearly, the grandmother speaks a language all along—that is, she herself is "articulate" in some context—but that language is misunderstood. Kingston's narrator equates being articulate to being understood among the adopted culture; being articulate means, in part, engaging in cultural rituals of the adopted home. This speaks to the project of Kingston's work: it is not necessarily that Kingston is striving to interpret China men's subjective experiences in the same way that she is not trying to decipher the woman's origin or language. Rather, she hopes to make the narratives of the China men articulate within her telling, even if the men themselves remain inarticulate. The experiences of the China men remain unreadable to her as the daughter, granddaughter, and great granddaughter like the "jabbering" the relatives hear from the woman. With the story of Bak Sook Goong and his wife, and Bak Sook Goong's son and the "black grandmother," Kingston seems to be

calling greater attention to the claim the men have on their own stories outside of how she would narrate them. Her story also serves as another reminder of the very different claims to identity the text envisions for men and women, which, again, were a historical reality in terms of allowed experiences in America.

While Hawai'i provides another space of telling the forgotten history of Chinese laborers in *China Men*, it also provides direct ties to American empire and military power not seen in Ah Goong's experiences, given the nature of Hawai'i and its story of becoming a part of America. That it was not America at the time of the story of her great grandfather Bak Goong calls into question what Kingston means to indicate with her explicit search for ancestors and "listen[ing] for the voices of the great grandfathers" in the sugarcane of Hawai'i when the narrator travels there. No language comes from the wind, no message from the view of the cane as Kingston looks on it. Within the silence is great violence that is rendered invisible: "Yet the rows and fields, organized like conveyor belts, hide murdered and raped bodies; this is a dumping ground" (88). Far from some idealistic and beautiful space of ancestors, there is poverty, drugs (shown through the hidden mushrooms and marijuana in the cane) and forgotten bodies ("Filipino men die in abandoned sheds" (88)). This suggests a sort of naïve perspective of the narrator, who listens for the ancestral messages in the deeply degraded space. She has a "shock" when hearing an island is colloquially named "Chinaman's Hat" after its shape, resembling the hats of the laboring great grandfathers and thereby binding them pejoratively to that labor—in being called such, it contains a racialized history and prejudiced viewpoint. The narrator refuses the term—"At first, I did not say Chinaman's Hat; I didn't call the island anything" (88)—but quickly, in a short narrative space, accepts the term by repeating it several times in close

succession to the reader, reclaiming it as something powerful rather than exclusively pejorative. In the search for the voices of her ancestors, she swims around the island on her trip, describing a vivid underwater world and a wild and fecund nature surrounding her. Separated from the inhabited places during this swimming expedition, she hears a sound, which she then claims as that of "the voice of the island singing" (90). Eventually, the story shares that she reclaims the term "Chinaman's Hat" only after this vivid experience on the island, surrounded by its material presence: "It's a tribute to the pioneers to have a living island named after their work hat" (90). Thus she claims a personal connection to the land of the uninhabited "Chinaman's Hat," which helps her listen so she "heard the land sing." In this, the narrator seems to rely on romanticizing the natural and the idea of space as empty of social meaning to call on these connections. The narrator claims that with telling the story of Bak Goong, she will "again search for my American ancestors by listening to the cane" (90). The focus on the site of their labor privileges material experience as key to "claiming America" as with the transcontinental railroad, but this time the narrator undermines a clear meaning to that history by demonstrating the ways the space is corrupted in contemporary time.

Following that blindness of the narrator to her overlooking of the degraded material space in her search for ancestors, Caroline Yang points out that there is an "omission" in how the text offers very little view of labor by native Hawaiian workers in the time of Bak Goong. Yang asserts that native Hawaiian laborers would have historically been visible on plantations at that time, the 1850s, marking the absence as a substantial historical loss in the text. Even as the text makes clear that this is Hawai'i before it is part of America in referencing the Hawaiian king and queen, Yang contends that in representing that the

Hawaiians have "*already disappeared* from the 'wild Sandalwood Mountains' (99) in the 1850s creates a problematic appropriation of that lost history. In claiming Chinese laborers as these ancestors of the space, it "not only serves to excuse the genocidal practices of empire, but also makes racialized and exploited labor complicit with those practices as it carries out the work of erasure" (74). That is, in redeeming the labor of the Chinese workers, the narrator cements their origins by insisting on the disappearance of the native Hawaiians as ancestors, making the redemption of Chinese laborers a troubled act of reclaiming power, at the expense of another group. Kingston, then, corrects the historical losses of the China men by means of insisting on the inevitability of that disappearance. Yang puts it bluntly: "to label the Chinese workers as the 'founding ancestors' of Hawai'i is to minimize the presence of the Native Hawaiians" (76). In opening the chapter with the unarticulated story of the "black grandmother," I would argue that Kingston engages directly with the critique that she makes claims for the China men through loss of the native Hawaiians in the story. In the story of the black grandmother, Kingston acknowledges that in what she makes articulate, other things are rendered indecipherable out of necessity. She is able to articulate the story of the China men because she can interpret it from her own viewpoint and with her own narrative power, but she makes sure to recognizably accuse herself with the story of the black grandmother and her inarticulate, animalistic portrayal—she does not decode the grandmother or even attempt to humanize her. By merely expressing that she is "glad" descendants of the "black grandmother" are themselves articulate within their community, Kingston's narrator suggests that she is unable to look back at the losses of the past from a cross-cultural angle and articulate what was once rendered inarticulate for others without flattening or appropriating the stories.

Yang suggests that the utterly misinterpreted grandmother is "read as a reflection on the ways in which narratives and identifactory markers of geography and people sometimes become recognizable at the expense of those not readily recognizable" (73), so that even the work which engages with making visible the losses of history, the claims exclude others who remain unrecognized. Similarly, the experience, origin, and language of the "black grandmother" is unrecognizable; therefore, she does not have access to the redemption through articulation as it occurs in Kingston's text for the China men. She remains disconnected and inarticulate in her experiences, and the narrator acknowledges that state; the native Hawaiians remain similarly unarticulated.

Further emphasizing the ways in which the narrator cannot speak adequately, at the beginning of "The Great Grandfather of the Sandalwood Mountains" the narrator distances herself from a Chinese cultural experience, thereby acknowledging the limits of what the narrator can articulate, based on the geography she knows. Kingston writes that she'd like to go to China not to see tourist sites but her ancestral village, but while visiting the physical space, she would look for the origins of the type of storytelling in *China Men* rather than tourist sites: "I want to talk to the Cantonese, who have always been revolutionaries, nonconformists, people with fabulous imaginations, people who invented the Gold Mountain" (87). She looks to talk to people and thereby develop a lineage of self-making and imagination more than to make specific cultural connections or experience even the spatial magnificence of the Great Wall of China. Further, she wants access to what remains uninterpretable in telling the stories of the China men here, who are motivated to travel by pleasing wives or making money in America, but whose reasons seem unsatisfactory to the narrator: "I want to discern what it is that makes people go West and turn into Americans. I

want to compare China, a country I made up, with what country is really out there" (87). Most clearly, here, Kingston makes no pretenses of authenticity in representing China or Chinese experiences, but takes full credit for appropriating the experiences of her ancestors in telling her own story. She "made up" China as a country in her texts, which remains distant from her own cultural experiences. That she wants to know China to better understand "why people go West" is also indicative of a focus on America rather than purely the transnational or cross-cultural; she wants to understand why they "turn into Americans" rather than gaining a cultural understanding of China in and of itself. Kingston makes clear that her history making is through the lens of herself, and that the connections she forges between the early ancestors who travel to America alter her understanding of making a nation through a work of personal history. In this, Kingston fundamentally contests history as neutral or fixed; history is narrative. The origins of nation are therefore remade through the telling of personally knowable history in the novel.

The story of great grandfather Bak Goong foregrounds the desire to speak and be heard, from the frame of the chapter with the inarticulate "black grandmother" through the chapter ending in his triumphant leading of the workers in a "shout party" (118). The shouting releases all the men want to say that has been restricted—they have been banned from speaking while working as indentured laborers on sugar plantations. When he first arrives in Hawai'i, after three long months and several worker deaths amidst a suffocating ship, he "sucked in deep breaths of the Sandalwood Mountain air, and let it fly out in a song, which reached up to the rims of volcanoes and down to the edge of the water. His song lifted and fell with the air, which seemed to breathe warmly through his body and through the rocks" (97). Performing the song is closely tied to the new, abundant landscape, full of

fruit and flowers to an extent he's never seen. The arrival not only invokes this song, but in the narrator's imagining, the land allows him to sing. The song transforms Bak Goong: "He sang like the heroes in stories about wanderers and exiles, poets and monks and monkeys, and princes and kings out for walks. His arias unfurled and rose in wide, wide arcs" (98). Bak Goong becomes a figure in a narrative rather than just a personal story of ancestor through his performance. Kingston connects singing to an oral tradition of poets, mentioning Odysseus and the siren song (90), which recalls how performance is crucial to Bak Goong understanding himself and where he is.

The native Hawaiians arise mostly through images of loss in the chapter, seeming to highlight Kingston's insistence of their irrelevance to her own story. On the arrival of Bak Goong, he notices abandoned homes of the indigenous Hawaiians, suggesting their experiences of loss that precede the China men's arrival: "The men passed a hutment of grass shacks with long yellow thatch weathered and fine, rippling and ruffling in the breeze like the hair of blonde ladies. Roofs had fallen, and the frames showed like bones. The doorways were empty. They did not see brown people come and go" (98). The "bones" of houses suggest skeletal remains for the cottages, in stark contrast to the "hair of blond ladies" on the roofs. The cross-cultural simile suggests the origin of the loss itself; the chapter later mentions "the blonde Jesus demonesses" (109), missionary white women, who settle on the island. Kingston takes pains to emphasize what is missing by describing the decay of the "empty" shacks and finally, by outright stating who is missing in naming what they "did not see"—the "brown people."

This first awareness of the empty shacks of the native Hawaiians precedes Bak Goong's arrival at the worksite, therefore precedes his labor in Hawai'i and the China men's

interactions marking the land, seeming to suggest that they are not responsible for that loss of cultural history by representing it as already a loss. Given tools—"a machete, a saw, an ax, and a pickax"—he and the others must "hack a farm out of the wilderness, which they were to level from ocean to the mountain" (98). The tools themselves are quite powerful and suggestive of the violence that needs to be done to the land in order to transform it from wild land into farmland. Just as digging through the rock of the Sierra Nevada mountains seems impossible, even insurmountable, to Ah Goong, the brush seems an impossible tangle to Bak Goong: "Though he chopped, hacked, and sawed with all his might, the knot of trees did not seem smaller" (98). In a different landscape, Kingston engages with similar images of extreme physical labor, making clear how closely tied her claims for grandfathers are to material interactions that alter the physical American landscape in an almost mythological way.

One of the few cross-cultural exchanges between native Hawaiians and the China men occurs in the early days of Bak Goong's time in Hawai'i. The arriving men are fed well on their first workday, and at this arrival meal, we see native Hawaiians. Kingston makes clear that they are in a minority of the workers in describing the dinner, however, though she does offer a moment of cultural exchange: "The few Hawaiian workers passed around salt. Chinese take a bit of sugar to remind them in times of bitter struggle of the sweetness of life, and Hawaiians take a few grains of salt on the tongue because it tastes like the sea, like the earth, like human sweat and tears" (99). These cultural rituals around eating connect the workers, and differentiate them as well; the Chinese focus is on sweetness within struggle, while the Hawaiian workers she presents seem more grim by focusing on the taste of the landscape—the sea, the earth—and the material evidence of human

suffering or difficulty—the sweat, the tears. Kingston seems to want to connect the groups in the way they are experiencing the work while keeping their specific cultural narratives divided; she does not fold them together through the shared labor. In fact, she even seems to emphasize the hard labor of Bak Goong and the other China men at the expense of the native Hawaiians, narrating how "the Hawaiians quit rather than help pull the boulders out of the earth" (103), leaving the China men as "the first human beings to dig into this part of the island and see the meat and bones of the red earth" (103). The story takes away the claims of the native Hawaiians to the land by showing not only the willingness of the China men to labor, and continue to labor under hard circumstances, but in how they are the "first human beings" to access the land in this way—even if the "meat and bones of the red earth" suggests the violence of a murdered body as what they have conquered.

"A Talk Addict"

Lisa Lowe argues that a "distance from the national culture constitutes Asian American culture as an alternative formation that produces cultural expressions materially and aesthetically at odds with the resolution of the citizen in the nation" (6). This aids in reading some of the resistance of the story to too-easily integrating Ah Goong and Bak Goong into the American identity that the narrator claims for them on the surface—Kingston redefines citizenship, and through this, allows the grandfathers to complicate the meaning of national origin. Lowe continues: "Rather than expressing a 'failed' integration of Asians into the American cultural sphere, this distance preserves Asian American culture as an alternative site where the palimpsest of lost memories is reinvented, histories are fractured and retraced, and the unlike varieties of silence emerge into articulacy" (6). That is, the distancing that Kingston undertakes—the ways in which the narrative redefines

citizenship for the grandfathers, but maintains distance from fully knowing their experiences—is a mechanism of preservation of Asian American culture, resisting the too-easy integration of the China men into the larger narrative of nation. Instead of fixed cultural memories, the "histories are fractured and retraced," suggesting an ongoing project of breaking and also remaking rather than one that is stable. The continual rewriting over loss implies something that has happened before and will continually happen, which is itself suggestive of performance.[15] Loss remains as a part of Asian American history in Lowe's view, though she suggests that silences resulting from different origins ("unlike varieties") can "emerge into articulacy." Imagining silence to be spoken would at first seem to be a contradiction, but Kingston's narrative project demonstrates the possibilities for silence to be spoken: it continually returns to images of silence and the need for speech in making claims of origin and ancestry.

Bak Goong is so utterly shocked by the prohibition on speech that he experiences as a plantation worker that he cannot believe it is true: "this rule was so absurd, he thought he must have misheard tones" (100). Silence is a required part of work, and he is even penalized in his wages for talking; he is rendered mute because the owners don't wish to hear the workers talk and want to prohibit relationships among the China men as they work. Yet talking and listening are a point of pride for Bak Goong, who was able to decipher the speech of "foreign, barbarous-looking China Men" (99) even though their language and tones are different than his own. In this, Kingston tries to make clear the vast cultural, linguistic and interpretive differences within the category of China men, which in American

[15] Performance Theorist Richard Schechner defines performance as "Twice-behaved behavior" and also "restored behavior" (36-37) in *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985. Implicit in this definition of performance is not only the sense of repetition, but of difference or revision in each repetition.

culture became a homogenized figure, even a caricature. There is such cultural variety that understanding between the men is not certain, and even as he strives for that understanding, the company would cut it off. The vastly different China men forge a community and perform their own rituals during their tough labors, but they disagree on what is to be done in the rituals: "Everybody thought that his way of doing things was the way all Chinese were supposed to do them" (102). This conflict among the men is emphasized again in planning for a dragon performance for New Years, where "They argued about which postures and moves were the correct king fu. They had been taught by different teachers in contradicting traditions" (108). The connections they make within the community of China Men are themselves cross-cultural rather than monolithic, which upends assumptions about the men made by the larger American community.

More than understanding, though, Kingston suggests that talk and voice are crucial to bodily survival itself. Silence is akin to a sickness in the chapter, highlighting the powerlessness of being rendered mute, and talk becomes as much a physical need as opium is for some of the men; with the increasing pressure of silence, Bak Goong realizes that "He was a talk addict" (110). Kingston privileges figures of narrative, narration and storytelling in the chapter, working to justify her own project of narrating and interpreting. Further highlighting the role of the writer, Bak Goong wonders on being forbidden to talk, "How was he to marvel adequately, voiceless? He needed to cast his voice out to catch ideas. I wasn't born to be silent like a monk, he thought" (100). He connects speech with appreciation—with marvel—for the world around him. He also connects speech, here, with a transformative process in the image of it being "cast" out like a fishing net and reeling in ideas. Interestingly, instead of writing that "*He* wasn't born to be silent," Kingston allows

Bak Goong first person speech here—giving him voice and letting him speak for himself even though she remains in control of the overall narrative. The inarticulate, mute grandmother comes into greater focus as this worry about speech preoccupies Bak Goong, considering Kingston allows him to be deciphered where she "jabbered." Working in silence, Bak Goong is compelled to talk about the labor, about their lives on the farm, but surprisingly, "He wanted to discuss mutes and kings who rip out tongues by the roots" (100). Though he is compelled to talk about the real, material aspects of the labor around him, such as "how he sawed through the trunks and the interlocked branches held the trees upright" (100), he wants to interpret stories about being mute as well, serving in the role of the narrator in the text, telling us how and what to understand about the story.

The urgency for speech builds for Bak Goong, "And one day—he could not help it—he sang about the black mountains reddening and how mighty was the sun that shone on him in this enchanted forest and on his family in China" (100). Nature seems the spur for the performance, overwhelming him and seemingly invoking a reaction he cannot control, rather than showing the performance as an act of purposeful resistance to his powerlessness. His song also makes direct cultural connections between his own experience and his family in China. Speech is natural for him, performance and song are naturalized as necessary bodily reactions, in fact, as much a bodily reaction for Bak Goong as Ah Goong's masturbation is. In both cases, Kingston reserves the encounter with an untouched, beautiful, but brutal natural world as invoking this uncontrollable bodily urge, one vocal and one sexual.

Speechless, the performance of speech comes into focus for Bak Goong, who eventually "wanted to sing like a farmer in an opera" (103). This brings to mind Ah Goong's

later transformative viewing of the opera performance where he finds a bit of cultural home abroad. The landscape in Hawai'i even presented performatively: "Whenever Bak Goong looked up from the work, the mountains were there above him. They rose, sheer green walls without slope like great stage curtains that could part or rise, and then he would see behind them what really runs the world, whether the gods' faces are kind or evil" (105). With the stage curtains and the suggestion of forces acting on him from behind the curtains, even nature is made into performance and becomes a constructed space, similar to the way Bak Goong and the men must forcefully remake the land for industry. In the resolution to the chapter, the men decide to perform the role of ancestor, finding a lack of customs to soothe their difficult experiences in Hawai'i. They need ceremony and ritual in the new land. Bak Goong, instigator of the new customs, making clear that "We made it up. We can make up customs because we're the founding ancestors of this place" (118). As with the story of Ah Goong, Kingston engages with the language of origin and ancestry, here complicated by the appearance of the native Hawaiians, who have no role in this custom or in the China Men's view of founding ancestors. The appearance of the native Hawaiians in Kingston's story, even as she narrates their loss of community, complicates the ways we see their claims on being a founder of the place, and an ancestor of the land. The China men risk replicating a destructive seizing of space, but, as Kingston shows, their options for regaining power over speech are limited, and in some ways reliant on excluding the complications of those already lost to the practices of empire in Hawai'i.

Yet there are indications in the chapter that Bak Goong's story is actually haunted by the disappearance of the native Hawaiians rather than Kingston ignoring or writing over it. Travelling the island and finding an abandoned village, he hears voices: "in it he heard sobs,

the lamentation of old men and children, thousands of souls wailing in separate voices…He felt like weeping in sympathy; sorrow filled his chest, but he kept the tears back not to blind himself as he ran out of the village" (111). Significantly, "he kept the tears back not to blind himself," suggesting that the losses of the "thousands of souls" are present, even if not brought to the forefront of Kingston's text. The sheer magnitude of the voices sobbing serves to further re-inscribe the native Hawaiian society as already lost when the China men arrive. However, Bak Goong's reaction—having to repress the tears even though "He felt like weeping in sympathy"—suggests that Kingston wishes to avoid blinding herself by telling that story of loss and suffering. Instead, she avoids direct interaction with their stories in the way Bak Goong flees the weeping village, an image with which she again indicts her narrative for its omissions. At the same time as the native Hawaiians are shown to haunt Bak Goong, talk takes on the physical features of the land around him, becoming as natural and inevitable as the Hawaiian world around him: "If he opened his mouth, words might tumble forth like coral out of the surf; spit would spout like lava" (114). In these similes, he has adapted to the space around him specifically in how he envisions speech, promoting a transcultural understanding of this desire for speech, but also seemingly taking on the space left by the loss of the native Hawaiians.

In creating a "shout party" (118) into a "wide hole," "a circle" that the men plow, as remedy to the illness of not talking, Bak Goong and the China Men transform the way they are perceived by the white men, and indeed shift the balance of power by speech combined with this material alteration of the land. The men "threw down their tools and flopped on the ground with their faces over the edge of the hole and their legs like wheel spokes" (117). Even though their speech does not threaten violence, and in fact centers on the

desire for home—"I want home. Home. Home. Home" (117)—the plantation men hide, and from then on "no longer accompanied the knife-wielding China Men into deep cane" (118). Even though no violence is used, no official uprising occurs, the very speech they engage in is suggestive of the possibility of violence to the extent that it alters their treatment by the white men. Performing this speech over the symbolic hole transforms the power dynamic, but in this case, only because the men are seen as a threat in the way they sound out of control—"so riled up, who knows what they were up to?" (118). The shout party does not serve to create further understanding between cultures or between the powerful and the powerless, but that their performance of speech remains inarticulate and not understandable to the white men is in fact a key to the power gained by the China men through the shout party. They are heard, but not the meaning of their words; they triumph in that from then on "Bak Goong talked and sang at his work" (118) without punishment, the inarticulate sounds enough to scare the men who do not understand their language.

In order for their shout party to succeed, the men physically dig a hole rather than just shouting amongst the cane, which again focuses on the ties of the material world to the narrative one. The men lie face down to shout in the hole, taking a very vulnerable position that places them in full contact with the earth. They primarily shout messages to their families: "Hello down there in China!" and "Hello, Mother," and also "I miss you" and "I've been working hard for you, and I hate it" (117). The hole physically represents their distance from and relationship to China, envisioning it as a place on the physically other side of the world, but also spatially as a place where their roots are, under the ground. Similar to Ah Goong's interaction with the mountains, the hole also references a sexual or gender dynamic, as they reach for home through the hole in the earth. They actually

"buried their words, planted them" (118) like seeds that would speak when the cane grew: "what stories the wind would tell" (118). They transform the space of empire and industry into one of speech and empowerment, taking physical and narrative control over the cane fields and by this material interaction, envisioning that their stories will long remain, carried by the wind blowing over where they are planted. Speech is a redemptive act for the men when tied to this performative, physical enactment of claiming the land, and it allows the China men to salvage the lost power of their relatively powerless economic and cultural positions.

"She would sing for him and listen to him sing"

In retelling the ancestral history of the generations before hers, Kingston portrays a complicated chain of connection and desire between the narrator and her grandfathers, suggesting in many cases that she has to seize narrative power at their expense. Yet in an early chapter called "The Father from China," Kingston portrays the railroad Grandfather Ah Goong's desire for an imagined "happy daughter" (17-18) that helps to illuminate the sometimes difficult narrative relationship of grandfathers and granddaughter. His image of this happy daughter writes the desire for a figure like the narrator herself into her family history. In the years after constructing the railroad, Ah Goong is a father of only sons living in China, when he dreams of this daughter: "Grandfather, Ah Goong, plowed fields hour after hour alone, inching along between earth and sky. To amuse himself, he sang girls' songs in an old man's falsetto. He wished for a happy daughter he could anticipate seeing in the evenings after work; she would sing for him and listen to him sing" (17-18). The image of Ah Goong's physical labor plowing fields endlessly calls to mind his labor on the transcontinental railroad (which is revealed in a subsequent chapter of the novel, creating

a temporal disruption). The mountains of his railroad work contrast with a flat and monotonous landscape of fields in which he is "inching along between earth and sky." His geography is severely limited in the image; however, the time is seemingly endless, "hour after hour" with barely any physical or forward movement.

Ah Goong desires a shared experience of art with this happy daughter in imagining that she would sing, and also listen to him singing. This allows the narrator to insert an anticipation of her own role as novelist and historian into the family history. Ah Goong anticipates both listening to and also singing for the happy daughter, but in order to imagine this, he actually performs in the future voice of the daughter in imitated falsetto. He thus performs the voice of the little girl in the way that Kingston performs the voice of the grandfathers in the text. The image dramatizes but reverses the performative gender switching necessary for Kingston to speak through the China men in the novel. In depicting Ah Goong's desire for a daughter that sings and listens, Kingston suggests that much as she must perform her own song in the narrative, she also is intent on fulfilling the role of performative listener to grandfathers in their singing, long anticipating the happy daughter.

Chapter 3
"Simply by Juxtaposition":
Possession and Loss in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*

In a 1921 interview with Latrobe Carroll, Willa Cather claimed that in her novel writing, "I'm trying to cut out all analysis, observation, description, even the picture-making quality, in order to make things and people tell their own story simply by juxtaposition" (qtd. in Leddy 182). Cather explains what she means by this "juxtaposition" of things and people using an image of material objects: "Just as if I put here on the table a green vase, and beside it a yellow orange. Now, those two things affect each other. Side by side, they produce a reaction which neither of them will produce alone…the audience I try to write for is the one interested in the effect the green vase brings out in the orange, and the orange in the green vase" (qtd. in Leddy 182). In her image, Cather uses common, domestic objects—a table, a vase, an orange—and the particular brightness of the visual contrast in colors to make her point about juxtaposition. Cather focuses on the change that looking at them together brings to the vision of each without overdetermining the way the looker sees that difference—that is, without that "analysis, observation, description" of what the combination means. That said, we might question exactly how Cather can "cut out" description itself in presenting things or people in a novel, or the extent to which presentation of object is itself ever beyond "description." The objects she selects for her example differ in function; the vase presumably has a primarily aesthetic or decorative function, while the orange has a practical one as food, but also marks a striking, vivid visual presence as an aesthetic object. With these objects, Cather situates her idea of juxtaposition within the material realm of the home. Indeed home, domesticity, and material history are

major themes in her 1925 novel *The Professor's House*, for which her ideas of juxtaposition are particularly relevant.

The Professor's House relies heavily on juxtaposition, both formally and thematically, to tell the story of middle aged, Midwestern historian Professor Godfrey St. Peter and his romance "of the mind" (234) with the young orphan adventurer Tom Outland. Studying the formal juxtaposition of the center section of the novel, "Tom Outland's Story," with the surrounding two sections that focus on St. Peter's story is key to unlocking each. Michael Leddy argues that Cather's novel demonstrates "an idea of the novel not as narrative but as image, as if placing objects against one another in space were indeed a way to tell a (temporal) story" (183). Cather's work relies heavily on spatial vision in the way Leddy suggests, in a formal way, but also a thematic one. The novel returns the reader to seeing and remembering the view through the window of the Professor's house, as he himself does throughout the text. The young Tom Outland's story of the Southwest is placed against the Professor's houses and the Professor's room, Outland's discovery of the Blue Mesa in New Mexico next to the Professor's view of Lake Michigan in the university town of Hamilton. Reading what effect the yellow orange has on the green vase means to read the Professor's imagination against the narrative of Tom Outland that is at the literal center of the novel.

Surprisingly, rather than merely aiding in decoding Cather's work, reading *The Professor's House* with Cather's aesthetic of juxtaposition in mind ends up raising questions about the ethics of a text that functions "simply by juxtaposition" in the multitude of ways that the formal and thematic juxtaposition alters meaning, allows for appropriation of cultural material, and constrains vision and connection in the story rather than expanding

it. This is particularly the case in how Tom Outland interacts with the Blue Mesa (which Cather bases on the real-life discovery of the Mesa Verde[16]), where he discovers the ruins of a lost cliff dwelling civilization, and he seeks to locate American ancestors among the lost tribe. This occurs in part through the juxtaposition of his material reality with the artifacts he locates, and the cultural meanings he interprets from that juxtaposition. Outland's narration of the material history that he finds in the American Southwest problematizes the ways in which the larger nation makes claims on ancestors for America. Cather's technique of juxtaposition suggests a way of understanding her form and theme in *The Professor's House*, but closely looking at the juxtaposition in the text suggests the problematic ways that juxtaposition is deployed in constructing American national identity both inside and outside of the text.

"To mean anything": Tom Outland's Diary

A central example of textual juxtaposition in the novel is found in Tom Outland's diary, which he kept to catalogue his excavation of the ruins on the Blue Mesa. Professor St. Peter seizes on the diary as a professional project after Tom's death. As a historian, St. Peter collects and retells stories, and does the same in preserving and passing along Tom's story in the course of the novel; "Tom Outland's Story" in the second section is told from the Professor's memory of being told it. Significantly, the occasion for remembering Outland's story in the course of the text is because the Professor plans "to give part of this summer to Tom Outland's diary—to edit and annotate it for publication" (150). He is tasked with writing an introduction to the diary, while his family is away in Europe.

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[16] Cather writes "the Blue Mesa (the Mesa Verde) actually was discovered by a young cowpuncher in just" the way as she has Outland discover it. "I followed the real story very closely in Tom Outland's narrative," she claims. *Willa Cather On Writing*, p. 32.

Framing the presentation of Outland's story, he is alone in his old study in the present time of the novel, long after Outland's death. Far from being just a personal connection in the Professor's life, Outland alters the academic work that the Professor undertakes, including the kinds of histories he writes. He considers the introduction to the diary the most crucial aspect, but also the most difficult: "The bother was that he must write an introduction. The diary covered only about six months of the boy's life, a summer he spent on the Blue Mesa, and in it there was almost nothing about Tom himself. To mean anything, it must be prefaced by a sketch of Outland, and some account of his later life and achievements" (150). Framing makes meaning for the work of the diary, bluntly allowing it "To mean anything." Without this "sketch" that fills in the missing presence of "Tom himself," the long-preserved journal is only personal, not a significant historical piece; it requires the juxtaposition of this contextual, academic introduction to come to meaning. This underscores the role of narrative even in academic work that could be thought of as objective or beyond the reach of narrative. It also points to the significance of the first and third sections of *The Professor's House* that, presumably, allow the central story, Tom's story, "To mean anything." In some regards, the introduction to the diary should be easy; after entering the university, Outland did indeed have many intellectual "achievements" the Professor can record, including making up years of mathematics and science at a staggering rate, and proving to be an extraordinary mind to all who he came across. Posthumously, an invention he undertook goes on to make a tremendous amount of money once it is marketed by the Professor's son-in-law Louie Marsellus, and is hailed as a tremendous scientific discovery.

The book the Professor is annotating and editing, then, has the benefit of connection to this success and the scientific achievement of Outland to shore it up as historically

significant. The wider academic and commercial success of Outland allows for the Professor's writing and the publication of the diary, and that interconnection of the commercial and academic cannot be discounted—even as the Professor and several colleagues try to fight this commercialization of the university that they see around them, resisting pressure for economic results from academic inquiry. The romance of the mind Outland and St. Peter experience related to Outland's Blue Mesa and what it means may appear to be an ideal mode of meaning making, and is idealized in the text—it is based on direct, material experience and also emotional engagement that would not be traditionally associated with academic work, if considered objective or fact-based. But even that idealized mode of meaning making is impossible without the commercial desire for the work to be done or without an audience for the narrative. The novel suggests that what history is made depends greatly on the economic, cultural, governmental, and academic forces at work when historians write it, driven by those who will remember it.

Tom Outland's diary is particularly significant in that it is formally dependent on juxtaposition, in this case, that of text and image. As the Professor struggles with his introduction, we get more details of the structure of the diary: "Tom…had noted down the details of each day's work among the ruins, along with the weather and anything unusual in the routine of their life. There was a minute description of each tool they found, of every piece of cloth and pottery" (239). Tom marks the material history of the mesa carefully in the diary, tying the items of the past to the present circumstances of their excavation, and even to "the routine of their life," as though the personal routine of Tom and the other excavators or "the weather" has an impact on the historical meaning of the objects. To Tom, however, those circumstances impact the narrative of the culture he excavates in how they

are presented together. The descriptions were "frequently accompanied by a very suggestive pencil sketch of the object and a surmise as to its use and the kind of life in which it had played a part" (238). The diary serves an interpretive purpose, no matter how brief, through both the "suggestive" sketch—the items are made into an aesthetic representation of them in the sketches—but also the "surmise," which suggests how Tom builds a narrative about what could have been in the lost society, what "kind of life" these objects make, and what their use means about the people who held them.

The simple structure of the diary is what appeals to the Professor more than anything: "To St. Peter this plain account was almost beautiful, because of the stupidities it avoided and the things it did not say" (238). The "plain account" is in contrast to the usual ordering that St. Peter must do with his scholarly work, forming an argument around the evidence he provides; the diary itself becomes an aesthetic object ("almost beautiful") rather than objective record, part of Tom Outland's material history. Further, the brevity of "adjectives [that] were purely descriptive, relating to form and colour," St. Peter insists are used for presenting the material objects and "not the young explorer's emotions" (238). Outland's diary captures Cather's call to get rid of "analysis, observation, description" in writing, simplifying the form even further than her own. And yet, "through this austerity" the Professor also feels "the ardour and excitement of the boy" (238), seeming to contradict the sense that his emotions are not described—or, at least, not directly so. Outland is recording how he fell in love with the Blue Mesa in the record of the objects. The feeling the Professor has from the record seems to arise from juxtaposition: the visual presentation of the object in the sketch against the simple, incomplete textual description is what resists "stupidities" that, the text suggests, arises from too overbearing analytical work,

undercutting in some measure the work performed by St. Peter in favor of this simpler, cleaner formal structuring of information.

Tom's diary is one of the only things preserved when the artifacts of the Cliff City are sold to a German by his friend and companion Rodney Blake (nicknamed Roddy); in the end the relics are lost to Tom, but his record of them remains. The diary then becomes record of what has been lost rather than what has been found. At first, the loss of the artifacts to a German with their sale—the profits from which Roddy wants to use to send Tom to college—is a devastating blow to Outland. He tells Roddy, "they weren't mine to sell—nor yours! They belonged to this country, to the State, and to all the people. They belonged to boys like you and me, that have no other ancestors to inherit from" (219). The explicit concentration on ancestors—signifying personal connection and inheritance he feels—and Tom's very personal feelings of ownership of the items they find calls into question the neutrality of his history making. Tom claims Rodney has sold "the pots and pans that belonged to my poor grandmothers a thousand years ago" (219). Using "my" and not "our" here is indicative of the singular possession Outland has taken of the history, even though he has no more claim than Roddy, or, arguably, than the German purchaser. Outland becomes possessed by his strong attachment to this particular version of history and ancestry for the nation, by the idea that his "poor grandmothers" and their domestic items have been violated, creating a particularly personal affront to home and family.

Although Tom is unable to preserve these physical items, either in a museum or collection for others to appreciate, he does preserve them through both his narrative (told to St. Peter) and his diary. Tom appropriates the artifacts in his story for what they can mean to him and to America in claiming they belonged "to all the people" and also to those

looking for ancestors—those already afflicted by loss, who have "no other ancestors to inherit from" and thus are joined to the inhabitants of the Cliff City by way of loss. Because there are no heirs to the civilization or the artifacts, Tom's adoption of these grandmothers is made possible; his own loss of the artifacts through their sale compounds the connection to these imagined ancestors in a shared cultural loss. Indeed, embracing his sense of loss leads him to repudiate his closest human connection, that with Roddy, who leaves the Blue Mesa after Tom confronts him about the sale. Outland's dedication to the affront to imagined grandmothers and their pots and pans takes precedence to his real human community in a way that is eventually troubling even to Outland himself.

However, it is only after severing his connection with Rodney that Tom begins to see the mesa "as a whole…It all came together in my understanding" (226). Outland claims that he "requites faith and friendship" (229) by driving Roddy out of their home on the mesa, but in doing so, gains access to a wholeness of the Southwestern space and lost civilization. In order to retain this whole, however, Tom must fight to exclude and repress even his own knowledge, never going to retrieve his diary from the tower in the so-called "Eagle's Nest" of the Cliff City at that time. Outland fears losing the sudden understanding of the whole if he retrieves the diary and reads it. He tells the Professor, "I didn't want to go back and unravel things step by step. Perhaps I was afraid that I would lose the whole in the parts" (227). Outland's narration of the mesa to St. Peter years later is blatantly, even to Outland, a nostalgic vision of the space of the Southwest and a simplified view of the ancestry of America through Outland's attachment to his stories of the cliff-dwelling civilization's artifacts. Maintaining the coherence of a whole is work, which is directly at odds with the close examination that we usually associate with academic work or intellectual inquiry.

However, Tom's understanding reflects Cather's own claims that "The higher processes of art are all processes of simplification" (*Willa Cather on Writing* 40), putting his experience of the mesa in decidedly narrative terms, hanging together in this simplified form.

In tying "high" art to simplification in "The Novel Démeublé" (written in 1922, prior to *The Professor's House*), Cather suggests that the novelist, the painter, and, by extension, the historian and his narratives are implicated in this process of simplification in making meaning: "The novelist must learn to write, and then he must unlearn it; just as the modern painter learns to draw, and then learns when utterly to disregard his accomplishment, when to subordinate it to a higher and truer effect" (40). In attaining a "higher and truer effect, however, "If the novel is a form of imaginative art, it cannot be at the same time a vivid and brilliant form of journalism" (40)—so the "truer effect" does not necessarily represent objective truth. Where, then, does this leave the narratives of history, which serve purposes between "journalism" and "imaginative art" in terms of envisioning the nation? St. Peter's history and Outland's history take on more aspects of narrative art, of the novel and its imaginative claims; after all, she differentiates the "journalism" from the art of the novel by the identification of the "eternal material": "Out of the teeming, gleaming stream of the present it must select the eternal material of art" (40). The novelist, like the historian, is tasked with something beyond presenting or representing the real, or the "teeming gleaming stream" of current time in a catalog of the present moment.

To shore up the newfound "whole" of the Blue Mesa that Tom experiences after the sale of the artifacts, Tom turns to other cultural texts, absorbing himself in reading Virgil amongst Native American ruins and thus "forget[ting] all about Roddy Blake without knowing it" (228). Significantly, he uses the *Aeneid* as this text of forgetting. Walter Benn

Michaels sees this as a way of transforming "a poem about political identity" into "a poem about cultural identity" (Michaels 229) in layering the two together, thus speaking to a particular view about the culture that the artifacts on the mesa represent in the text. Building on that, Tom's reading of Virgil on the mesa gives insight into the themes of the novel as a whole: the production of stories of foundation, who gets to make them and what they come to mean. Tom's reading on the mesa weaves this supposedly uninhabited and currently uncultured space into the larger fabric of making the American nation. As the *Aeneid* searches for ancestors, origins, and foundations, so does Tom; founding myths, not just "American" ones, rewrite the meanings of material space in front of him.

And indeed, history as a narrative process is a major conflict of *The Professor's House,* calling into question the extent to which any history is, or can be, true—or could be separated from the desires and needs of those telling the story. The text presents the Professor as a sort of heroic figure, an academic with motives rooted in learning rather than monetary gain like many around him, and yet it also calls into question the process of history making performed by the Professor. His history is something that is at once factual, but also deeply colored by the lived experiences of the one writing the history. To the Professor, "the most important chapters of history were interwoven with personal memories" (85). This view of historical production is obviously problematized in the questions it raises about objectivity. However, with this Cather makes the larger claim that all chapters of history are necessarily interwoven with memory for better or worse, to some extent—whether that be of a personal variety like the Professor, or a collective or national memory that infuses the understanding of history, altering what would seem to be objective through that juxtaposition. Rather than advocating for this way of making history,

Cather lays bare the invisible process that occurs in the construction of narrative history, particularly in the history of national origin.

Tom Outland's story resonates with Godfrey St. Peter because it shares the quality of history and personal memory that his own history making depends upon. This is true not only in the history of the cliff dwellers that is grafted onto Tom's relationship with Roddy Blake, but also in the way his reading of the *Aeneid* forever juxtaposes the book with a vision of the landscape: "When I look into the *Aeneid* now, I can always see two pictures: the one on the page, and another behind that: blue and purple rocks and yellow-green piñons with flat tops, little clustered houses clinging together for protection, a rude tower rising in their midst, rising strong, with calmness and courage" (228). The physical experience of reading the *Aeneid* in New Mexico not only colors the interpretation of the text, but also cultures the meaning of the space in which he reads, particularly in his vision of it with the "houses clinging together" protected by their community. Tom's experience reading the *Aeneid* on the Blue Mesa tests Cather's idea about the juxtaposition of the orange and vase in the visual experiences of the novel—the objects will forever have impact on each other merely by this placing side by side. Through juxtaposition, Tom interprets the people of the mesa along epic lines, which colors his view of the relics with the epic that is foundational in European culture, and also his claim to them. Significantly, he feels no need to exclude this text from his experience of American space even though it is very different in origin than the landscape around him; he is comfortable with the way the European cultural texts trespass on American space. In this, Tom models a comfort with cross-cultural foundations for America rather than one focused internally on a geographic

America. However, Outland also never questions whether his vision of the Native American culture itself appropriates or excludes.

Tom feels connected to the cliff dwellers through the human, material evidence of their existence, which he is able to hold in his hands: "Nothing makes those people seem so real to me as their old pots, with the fire-black on them" (101). The domestic residue of the fire-black on the old pot represents to Outland the same sort of interweaving of personal experience and history. The pots are at once culturally significant and were individually significant to the daily space of the cliff dwellers. The fire-black on the pots, the mark of lived-in space and daily utility, serves as a larger theme for the book as a whole. As Cather tells the story of how history is made, how academic work is performed, and how interpretation of the past occurs, she also tells the story of domestic life for the Professor, and for Tom Outland. It is no coincidence that the object Outland attaches to is not a work of art, but an artifact of daily life. It is something necessary, useful, domestic; Cather seems to suggest that the history that acknowledges its lived experience is the same type of object as the pots marked with "fire-black."

"It was possession"

Professor St. Peter and Tom Outland both seek a simplified whole in the course of the text through several different routes of vision and connection. For Outland, this is found in what he sees as the most striking feature of Cliff City, the tower in the center: "The tower was the fine thing that held all the jumble of houses together and made them mean something" (180). Through the architectural and spatial coherence, Tom envisions cultural coherence. He idealizes the people because of the space of their home. What it "made them mean" is left for Tom to narrate, similarly to the way the Professor must make Outland's

diary "mean anything" with his introduction. About this central tower, Outland muses, "I had never seen a tower like that one. It seemed to mark a difference. I felt that only a strong and aspiring people would have built it, and a people with feeling for design" (182). It is this "difference," the idealized civilization of peace and connectedness in which Tom creates his home by excluding and limiting. Not only is it based on what Tom "felt," feeling alone rather than evidence, it is predicated on the "feeling for design" of the lost community, signified by the juxtaposition of the tower to the surrounding houses. Yet the tower, marking a difference in how it interacts with the houses around, "made them mean something." In this, Tom fails to read the implicit connectedness of members within a community. Instead, he envisions his *own* connectedness to the cultural artifacts of this lost community. Thus, Tom is able to forsake Roddy, his familial community, after the sale of the artifacts, and as a result, experiences full imaginative possession of the Blue Mesa:

> that was the first night I was ever really on the mesa at all—the first night that all of me was there. This was the first time I ever saw it as a whole. It all came together in my understanding, as a series of experiments do when you begin to see where they are leading. Something had happened in me that made it possible for me to co-ordinate and simplify, and that process, going on in my mind, brought with it great happiness. It was possession. (226).

Outland simplifies, creating a whole of the mesa that leads to his "possession" of it, and also leads to him being possessed by it. Outland's simplification of vision is deeply persuasive, but relies on exclusion of detail, opting instead for juxtaposition. Outland is obsessed by the "difference" marked by the rising tower, which includes a sense of difference from the world he knows; as an orphan, he has no space or home, which marks the city with

particular resonance for him. Rodney Blake's connection to the community of the living, to Tom's future (with the bid to send him to college) and indeed his happiness, destroys Tom's imaginative home on the range. Tom wishes to institutionalize that "difference" marked by the tower by way of having scholars study and excavate the site, but eventually accepts personal possession of the mesa as a substitution for this nationalized possession.

Outland finds "happiness unalloyed" (227) after requiting friendship because the loss of Rodney allows him to experience the idealized space of the cliff city—he rids himself of social bonds in favor of imagined ones in a way that eventually troubles even Tom. Outland is then presented both as heroic and as anti-heroic in the novel: he represents a lone dissenting spirit against the official national discourse, which refuses to memorialize the ruins of his mesa and those American ancestors he claims, but we are also meant to see the fictional nature of those ancestors in the way Outland imagines them. Tom himself feels deeply comforted by his spatial juxtaposition, by sharing the material space of these ancestors, when he thinks on the loss of Roddy: "I used to be frightened at my own heartlessness. But the feel of the narrow moccasin-worn trail in the flat rock made my feet glad, like a good taste in the mouth" (228). His own presence in the material space of the worn path, traversed by those who wore the moccasins and walked it long ago and countless times leads to Outland's acceptance of his "heartlessness." His presence in the material space is persuasive enough to support his connection to the space and the imagined ancestors. As Tom navigates through the connection to a meaningful historical past for himself and for America, we see the contradictory nature of that narrative construction. In a sense, his failure to have the relics become part of the official national memory preserves them to a greater degree as symbols of resistance and exclusion, and

even as symbols of loss, which are appropriate symbols for someone who himself is without family or economic and social privilege, and would seem on a larger level to symbolize a nation predicated on a history of loss or disruption. The material loss when the ruins are sold to the German deepens Tom's sense of failure at constructing a national narrative from the artifacts, but the material loss of the ruins also allows him to fully experience the civilization on the mesa and to preserve and possess them in his own narrative meaning.

In his telling of the space of the mesa, Outland first sees the cliff city as marking coherence and quiet beauty; the architecture of the space allows him to imagine an origin for himself. In recounting his first image of the city on the day of its discovery, Tom tells Professor St. Peter:

> I wish I could tell you what I saw there, just *as* I saw it, on that first morning, through a veil of lightly falling snow. Far up above me, a thousand feet or so, set in a great cavern in the face of the cliff, I saw a little city of stone, asleep. It was as still as sculpture—and something like that. It all hung together, seemed to have a kind of composition. (179-180)

He has had an experience of vision that cannot be related "*as* I saw it," making narrative insufficient for the experience, again bringing to mind Cather's desire to simplify and juxtapose as opposed to interpret and describe. The only way for the professor to understand the cliff city is to imagine the space of it visually as the piece of art Outland describes. For Outland, it is not merely the evidence of people, but rather spatial art, "sculpture." He is fascinated by how "It all hung together," as literally, a city carved into a stone wall and supported by air, would hang together over the cavern below. Tom

envisions, through this literal hanging of the rock, the corollary coherent, mythical inhabitants, high above the concerns of rootless boys like himself.

Tom's awe at the sight of the cliff city is reflected by a similar reverence that St. Peter later develops for the Southwestern landscape through his interactions with Tom. While his family is travelling in Europe for the summer, they discuss bringing the Professor with them the following summer. While "Sometimes he thought he would like to drive up in front of Notre Dame, in Paris, again, and see it standing there like the Rock of Ages, with the frail generations breaking about its base" (246), he "wondered" if he would, but is not drawn to the experience—especially that the family wants "to take him with them" (246)—he rejects the need or desire for human bonds in a way similar to Outland. Instead, "if he went anywhere next summer, he thought it would be down into Outland's country" (246), presumably alone. There he would "watch the sunrise break on sculptured peaks and impassable mountain passes—to look off at those long, rugged, untamed vistas dear to the American heart. Dear to all hearts, probably—at least, calling to all" (246). The landscape is marked by the natural formations that are like art in the "sculptured peaks," and suggests a solitary, distant, disconnected landscape, in both "impassable mountain passes" where people could not go and also the "sculptured peaks" that are visually stunning from afar, but unable to be experienced up close—inaccessible and unavailable. And yet, these are "dear to the American heart," suggesting that the Professor associates the "untamed" landscape with a similarly untamed or unstructured American cultural foundation, and that distant vision is a part of what makes it "dear" to that communal "American heart." Against that is juxtaposed the man-made Notre Dame in Paris, which represents human skill, European culture, and religious piety in an astounding work of architecture. In linking the

two, Cather suggests the ways the Professor is situated from a position of American exceptionalism. “Dear to all hearts, probably,” the view is at once nationalized (“probably” dear to all, but not necessarily so, having a specific nationalistic meaning), but also suggestive of the American ideal becoming a universal ideal, in the way the landscape is “calling to all.” The text suggests a democratic view, available “to all” who would look—even if American citizenship laws severely restricted the reality of who the view was “calling” into the country as a citizen, at least.

The discovery of one former inhabitant, nicknamed “Mother Eve,” provides particular insight into the masculine myth making and possession that seize Outland during his excavation of the mesa. The mummified body of Mother Eve is uncovered in the so-called Eagle’s Nest that rises high above the cliff city. From her circumstances, they gather that she has been murdered quite violently, left with a horrible expression on her face. The men go on to construct a narrative of her murder that makes sense within the civilization as they see it, giving insight into the desire they have for that civilization. However, despite their narratives, Mother Eve is a symbol of disarray within the order, and her body provides troubling evidence of violence within the society that Outland and the other men idealize as peaceful and advanced. On the face of Mother Eve is “a look of terrible agony” which she had kept “through all those years” (192). Father Duchene, the priest that befriends Tom and serves as his informal educator and advisor while in the mesa, reads the evidence of Mother Eve’s murder as “a personal tragedy” rather than evidence of societal imperfection (201). Speaking “slyly,” he hypothesizes that the woman has been unfaithful to her husband, leading to her murder, because in “primitive society the husband is allowed

to punish an unfaithful wife with death" (201)[17]. Duchene, then, blames "Mother Eve" for her own death, which he reads as justified in the rules of this ordered society; she created disarray through adultery and the men to punish her for that crime, so his story goes. The men on the mesa express no horror over the fate of Mother Eve, and most significantly, they do not question Father Duchene's narration of her death or suggest other possible interpretations. In order to maintain coherence in the beautiful, artful society, where, Duchene claims, "They were, perhaps, too far advanced for their time and environment" (198), the men choose to imagine Mother Eve's death as a rational, even beautifully simple act of societal law. Violence becomes naturalized in the reading of her death, something necessary for the society to hang together like the cliff city. To hold the image of an idealized originary American people in their minds, the men actively exclude questions of the fairness of Mother Eve's punishment if she did commit adultery, while excluding any alternative story of the woman's life and death. Ann Mosely argues that because the Eagle's Nest is a "refuge," that is, the safe place where Outland hides his diary, finding the murdered Mother Eve creates a stark difference; she writes that it is "ironically, no refuge for Mother Eve" (204). In yoking the diary to the body, Cather seems to point us towards reading the body of Mother Eve as a text itself: The Eagle's Nest conceals and preserves the body of the murdered woman and then serves to preserve Outland's diary from the sale of the artifacts, "sealed…up with cement" in "this neat little cupboard in the wall" (200).

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[17] See Seamus Heaney's poem "Punishment" for his reading of a similar account of punishment for a "Little adulteress" (24) in Northern Europe. Heaney imagines his own complicity in her murder in his engagement with the symbols of the bog people: "I almost love you / but would have cast, I know, / the stones of silence. / I am the artful voyeur" (29-32). In a fascinating twist, the so-called "Windeby Girl" on whom Heaney bases the poem—which archeologists had assumed was a young woman punished for adultery—was later found by archeologist Heather Gill-Robinson to actually have been male. The story of the Windeby Girl shows again the instability of what at first seems to be clear narratives of the past rooted in the seductive materiality of these preserved bodies in particular.

"A Square Window"

In an often-quoted letter to a friend in 1938, Cather claims the origins of form in *The Professor's House* arose from an experience of visual art:

> Just before I began the book I had seen, in Paris, an exhibition of old and modern Dutch paintings. In many of them the scene presented was a living-room warmly furnished, or a kitchen full of food and coppers. But in most of the interiors, whether drawing-room or kitchen, there was a square window, open, through which one saw the masts of ships, or a stretch of grey sea. The feeling of the sea that one got through those square windows was remarkable, and gave me a sense of the fleets of Dutch ships that ply quietly on all the waters of the globe—to Java, etc. (*Willa Cather on Writing* 31)

Cather's vision of the American Southwest is surprisingly framed by a distinctly international, even global aesthetic experience in that French exhibition of both "old and modern" Dutch artwork. Her framing of land, space, and landscape through this open window, however, is even more surprising: the sea through the window does not represent what we might assume for the scene—mere openness, vastness, or unmarked landscape against the domestic interiors. Rather the "feeling of the sea" for Cather is specifically that of "Dutch ships that ply quietly on all the waters of the globe"—the sea supplies the vision of a very marked space and marked landscape, with a very specific experience of empire that "quietly," perhaps close to invisibly, exists within and without of that Dutch home space. Deborah Karush points out that Cather's statement on Dutch paintings is an explicit reference to Dutch colonialism in its mention of Java, which was a Dutch colony until 1945. She suggests that the sea with Dutch fleets "turns a glimpse of the sea in a painting into a

synecdoche for European imperialism" (145). In Cather's comparison of Outland's mesa to the Dutch trading ships, Karush suggests, "the passage transforms the foreign into the familiar and turns the expansionist gaze inward, toward an imaginatively reopened, mythologically innocent continental frontier" (145). That is to say, through this foundation for the novel, Cather herself envisions the text as an explicitly imperialist endeavor, and clearly envisions space or landscape as marked by culture rather than outside it, signaling a similar way to read the space of the Blue Mesa. Her letter decodes some of what might remain hidden in her construction of American empire in the text; space is not empty for Cather, and landscape not merely background to the central plot or characters. Sarah Wilson asserts, "The paintings reveal that the construction of this national identity hinges on perceptions of timeless horizons in service to a time-bound nation, suggesting the degree to which (often historical) ideas of the past undergird conceptions of nationality" (573). The "timeless horizons" function as the "eternal materials" in the construction of national identity by historians and others who have narrated the nation, but, as Wilson states, are actually inextricably linked to the present and its needs and desires for national identity.

Cather explains that the Dutch paintings led to her vision of *The Professor's House* both in terms of the domestic focus of the text (similar to the domestic focus of the paintings), but also the formal focus around a window, a window that Outland's story opens by looking outside of the crowded interiors: "In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things; American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies—until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and

the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and in his behaviour" (31-32). Cather plays with the definition of being overcrowded in her statement, mixing material crowding—the clothes, the furs, the things that crowd the professor and his family—with the ideological crowding that emerges as the characters interact in the text, placing them against one another in a way that reflects the shared role of the material space and discursive space in the text. The first and third sections of Cather's novel, "The Family" and "The Professor," frame Outland's story as the open window amidst the stuffy houses on either side, opening the family stories up to new possibilities. The structure also highlights the way in which Outland never "lives" in the novel as a directly experienced character in himself, but as remembered by St. Peter and other characters.

Against the wide geography of the text, Cather juxtaposes a narrow geography of home spaces. Godfrey St. Peter inhabits many spaces in the novel, but none as wholly as his dilapidated attic room with a view—his study, where he creates his histories. Through eliminating the domestic drama from his workspace, and by only allowing hints of the family to drift up the stairs to this attic room when the house is full (and the memory of the family when the house is empty, once the family is set to move to a new house), the Professor can live in his memories, stories, and histories. The space above the old house makes vision possible for him. It is there, looking with the Professor through the window in the attic room, that the reader discovers Tom Outland's story. Through this structuring, the reader also discovers the simplification that Outland's vision depends upon to exist. Human connections must be severed and cultural histories erased for Tom (and the Professor) to imagine a home in the space of the Blue Mesa.

The formal structure of novel, imagined as a house with "Tom Outland's Story" as the "window" at the center, offers the reader an open, uninhabited—but once domesticated—space. As Janis Stout points out, windows in the text "are consistently a focal point of Cather's attention, signifying visual or mental passage from inside to outside…The gaze out the window affords relief from claustrophobic uneasiness and expresses aspiration" (71). Professor St. Peter spends much of the novel gazing out the window, remembering his own past and his origins on the hazy blue lake on the landscape. The danger with imaginative space is its very reliance on inward-turning. This imaginative space, and the Professor's romance with it, leads to a simplified vision that means ignoring possibilities beyond the self. Outland's mesa involves exclusion to such a degree that, in order to cohere, he repudiates his friendship with Rodney, and is particularly offended by the sale of the items beyond national boundaries, even against evidence of the fictiveness of those boundaries in terms of "ownership" of the items. In this, Cather offers a critique of a nativist viewpoint of American history, indicating the falseness of this inward turning on both a personal and national level.

Outland's vision naively excludes the awareness of his own desire as he makes the cliff dwellers into the cultural ancestors that he wants. His advisor Father Duchene hopes that by giving the materials to the director of the Smithsonian, "He will revive this civilization in a scholarly work" (199). Considering the Professor's insistence of the influence of personal experience on the historical, the "revival" that Father Duchene envisions is complicated. Any revival in the world of the text becomes an appropriation of cultural difference into American sameness. Interestingly, Father Duchene believes that the idealized, cliff-dwelling Indians were "wiped out by Indians without domestic virtues"

(198). Central to the fantasy of the American past is the domestic space of the cliff dwellers, and through that space the imagined connection to modern values of American domesticity and the domestic life of St. Peter.

Outland's identification of the Native Americans as ancestors is problematized repeatedly by his utter desire for possession of them physically and narratively. The process of imagining and shaping that Tom undertakes as he catalogues the relics and removes them one by one is based on his desire to make the society mean something, to make it into fitting ancestors for him and the nation. The culture he stumbles upon is extinct, and, as Lucy Maddox suggests, the extinction of it leaves a space for Outland to imagine these as American ancestors (36). Professor St. Peter believes that "Desire is creation, is the magical element in the process" (19). Desire in *The Professor's House* is presented in spatial terms, the desire to possess the landscape seen through the window. The Professor and Tom both try to possess the landscapes they see through the window as an alternative to the inner spaces of the people around them, dark and unknowable. Godfrey muses, "The heart of another is a dark forest, always, no matter how close it has been to one's own" (78). His emotional separation from his wife is figured in spatial terms of as a "dark forest" in which "He wished he knew just how it seemed to her" (78). Though connected in domestic space, the space between St. Peter and his wife is overpowering. He retreats to the imagined space of the mesa, visualizing Tom's desire of possession, absorbing the story as a whole rather than the complicated parts.

Cather allows glimpses of that oversimplification of Outland's narrative, suggesting an awareness within the text of the dangers of a coherent or simplified vision. The night after discovering the cliff city relics, which happens to be Christmas Eve, Tom is unable to

sleep and so ventures outside to "get sight of the mesa" (182). Tom wonders "how many Christmases had come and gone since that round tower was built" (182). Tom's thinking is so occupied by the project of making meaning that he wonders how many years, measured by a Christian holiday, have passed since the non-Christian community built it. Outland automatically assimilates the cliff dwellers into his own identity in the way he reads himself and his cultural meanings over the space. Similarly, he names the mummified woman "Eve" as a marker of the generative Judeo-Christian mother. Rafeeq McGiveron suggests, "Cather picks this date over any other so that she may remind us of such religious connections" (398); yet, the holiday is meaningless in the original community space of the cliff-dwellers, thus highlighting not the religious significance of the date, but the ingrained nature of appropriation. Looking through his attic window, the Professor's view is clouded by Tom's appropriating spatial vision, by his creation of male space on the mesa that relies on the exclusion of history and details in order to cohere.

Outland's out-of-balance commitment to the historical past as he imagines it for these ancestors rejects any possibility of human connection. It is when Outland returns to the mesa after a trip Washington, which was an attempt to have the Smithsonian Institution preserve the artifacts, that he finds his treasures sold. He tells Roddy, "I thought we were men enough to keep a trust. I'd as soon have sold my own grandmother as Mother Eve—I'd have sold any living woman first" (221). Outland indicates that their bond as men is violated by Rodney selling the artifacts. The imaginative community they create in the "fresh delight [of] our snug quarters" (173) on the mesa allows Tom, Roddy, and, until his death, their cook Henry together to construct "a happy family" (176), a male community on the frontier. This family is shattered by the violated male bond. Gender, then, is at stake in

Outland's story; it isn't that Tom would have sold any living person first, but specifically any living woman before the mummified Mother Eve. Though warning the departing Rodney of a "dangerous crossing" (223) of the river as he departs their last meeting, it is Outland who himself makes a symbolically dangerous crossing with this claim. Rhetorically at least, he places a value of her body above making a slave or prostitute out of a living woman—his imagined cultural heritage has dangerously extreme value, again, as with Mother Eve's story of necessary societal violence, one that suggests extreme measures to preserve cultural heritage.

The meaning of the Blue Mesa as narrated by Tom is reliant on the civilization that he finds there being already in the past. His experience is dependent on the extinction of its inhabitants, leaving it available for new, imagined ancestors. In *Removals,* Lucy Maddox notes the "relevance of the Indian presence in North America to the development of a national literature" (36), suggesting the ways the material presence of Native Americans was put in the service of developing an American narrative that simultaneously excluded them. Maddox contends that in the nineteenth century, "the only alternative imagined for the Indians was extinction: through literal death, or through banishment from the version of history that the culture chose to preserve in its literature" (36). Maddox argues that there was a particularly important role for the fate of Native Americans in the development of a differentiated American literary culture, but that role relied on portrayals of Native American culture as something already past, an extinct culture without heir. In Outland's cliff dwellers, Cather seizes on this same image of extinction, and with it suggests the ways that a narrative of cultural extinction has in the past been employed in the development of an American national identity.

Narrative, Space, and History

The Professor's House is a story of the making of American history through the dazzle of Outland's material experience with the space on the mesa, but it is equally the story of making history through the slow, detailed, traditional academic work of Godfrey St. Peter. "Tom Outland's Story" is directly narrated to the reader from the Professor's memory. With this first-person narration from Outland, the reader and the Professor are left to the work of making meaning from the story at its close. The three-part structure of the novel points us towards Cather's concentration on story as a means of possession: narrative becomes a way to conquer American spaces for Tom Outland, and also for St. Peter in the course of the books he writes about "adventurers," which are distinctly tied to early experiences of empire and colonialism. When St. Peter first meets Tom Outland, he is in the process of writing his multi-volume *Spanish Adventurers in North America*, focused on some of the same spaces Outland traversed during his time in the Southwest. The physical space and the physical history of the American Southwest represent a tangible and seductive story of the nation for both Tom Outland and Godfrey St. Peter. However, these spaces are haunted by what is never quite erased in material space and master narratives of the American nation. Tom Outland's story dramatizes the foundation of empire because it represents the way the American nation has shored up space through story. However, the way he uses story to master space also provides the key to the persistent, flattening myths of nationhood.

Significantly, Professor St. Peter ultimately rejects the version of history told by Tom Outland. Given the centrality of Outland's story to the Professor's own story, I suggest that it is incomplete to understand the Professor's rejection of the persuasive, romantic version

of history told by Tom Outland as a rejection of youth and imagination, or as a rejection of life and family, or even a requiting of "faith and friendship" (229) like Outland. It is true that the Professor would seem near the point of giving up on life itself as the novel ends. He even considers not acting to save himself when he realizes the furnace has gone out in his attic study and he is being overcome with poisonous gas, thereby seeming to give in to the loss of all romances and all possibilities of joy in life. However, he survives the experience, after trying to escape the room, and is saved when he collapses. At the end of the novel, we see a revived Professor facing the future of family and academic work with a sense of possibility. His family will return, his grandchild will be born, and new books will be published. However, that new book is Outland's diary, suggesting an inextricable tie between Outland's story and the Professor's, even as the form tries to cordon off Outland's narration.

Haunted by Outland's story after he dies in the war, St. Peter ultimately falls out of love with the romance "of the mind" (234) that he experiences through that narrative; he refuses to be hemmed in by the limited vision of the mesa Outland offers, though at first this seems to foreclose possibilities for him. By the end of the text, he is able to envision a future in his family and professional life rather than clinging to a personal and historical past. The novel serves as a sustained commentary on the process of academic inquiry, given the Professor's interactions at the university and the focus on his writing and publishing throughout. It critiques the creation of knowledge by academics and the power they wield over the way history is narrated, but the text also argues that creation of knowledge by academics, in books specifically, is foundational, and is at the core of the ideas of nation. To emphasize this, Cather offers a particularly bleak portrayal of

government organizations, which are completely indifferent to the history Outland tells and the Professor writes. Academic work, the novel suggests, for better or worse, founds the nation to a much greater degree than the narrow-minded government in Washington, D.C., so concentrated on what is current and politically advantageous.

Outland's story of America suggests the problematic nature of choosing one story over another in the construction of historical narratives. In order to imagine his piece of the Southwest, Outland explicitly engages in narrative acts that restrict the possibilities of the spaces and objects he finds. This approach impacts not just Outland: his experiences in the Southwest push the Professor towards a deeply grounded, material experience of history in his own writing. Outland takes St. Peter to the location of the histories he is writing, leading to "more simple and inevitable" (234) volumes of *Spanish Adventurers*. The volumes are interwoven with his travels to the spaces of the adventurers, with Tom as guide to the space, but instead of complicating his experience of history, tying the material to his intellectual work simplifies it. The "inevitable" aspect of these later histories suggests an overpowering role of the narrative he constructs—it becomes a story of history without rival or without alternatives. The novel continually teases the question: Is simpler vision better? What is lost in creating history or art that is simple and coherent? What Cather leaves unclear is whether the stories tied to and simplified by a personal and material experience are invalidated as true "history," or whether there can be anything but those stories.

"Fourth of July Talk"

The earnestness of Tom Outland's quest to preserve the artifacts, combined with his belief that he has found "eternal material" and eternal beauty in his vision of American

foundation in the mesa, is a persuasive narrative of uncovering beauty and transcendent cultural experience. Outland's story reads as though the failure of America—specifically, the American government—to recognize and preserve his artifacts is a tragedy. Outland, for one, reads it as tragedy. However, resisting that initial reading brings to bear the ways in which his story of America, by means of his story of the artifacts and their meanings, is problematic in the first place. Imagining his inheritances from Native Americans that no longer exist highlights the dependence of America on these losses in order to envision itself as a coherent whole. American imperialism mastered the spaces and the stories of the Southwest. In his final conversation with Rodney, explaining his feelings of betrayal at the sale of the artifacts to the German collector, Rodney signals the excess in Tom's speech about the value of the items: "You're away out of my depth, but I think I get you. You might have given me some of this Fourth of July talk a little earlier in the game" (221). Although Tom Outland's story frames itself as a patriotic battle against the establishment forces of the nation to include and remember a forgotten original culture, Tom's story ultimately represents that imperialistic worldview in the possession he takes of the space, and through the space, the lost culture, represented by the "Fourth of July talk" of nationalistic excess that Outland conjures from the ruins.[18]

Walter Benn Michaels deconstructs this necessary loss of Indian culture in order to for Outland to claim their inheritance in the text. He notes that the novel was composed

[18] Sarah Wilson notes that a search for origin or ancestry in pasts that predate the nation actually signals a closing off rather than opening of national borders: "According to theorists of nationality such as Benedict Anderson, this turn to the prenational, the annexation and embellishment of a history for the nation, is often the hallmark of an aggressive promotion of national identity" (Wilson 597, note 40). So while Tom would seem to figure against the national discourse, particularly with the resistance he faces in Washington, D.C., he actually dramatizes that desire for and pull to the prenational in the "aggressive" desire for nation and national identity.

primarily in 1924, "the year in which postwar nativism climaxed in the passage of the Johnson Immigration Act" (220). As Michaels catalogs, the Johnson Immigration Act severely limited the overall number of immigrants to the country (from over a million per year just after World War I to a limit of 150,000 per year); the Reed Amendment to the Act also added nationality quotas to those allowed to immigrate, ensuring that those arriving in the nation were of the same ancestral make up as those already part of the nation (220). As a result, at the time of the publication of the novel in 1925, Michaels claims there was a "newly official interest in everybody's ancestors" (221), and indeed the preservation of that stable ancestry for the nation through the quotas to preserve it. That national focus parallels Outland's interest in locating and preserving ancestors of his own.

Simultaneously, the nation passed the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, changing the status of Native Americans from what the Dawes Act of 1887 declared—that they were potential citizens—to bona fide citizens of the nation, without any necessity of assimilation or action to achieve that citizenship (Michaels 222). Michaels resists a celebratory interpretation of the Indian Citizenship Act as an inclusive, progressive gesture towards Native Americans, which opposed the racial exclusion of the Johnson Immigration Act. Instead, Michaels reads the Indian Citizenship Act as "at best a futile gesture, at worst a cynical acknowledgement of the ultimate irrelevance of citizenship to the Indians' predicament" (222). He sees the acts as equally exclusionary, and equally designed to keep racial others from becoming citizens—even though ostensibly that would seem impossible given that the act literally grants citizenship. He claims that the conjunction of the acts radically transformed American citizenship itself "from a condition that could be achieved through one's own actions (immigrating, becoming 'civilized,' getting 'naturalized,') to an identity that could be

better understood as inherited" (223). Michaels therefore takes the two acts as similarly disempowering in their constructions of what it means to be a citizen, changing it from something achievable to something innate, and therefore exclusionary, even irrelevant to the status of Native Americans to the larger nation. The legal changes to immigration and citizenship during Cather's writing of the book highlight the conflict regarding ancestry in America, which frames Outland's personal search for ancestors as a stand in for national deliberations on the origins and ancestry of the nation. The political incorporation of Native Americans through the newly defined citizenship indicates a parallel impulse to incorporate Native American cultural identity into the story of American cultural origins.

Writing about "discovery" and settlement in the West—what Deborah Karush terms "the mythology of continental expansion" (147)—in 1925, as *The Professor's House* does, is a conscious looking back to the period of geographic formation of the United States as a nation. The settlement of the West seizes on a moment of geographic and ideological foundation. As Karush points out, at the time of Cather's writing of the novel, "the continental frontier had been officially closed for over three decades" (147). However, she notes that contemporary to the novel, "the United States was emerging as a world power" (147), rather than retreating from global interaction. She argues that Cather chooses to resist questions of the United States and its contemporary global relationships in the novel by making the choice to look back to continental expansion of the recent past. Karush details how "[Cather's] works transform the American empire into a thing of the past, while her emphasis on continental expansion keeps the United States figuratively at home" (145-46). Despite the new restrictions on immigration and citizenship brought about in the Johnson Act that would seem to indicate the nation's inward, nativist turn, Karush argues

that the reality of the time also included an expanding cultural impact and global role for the U.S. She writes that Cather "ignored the United States's growing involvement in Latin America, the Caribbean, and parts of Asia" (147) in her internal focus on the West and on settlement. While true that Outland's story looks backwards rather than at the present day of her composition, and is geographically constrained, even violently so in the way the novel squeezes Outland's Blue Mesa into the central "window" of his story, the novel makes a theme of this constraint and shaping. Far from insisting itself as representing the political reality of the time, through its form alone it critiques the ways in which the United States looks inwards rather than out. That the novel looks back to the time of continental expansion in the recent past crystallizes the sense that national identity is constantly shifting, rather than stable, and that it serves the needs of the present time, or "originary present" as Benedict Anderson argues (205).

"Patterns and Manuscripts"

Cather emphasizes the significance of homes, literal and imaginative, to her geography in the text by opening the novel with Godfrey St. Peter surveying the "dismantled house where he had lived ever since his marriage, where he had worked out his career and brought up his two daughters" (3). The wholeness of it as a home has been dismantled—its contents have been fragmented, packed, and rearranged in a new space. The setting for domestic drama has also been dismantled, and the house itself no longer fulfills its domestic purpose. It is emptied of the artifacts of life, which are strikingly similar to the daily artifacts Tom Outland uncovers on the mesa—functional pottery and items used in day-to-day life rather than works of art. From the very beginning of the novel, the Professor is located within the old, dilapidated house, longing for the past reflected in the

out-of-date domicile: "the stairs that were too steep, the halls that were too cramped, the awkward oak mantles with thick round posts" (3).

In "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty posit that "'being home' refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; 'not being home' is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself" (196). The theory of home that Martin and Mohanty extrapolate comes from an interpretation of Minnie Bruce Pratt's autobiographical narrative "Identity: Skin Blood Heart." This idea of home expands the view of the Professor's home spaces by thinking of what is home to him, in the literal transition his family is making from an old home to a new, to which he is decidedly resistant, remaining in the office of the empty house long after the rest of the family's belongings have been removed, resisting even the removing of small items in his attic study that might impact his ability to work.

In "The Novel Démeublé," Cather theorizes that in the house of the novel "How wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window; and along with it…all the tiresome old patterns, and leave the room as bare as the stage of a Greek theatre, or as that house into which the glory of Pentecost descended; leave the scene bare for the play of emotions, great and little" (*Willa Cather on Writing* 42-43). By situating St. Peter so firmly in his attic room, Cather essentially "throw[s] all the furniture out of the window" in terms of typical domestic life in the novel; in the empty, old house the stage is bare for St. Peter's crisis of purpose and vision. Similarly, Tom's story serves as a new pattern for St. Peter's history making, a model of male domesticity and imaginative appropriation of the

land, which gives him roots. The idea of a bare scene leaves the space to the imagination. This is true not only for the reader, but for St. Peter as well. St. Peter's office isolates him, but also protects him from the commercial and the material world, both in his house and at the university beyond. However, it also allows him a bare scene—a place from which to gaze through the window and even open it. Only there can St. Peter weave together his history.

The Professor's attic is differentiated from the domestic space of the house, in his mind forming a separate space where he can exempt himself from the domestic life below. In fact, however, domesticity cohabits in the attic space. Serving as the "sewing-room," the office "was the one place in the house where he could get isolation, insulation from the engaging drama of domestic life. No one was tramping over him, and only a vague sense, generally pleasant, of what went on below came up the narrow stairway" (16). He fondly remembers his very young daughter waiting patiently at the door while suffering from a bee sting, not wanting to interrupt his work. As the room where the family's garments are produced, the attic is protected from the actual staging of family drama, leaving the Professor purely to his romance of the mind.

His attic retreat, always outside of the family life, remains for the Professor an idealized space of producing history—next to, but not fully intertwined with his family life and personal experience, with a view to what lies beyond through the literal window, and decidedly unremarkable in its furnishings. Walking from his garden through the empty house up to his study at the start of the novel, the Professor thinks on the room, noting that "there was one room still furnished—that is, if it had ever been furnished" (7). Using Cather's language of throwing the furniture out of the window seems embodied in the

Professor's sparse, comfortless room, a space that allows his work to play out without the conspicuous materialism exuded by the space below. The room is, in a sense, continuous with the "overcrowded and stuffy" atmosphere of the rest of the house, but these are not "new things" as Cather saw stifling the life throughout the rest of the house. Rather, the Professor collects notes and histories in the room, and here pieces the fragments together to create his vision of the past. St. Peter's room "was the place where he worked. And not he alone" (8).

In fact, the Professor shares the attic retreat with Augusta, the seamstress who sews in the room several weeks of the year, creating the clothes that present his family to the world. She makes the material markers of identity for the family, the costumes that allow the women to enact their social drama, and has done so since the beloved days of the young life of the professor's daughters. Through Augusta's presence in the attic, Cather connects intellectual labor with domestic labor. Far from being a purely masculine space, then, the attic room serves as the place where fragments are stitched together, where a whole is made from patterns and parts. St. Peter notes, "the records and the ideas always came back to this room. It was here they were digested and sorted, and woven into their proper place in his history" (16). Augusta is of a different class than St. Peter, but shares his attention to the work itself performed in the space rather than showiness or commercial gain. She must produce to live, and so must he; the patterns of her dresses and his endless notebooks commingle in a chest: "In the middle of the box, patterns and manuscripts interpenetrated" (13), again an image of both material and textual juxtaposition. The notched charts stored in the box map his daughters' growth over the years, "from early childhood to womanhood" (13), mixing his familial history visibly with the notebooks of historical experience,

juxtaposing different ways of accessing and understanding the past through these different types of records. His intellectual life is inseparable from this seemingly unconnected, banal material experience of his family in the construction of their clothing.

The patterns and charts, along with the fragmentary notes of St. Peter, give the room a sense of being the behind-the-scenes area of the St. Peters' house, a staging area. The bodies of the women are mapped into the attic space by way of patterns and in physical sewing forms utilized by Augusta, which St. Peter cannot bear to have removed from the space at the time of the move, suggesting the material presence of these measures of life are essential to making the kind of meaning he does. When Augusta reflects that she never thought she'd sew for the St. Peters for so many years, the Professor wonders, "What other future could Augusta possibly have expected?" (14). Her presence and her separate vision of her life alert the Professor to his self-absorbedness, to the fact that her experience in their shared space is also a valid experience. The space belongs to her as well as to him. Juxtaposing patterns and academic manuscripts, Cather suggests a correlation between material and intellectual experiences of the world that at first would seem opposed.

"Outland's Country"

Storytelling is a major focus of Outland's time with the Professor's family and in his interactions with his daughters, Kitty and Rosie, when they are very young. When Tom retells stories of his life and his time in the Southwest to the children, "there were no shadows" (105). Outland represents his own history as happy rather than tragic, and his origin-less beginning as an adventure rather than a struggle for roots. As he plays in Godfrey's garden with Rosie and Kitty, he remaps the Southwest for the girls, recreating the land in his own image, "making Hopi villages with sand and pebbles, drawing maps of the

Painted Desert and the Rio Grande country in the gravel, telling them stories, when there was no one by to listen, about the adventures he had had with his friend Roddy" (104). In play, the native villages are reduced to piles of pebbles and adventure stories, romanticized and possessed not only by Outland, but also through him, by Kitty and Rosie. Kitty, once grown, claims possession of the mesa that she has never seen: "I consider Tom's mesa entirely my own" (112), she tells her father. Tom's simplified stories to the children serve as a model for how he must himself simplify in order to lay claim to Native American ancestors. Through Tom's stories, Kitty learns the same kind of retelling and appropriating. The actual stories and cultural foundations of the cliff-dwelling Indians are never considered by either. The land becomes "Outland's country" (246) to the St. Peter family, who cling to the myth of possession necessary for Tom, and themselves, to experience the illusion of a whole and of a home. Tom's position as an orphan, excluded from familial and national roots, places him in a marginalized position. His narrative possession is then twofold: claiming ancestors is empowering to Outland, but in doing so, Outland dramatizes the necessity of loss and disempowerment of others to make that possible. There are no real heirs to claim the ancestors. By possessing the material and imaginative inheritances of the spaces around them, Outland is able to gain control over his own story. It is an empowering move, aided by the material remnants around them to seize control of story. However, those same materials of history are never fully emptied of their original resonance.

Merrill Maguire Skaggs argues that the vision Tom provides for the Professor is not as simple as many critics have read, and though it provides access to an image of wider space and escape, Tom in reality has "estranged the St. Peter daughters, as well as their

parents, from each other" (427). His romance with St. Peter, and his romance with the grown-up Rosie, divides the family in half; Kitty also loved him, and the Professor's wife comes to view Outland as a sort of rival. Skaggs also critiques the notion of Tom's story as a valid alternative for space and vision in the first place. She insists, "Tom's purity of vision, his insistence on his own uncontaminated ideals, damns others" (426). This is particularly the case in how he evaluates Rodney's actions on his behalf. Tom overtakes the mesa, empties it of its artifacts to be catalogued and preserved in a museum, but when Roddy sells the artifacts in good faith, to support Tom, he notes, "Motives don't count" (222)—only Outland's ideals do. Despite the selling of the artifacts that Roddy brings about, Outland had already emptied the cliff city of its relics in hopes of finding a home for the remnants of Native American life in the official annals of American history. He did not leave them preserved on the Blue Mesa, further calling into question his offense at their sale. Outland even compares selling the items to a German is akin to treason. In this, he does not recognize his own role not only in the removal of the artifacts but in their appropriation as his own American cultural history.

Skaggs reads the ending of the novel as a throwing off of the illusions fabricated by Tom's mesa: "Godfrey St. Peter's task in this novel is to shape a plausible life for his middle age. Thus, though it nearly kills Godfrey to do so, he must sacrifice the youthful image Tom represents, and let it die" (427). The Professor's image of the space on the mesa, created by Tom Outland's story, is an image created by naïve youth, seizing and possessing a whole at the cost of the parts. Building on Skaggs' claims, it is not only that Godfrey must sacrifice the youthful image of Tom and his mesa in the end of the novel, but also that he must learn to relinquish a neat spatial and narrative whole in order to restore "the ground under his

feet" and reaffirm that "He thought he knew where he was" (258). The ending of the novel is figured in terms of a spatial re-alignment, of feeling the solid ground rather than the high cliffs built on air and illusion of the young Outland. Material certainty is paramount in the Professor's realizations at the end of the text.

The construction of national space and the construction of personal space are closely tied in the novel, and the form of the novel itself reflects the centrality of space to the novel and the nation. Ann Moseley posits, "the structure itself is essentially spatial rather than temporal, synchronic rather than diachronic" (198). Space rather than time is at the heart of the story, which Moseley sees as best expressed by Cather's "analogy of the square window opened to the air" (198). Rather than moving forward, time loops back on itself, creating a simultaneous experience of St. Peter's present life and Tom Outland's story that was narrated in the past, placing the reader "In the middle section of the novel…outside the window in both space and time, beyond the confining frame of the realistic present and in the past—both the recent past of Tom Outland's discovery and the ancient past of the cliff dwellers' civilization itself" (198). The analogy of the window helps us to understand Cather's idea of juxtaposition, of the novel "as image," objects placed next to one another and outside of linear time, but there is also a suggestion of the limits of vision, of artifice in revealing the complexity of history. However, vision is crucial to understanding Tom's mesa and the Professor's attic. The Professor looks through his window and out on to the mesa of Outland, named and recreated within "Tom Outland's Story." Time collapses, allowing Tom to connect himself to the ancient past that he narrates for the space of the mesa, and the professor to connect to Outland's memory of the mesa.

Moving from the open window of Oultand's story in the second section to the third section, "The Professor," Mosley notes that "when the narrative window on the past closes and the focus returns to St. Peter in his study, both St. Peter and the reader reflect on the significance of the scene and on its relationship to St. Peter's life" (199). Solely because of spatial juxtaposition, the reader is brought into St. Peter's memory and his frame of mind concurrent with his space and happenings, and we are left to consider the image Outland creates with the space of his story. What we see is, significantly, a story about making a home and a whole of parts through some acts of forgetting and exclusion. Outland's story is so persuasive in the imagined spaces and in narrative technique that the return to St. Peter and his issues of middle age produces a lopsided progression to the narrative.

"On the Solid Earth"

Closing the window on the mesa and returning to the space of the Professor's attic study in the third section of the novel, the Professor himself falls out of love with Outland's simplified vision of space: "Surely the saddest thing in the world is falling out of love—if once one has ever fallen in. Falling out, for him, seemed to mean falling out of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family indeed" (251). The falling is a spatial act of losing place, and losing possession over the story—but this failure to repossess is figured as what saves St. Peter from Outland's own inability to live outside of his narrative. Eventually losing sight of Outland's youthful story of space and order, the Professor revives Godfrey as a boy, "the realist of his lives…all the years between had been accidental and ordered from the outside" (240). St. Peter grows disgusted with what he sees as the forced order of his life ("Because there was marriage, there were children. Because there were children, and fervour in the blood and brain, books were born as well

as daughters" (240)). Doris Grumbach describes the importance of spatial movement as ordering principle in the work: "The narrative progress of the novel depends in part upon movement among places, from an old, small room to a new and more ample space. A psychological tension exists between the old room of retreat and death and the new house representative of 'progress' and life" (331). The attic room, which is empty of domestic resonances, allows Godfrey the room to imagine the greater space of southwestern landscape and, therein, the history of the space—it is there that he writes his books. However, the attic space threatens to entomb him prematurely in his falling out of love. It nearly allows him to surrender to death rather than to adjust Outland's vision to reflect his own imposing realities of time, age, and the need for connectedness.

The ending of *The Professor's House*, St. Peter stands in symbolically for the nation, a sort of weathered, middle aged, out-of-love with ideals America as it might have been in the post-War era of the 1920s. Ultimately, he must overcome the desire to order and inhabit the past, personally and professionally, given his juxtaposition to the persuasive narrative of Tom Outland. He has to refocus his vision around the future and the larger community around him. This suggests an allegory of national experience, a warning against the desires that might be gratified in embracing ancestors as an orphan nation. The last line of the novel declares Godfrey ready to "face with fortitude the *Berengaria* and the future" (258)—the *Berengaria* is the ship bringing home his family, returning from European travels. This hint of the global experience, the travels in Europe that connect the Professor's family to the role of America in the rest of the world, and the fact that they are a focus of the ending of the novel suggests that the text offers a portrait of American identity that is inextricably

tied to the rest of the world.[19] Relinquishing youthful, exclusionary ideals of space and place allows the Professor St. Peter to reenter the world of the living and face the boat that signals the return to family life, even if changed.

In the lonely space of his own creation, Outland finds true happiness, but of a temporary nature, and with great danger, with his intimation to the Professor that he "will have to pay for it," that is, for "requit[ing] faith and friendship as I did" (229), that is, by rejecting them. Interestingly, Stout reads possibility in the structure of the windows as "a literal opening to life itself (the outdoors, fresh air) and a figurative opening of release from the confines of the isolated self to the spaciousness of commonality with others" (71), thus suggesting a way that we communally cohere around something greater than the self. She goes on to argue that Godfrey's "inward-turning" is balanced by the "immense spaces of the American Southwest" (81). However, that does not acknowledge Outland's role in shaping and limiting the expanse of space into a simplified, coherent whole—one he is loath to fragment in his refusal to seek out his diary. Instead, Stout sees the ending of the novel as a failure on the part of St. Peter: "Godfrey has lost his personal and imaginative access to those spaces, and thereby to mental and emotional vastness…Godfrey has petulantly closed his mental and emotional widow" (81).

Closing the window on Outland's story, however, is not just a refusal of imagination, as much as the reader might be persuaded by the vivid nature of Outland's story that it is.

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[19] Deborah Karush reads the cosmopolitan, globally connected character of Louie Marsellus (the professor's son-in-law) as symbolizing the alternative to anti-imperial readings of Outland's story in the larger text. In her telling, he stands as a positive portrayal of American empire in how he is regarded, particularly in the economic, cultural, and political ties he has to elsewhere, and argues that one of the major ways the growing role of the U.S. in the rest of the world comes through in the text is through his characterization and significance at the end of the text, as St. Peter awaits their return and his new grandchild.

The refusal is a mark of maturity on the part of the Professor: Godfrey's window is no longer open to Outland's narrow, exclusionary landscape, and he refuses the juxtaposition of the two. The choice comes down to his own death, or opening himself to a new way of vision. In the moment of crisis, when the gas fills his attic study, it is the unexpected appearance of the long-time servant Augusta that saves the Professor as he struggles in the attic against the choking gas. It is her practicality that calls him back to life; he thinks of Augusta, "with whom one was outward bound" (257), providing her "outward" movement as the replacement for "Outland," and away from the inward turn both Outland and he experience. The Professor chooses against youthful fantasies of spatial appropriation.

The choice, however, seems a decidedly negative one: "Augusta was like the taste of bitter herbs; she was the bloomless side of life that he had always run away from,—yet when he had to face it, he found that it wasn't altogether repugnant" (256). She hardly could be said to represent anything persuasive or positive, "bloomless" and without life, "bitter herbs" that, it is implied, are medicinally necessary for healing, not "altogether repugnant." With Augusta, he replaces fantasies with a new sense of moving forward into changing familial bonds and home spaces, but even she seems exploited in terms of her meaning—her physical presence, the very juxtaposition of her labor with his, her body in his space, comes to give meaning to her in the crisis. St. Peter can now face the future because he can now envision it rather than just the historical and spatial American past—which is a significant mark for the historian, but that future could hardly be said to be a joyful one. The romance of Outland narrating the nation is persuasive, but remains locked in the first-person narration at the center of the book. Godfrey seizes control over the

narrative, and yet, he is never fully able to repress Tom's narrative of American possession, which is inextricably at the heart of his own story.

Returning to the materiality of the Blue Mesa that so enraptures Tom Outland, the Professor finds a new experience of materiality in his relationship with Augusta as a comfort: "Seasoned and sound and on the solid earth she surely was, and, for her matter-of-factness and hard-handedness, kind and loyal" (256). Where Outland repudiates the human bond with Roddy, Augusta is loyal to it. Where Outland is swayed by the cliffs hung in the sky, Augusta is "on the solid earth." They are both visions of the persuasive nature of the material world, and through that, St. Peter feels "a sense of obligation towards her, instinctive, escaping definition, but real" (257). The "obligation" is less tied to caring for Augusta, though throughout the novel, the precariousness of her financial and class standing are a focus for the St. Peter family, and problematic in terms of her significantly limited point of view and textual interactions. In some ways, she functions as object in the text more than developed character, contrast to Outland in her engrained sense of community above all. The obligation is to her view of the world, a grounded, solid view that would look harshly on prematurely ending life. That feeling of "real" is what saves the Professor and seems to offer him a new vision in the "now": "And when you admitted that a thing was real, that was enough—now" (257). The word "admitted"—as opposed to "believed," for example, indicates a change in vision on the part of the Professor, but suggests that the "real" that he experiences has always been there waiting to be "admitted," to be let in, or if it has not been there all along, it is at the very least something that is beyond his control. For the Professor, the real is not determined by internal vision, unlike Outland's story. Augusta's stark, bare, and less persuasive view of the human world in fact

anchors him and holds sway after St. Peter falls out of love with Outland's vision. Sarah Wilson argues that with the Professor's relationship to Augusta at the end of the text, "Cather intimates that an ethical relation to one's contemporary community is indissoluble from an ethical understanding of history…Bound by ethic responsibility to the past, these figures cannot assert mastery over it. Possession must give way to flux and changeability, instability and constant revision" (590). And yet, Augusta herself functions largely in a symbolic role for the Professor, herself viewed through an aesthetic of juxtaposition with both himself and Outland.

Taking personal possession of the objects and their stories, history for Outland becomes inseparable from the self and its desires. This personal and material possession of history is exhilarating and persuasive to Tom Outland—and also to the Professor and the reader—but ultimately damaging to a complex understanding of America's origins. Outland's story suggests that in order for national identity to cohere, loss is necessary. The nation must turn a blind eye towards the simplification of history-making for that coherent whole, in the same way Outland refuses to return to the details of his journal. While that would at first seem to critique the process of history making, Cather's text is remarkably ambivalent on the process in the end, stepping back by means of the aesthetic of juxtaposition. Surprisingly, Outland's story demonstrates the pull or even necessity of such simplified history making to the experience of nation. The nation in Cather's work is rooted in the desire for what is simple, connected, and eternal. This is best symbolized in the tower at the center of the cliff city, the use of which the men can only guess; lost to history, it is juxtaposed against the real, domestic community of the clustered houses that seem to call for a new community even as the extinction of the inhabitants refuses one.

Chapter 4
"Every Silence in the World / Has Conspired with Every Other": Cross-Cultural Loss in Agha Shahid Ali's *A Nostalgist's Map of America*

> Who pulls me with such
> ease? A dead ancestor,
> a lost friend, or
>
> the shell's hollow cry?
> The weeds wrap me, like arms.
> I'm pulled down, down, to the tip of the sky.
>
> I hold the world as I drown
> -Agha Shahid Ali, "Notes on the Sea's Existence" (17-23)

The poet Agha Shahid Ali's image of drowning in his poem "Notes on the Sea's Existence" suggests a lens for how he conceives of history in his 1991 collection *A Nostalgist's Map of America*. In the poems, the very connections to others—"A dead ancestor, / a lost friend" (18-19), people in both the past and the present, or even the personified natural world that he locates in the sound of "the shell's hollow cry" (20)—pull him down "with such / ease" (1-2) because of his open, abiding search for connection among them. The history making that Ali undertakes maps a dual history of loss in America, one personal and the other historical. The poet is unexpectedly pulled "down, down, to the tip of the sky" (22), the sky being where we might expect instead for him to be pulled upwards from the earth; this suggests that the position of the poet is far at the ark of the horizon as he makes connections to the past. Despite this distant view, he is still in danger of "The weeds" that "wrap me like arms" (21), and through their yoking, cause the poet to lose altitude and therefore his privileged perspective. The poet "hold[s] the world as I drown" (23), weighed down by the very shared ancestry of loss that he narrates throughout *A Nostalgist's Map*. Through this threat of drowning, Ali offers a bleak view of the necessary work of the poet to restore forgotten American pasts and forge cross-cultural

connections through the restoration of those losses. Yet, in saying "I hold the world," he insinuates an experience of comfort as well as threat. The poet drowns joined to the world in simultaneous image of cross-cultural connection and cross-cultural tragedy, suggesting that ultimately, human connection and shared tragedy are inherently bound together.

In an interview with Christine Benvenuto, Ali reflected on his treatment of the American history in *A Nostalgist's Map of America*: "I think of people who because of historical forces have lost so much…I mean, these things are in my way of looking at the world. I'm in one way or another obsessed with that" (266). Throughout *Nostalgist's Map,* Ali demonstrates this obsession with loss due to historical forces in the American past. Ali weaves together personal histories of loss on the part of his speakers with wide-ranging cultural and historical experiences, creating a cross-cultural ancestry of loss for America. Significantly, American material space figures as the ground for experiencing and remembering these losses. Ali finds the American landscape haunted by forgotten people and events, suggesting the perilous and incomplete nature of both forgetting and remembering the history of the American nation. The "shell's hollow cry" in "Notes on the Sea's Existence" suggests the power of the material world to "cry" out in its loss to the poet, as it does throughout *A Nostalgist's Map.*

What is intriguing about the joined losses imagined in *A Nostalgist's Map of America* is the extent to which Ali suggests that collective loss is an essential mode for constructing the American nation, both historically and in the contemporary moment.[20] In the poems, Ali

[20] This recalls Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities,* who offers that the origin and identity of the nation must be fashioned through narrative. The need for continuity with a historical moment that has been necessarily forgotten makes national history an inherently narrative process. He argues that this need for continuity, whether in forging personal identity in a biography or the broad history of a nation, "because it cannot be 'remembered' must be narrated" (204).

finds connection to others through a shared history of cultural and spatial loss that arises in part from his own experiences of exile, as a poet living in and writing about America far from his roots in India and Kashmir, but also as a poet who considers himself to be firmly American.[21] To connect, Ali must frame the losses of others through his own particular lens, ultimately calling into question the ethics of this cross-cultural connection of loss. However, the poems suggest that Ali is all too aware of the ethical challenge of remembering in the ways that memory easily becomes an appropriative process both for the individual and for the larger nation in his poems.

"Are you an American, or are you not?"

Ali's poem "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel" from *A Nostalgist's Map* could easily be mistaken for a straight retelling of a lost history, ostensibly written to insert the narrative of the Bisbee Deportation, which took place in 1917 in Bisbee, Arizona, back into cultural awareness on behalf of those marginalized by the event. The deportation of striking copper miners from Bisbee is framed as the central trauma for the poem about a hotelkeeper remembering the time before the deportation. He is left with recollections of a changed community and a haunted personal space since the deportation. Ali frames the poem with a clear epigraph of the event, including its time and place, signaling that the poem will engage

[21] Ali was born in New Delhi and grew up in Kashmir. After earning a Master's Degree in English from the University of Delhi, Ali earned Ph.D. and MFA degrees in the United States, eventually teaching in the MFA program at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (Benvenuto 263). At a young age he began composing poetry in English, having been raised in a household of three languages: Urdu, Kashmiri, and English (Benvenuto 262). In her interview, Benvenuto lists a series of hyphenated identities that the poet said could be applied to him: "Kashmiri-American poet, Indian-American poet, South Asian-American poet, Muslim-American poet" (267), though he insists "if they're used simply to restrict me, I'm not interested in them" (267). What is interesting about each of the hyphenated labels, however, that Ali agrees with is the repetition of American in each; there is an insistence on American identity being available to him in each case: Ali is very much an American poet.

with a historical narrative. In analyzing "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel," critics such as Jeannie Chiu have indeed used the poem itself to comment on the significance of the Bisbee Deportation, "where striking miners were killed, and others deported to the desert without water" (35). Chiu speaks of the "politically-motivated murders" of the striking miners that "represent losses to democracy itself" (35).

However, there were no "politically-motivated murders" in the Bisbee Deportation—at least, not in the way Ali describes as happening in the poem. Chiu's usage of the poem as a historical narrative in and of itself, as a text that speaks the truth of the deportation, demonstrates the seductive power of Ali's collection: his version of history presented in the poem becomes the new historical narrative that replaces the old, seemingly incomplete one. But in fact, his desire to capture the lost history ends up overstating its claim in the poem, where a closer look at the history of the Bisbee Deportation shows that there was only one death of a striking miner, and that death was not an overt act of premeditated murder as the poem suggests (Taft 16). Ali magnifies the horror of the deportation in the way he convincingly portrays that the Bisbee Deportation included mass murder for political reasons.

The Deportation in and of itself was an extremely troubling deprivation of the rights of more than a thousand men, and later, their families; the men were forced to leave their community at gunpoint wielded by thousands of other citizens of the community. Even without claims of mass murder, the event is an astounding instance of forced exile on a local scale that resonates with other global histories of exile. The enlargement of horror suggests that Ali exploits loss rather than just exposes it, calling into question the aims of his history making throughout the collection. "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel" offers, "Every

silence in the world / has conspired with every other" (38-39); this insinuates that through the poem, Ali seeks to expose the silences surrounding the Bisbee Deportation and narrate the lost history of the event. However, with the image of conspiring silences, Ali also implies that the losses of such historical narratives are bound to *all* instances of historical suppression. This means that the truth of one such silencing of history is bound to a larger history of silence for those marginalized or otherwise left out of traditional historical narratives. In the poem, Ali the massacre is not an objectively true experience, but through his suggestion of mass death of striking miners, he speaks to a larger truth of their disempowerment. Certainly, the deported men lost much of their lives through the deprivation of livelihood, homes, family separation, and loss of community, upon being suddenly and forcibly expelled by their own neighbors. Throughout *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, as in "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel," Ali toys with the ethics of appropriating the losses of others, suggesting that it is possible to narrate a history of loss that may be simultaneously false but also necessary. To end the conspiracy of silence around the multitudes of loss in forming a cross-cultural America, the poet must necessarily appropriate other histories of loss to end the conspiracy of silence.

Ali's selection of the Bisbee Deportation as a central event in "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel" is best understood in the ways it reflects a historical moment where being American came to mean the closure of cross-cultural connections in a nation focused on inward-turning, nativist protection in 1917. To untangle Ali's suggestion of murder in the Bisbee Deportation, we first must get a sense of the magnitude and significance of the deportation in American history and the ways it has been historically considered. In the early dawn hours of July 12, 1917, nearly 2,000 men in the small Arizona mining town were

rounded up by another 2,000-plus rifle-toting "deputies" and forced out of their homes, even from their breakfast tables and beds, due to suspicion of being associated with a mining strike led by the International Workers of the World (IWW) (McBride 68). The Deportation is significant in terms of United States labor history, but it also illuminates larger conflicts over national identity, patriotism, race, and class at the time. As Katherine Benton-Cohen puts it, "The deportation was not about labor relations *or* race *or* gender; it was about all of them," suggesting that readings of the deportation that focus only on the nativist aspect fail to fully account for its roots and cultural significance ("Docile Children" 31). Of the 2,000 or so men rounded up and marched several miles to a nearby baseball field, 1,186 men were found to be associated with the mining strike, or were unable or unwilling to prove they were not (that is, prove it by agreeing to return to work or find a citizen to vouch for their being upstanding members of the community) were forced onto 23 cattle cars topped with armed guards and then taken by train through the desert to New Mexico. The bleachers of a community baseball field were transformed into a temporary prison as the men were sorted, under the guard of many citizens with rifles. Violence was done in the service of preserving American identity, a fact highlighted by utilizing the American cultural symbol of the baseball field as the material means to imprison the men before loading them on a train that was secured from the railroad company by an executive of the mining corporation (Taft 16). When the army base to which the men had been sent without permission in New Mexico refused to receive them, the train full of men travelled back to the desert and then was abandoned by the guards (McBride 74). The men aboard were left alone with few resources until the arrival of the army two days later, and according to the government investigation of the incident detailed in the President's

Mediation Commission report, "wholly without adequate supply of food and water and shelter for two days."

That so many men agreed to participate in driving out fellow citizens of Bisbee—520 of the deported men owned property in Bisbee, according to a United States Army survey taken of the deportees, and 433 were married with families (Taft 22)—in what they claimed was an attempt to rid the town of outside or foreign labor agitators indicates the depth of the political, racial, and economic tensions in the town that extended far beyond a labor dispute. Benton-Cohen notes that from the late 1800s, Bisbee was reputed as a "white man's camp" ("Docile Children" 32), where the Chinese were excluded not just from working in the mines, but as James McBride notes, from entering or remaining in the town limits after dark (64). Benton-Cohen details that Mexicans, meaning both those who were immigrants from Mexico and those born in America but of Mexican ancestry were given only menial jobs above ground at the mine, and therefore earned far less for their labor than the skilled underground workers who were white ("Docile Children" 32). Of the 2,000 men deputized to carry out the deportation at Bisbee, the group deporting strikers was substantially Anglo-American, British, or Canadian in nationality (Benton-Cohen *Borderline* 225). In contrast, she notes that the deportation separated 174 Mexican families, indicating a vast racial difference between the deputies and deportees. McBride reports that eighty percent of the deportees were immigrants, and thirty three percent of those were Mexican (74). However, showing the variety of those targeted for deportation, and also signaling the radical violation of rights that the deportation marks, the Army survey of the men counted 199 deportees as native-born American citizens. There were an additional 468 naturalized American citizens forced from Bisbee (McBride 74). In an article in *The Nation* in 1918,

journalist Robert Bruere details that it was not just strikers, but anyone labeled a sympathizer who was targeted by the deputies for deportation: "storekeepers, laymen, contractors, many men who had taken absolutely no active part in the strike" (203). According to Bruere, even American citizens who were members of the community and property owners in the town—citizens that had no involvement with mining—were also subject to deportation. This suggests that the Bisbee Deportation is best read as a radical act of racial and cultural reformation of the community.

It is hard to imagine an atmosphere conducive to such a deportation being carried out, but tensions were high in the borderlands of Arizona in 1917. This owed to the dual realities of the Mexican revolution raging just to the south and the United States engagement in World War I, which put pressure on the copper industry in Arizona to produce sufficient copper supply for munitions in the war effort. In late June of 1917, miners associated with the IWW, also known as the "Wobblies," initiated a strike against the Phelps-Dodge owned Copper Queen mine in Bisbee. The strike by the IWW reflected larger tensions about race, nationality, and class; many of the striking workers were immigrants from Mexico or Europe, seeking wage equality with underground miners, eager to support the IWW platform of wage equality (Benton-Cohen, *Borderline* 207-208). That many participating strikers were immigrants, and that they were associated with the IWW, which was considered radical among the labor organizations and was understood by some to have an anti-war and even anti-American stance, helped those opposing the strike to construct a narrative of their patriotic resistance to the striking workers and their demands. Adding to this patriotic narrative for those against the strike was the release of the Zimmerman telegram five months before the Bisbee Deportation. The intercepted,

coded telegram between Germany and Mexico fomented fears of attack from Mexico at the behest of Germany, who promised to return Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas to Mexico.[22] The telegram suggested to American citizens that Mexico posed a direct threat to the U.S. in the ongoing war and was a critical turning point in American views on Germany and involvement in the war (Benton-Cohen, *Borderline* 221).

Buffered by the Zimmerman telegram and the cultural atmosphere of the United States entering World War I, Sheriff Harry Wheeler, the driving force behind the deportation in Bisbee, argued to the local citizens that the mining strike itself was connected to Mexican supporters of Germany. Wheeler is the one who deputized the posse of more than 2,000 citizens to arrest suspected IWW strikers and supporters in the Deportation. Despite this, he was reportedly an independent, incorruptible figure that was not under the control of the mining companies in his actions, even though he acted in their interests in deporting the strikers (Benton-Cohen, *Borderline* 219-220). That is, Wheeler saw the strike as a threat to national security rather than a threat to the mining business in and of itself and acted based on his professed patriotism. Wheeler sent a telegram to the Governor of Arizona in the days before the deportation, requesting help from federal troops to end the strike based on this patriotic reading of the strike:

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[22] According to the ourdocuments.gov site run by the National Archives (archives.gov), the Zimmerman telegram between German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman and the German Minister to Mexico was intercepted and decoded by British code breakers in January of 1917. The British released the contents of the telegram to President Woodrow Wilson in late February 1917, after the United States had severed diplomatic relations with Germany; the contents of the telegram became public in early March and had a profound impact on swaying public opinion towards involvement in the war. The decoded message in part reads: "we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona….the President [of Mexico]…should, on his own initiative, invite Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves" (Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State, 1756-1979, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. Web. October 10, 2015).

> The Strike here is most serious and I anticipate great property loss and bloodshed; majority of strikers seem foreign. The whole thing appears to be pro-German and anti-American. Earnestly request you to use your influence to have United States troops sent here to take charge of the situation and prevent bloodshed and the closing of this great copper industry now so valuable to the United States Government. (Morse)

That the strikers "seem foreign" in his interpretation, and moreover that their foreign appearance connects them to "pro-German and anti-American" interests indicates the deep distrust in racial, cultural, and national difference in Bisbee at the time, and especially in Wheeler's motivations for supporting the deportation. In his testimony to the President's Mediation Commission, when pressed on how he determined which Mexican workers were associated with the IWW and which were not, Wheeler claimed "How could you separate one Mexican from another?" (qtd. in Morse). Wheeler's indiscriminate distrust of Mexican immigrants, naturalized Mexican American citizens, and native-born Americans of Mexican descent colored his reading of the threat posed by the strike. Despite Wheeler's claims of coming "property loss and bloodshed" from the strike, witness testimony and the official President's Mediation Commission report on the Bisbee Deportations indicate the opposite, that "the conditions in Bisbee were in fact peaceful and free from any manifestations of disorder or violence." In fact, Wheeler was refused the aid he requested in the telegram because the conditions were noted to be so peaceful at the time. In testimony to the Mediation Commission, Wheeler admitted that in deporting the strikers after being refused federal troops to end the strike, "Perhaps everything I did wasn't legal. I tried to make it legal as far as I could, and I believed I was doing what was best for the community, and for

the Government at that time. It became a question of 'Are you an American, or are you not?' That was the question predominating at the time" (qtd. Morse). Far from serving as an extension of the authority and interests of the mining companies, Wheeler saw his role in the strike and deportations as patriotic defender of American borders and institutions. The strikers and any associated with them were, in his mind, decisively not American, and therefore a threat.

The President's Mediation Commission report found unequivocally in favor of the deportees: "The deportation was wholly illegal and without authority in law, either State or Federal" (6). However, both federal and state authorities failed to secure convictions for any of those responsible for the deportation, with the President's Mediation Commission report declaring that the federal government was in fact lacking jurisdiction to prosecute the offenders. Eventually, the state arrested twenty-one of those involved on charges of kidnapping, but those charges were eventually dropped (Benton-Cohen, *Borderline* 234). Despite this lack of prosecution, there was an ongoing, extended violation of rights in Bisbee that continued long beyond the Deportation itself. For months after the deportation, the borders of Bisbee were guarded and any deportees who tried to return were arrested and tried by a makeshift community court (McBride 74). Families left behind by deportees were in many cases driven out of town. Benton-Cohen cites that there were sixty-four documented cases of women receiving one-way tickets out of Bisbee, including a mother with a two week old baby, in an act supposedly part of the "relief" aid for the families of the deported provided by the community (*Borderline* 232). The town worked to eliminate any foreign or threatening element through the deportations, and with that, any union support that might hamper the production of copper in the town. In his 1929 *The Truth about*

Bisbee, a document arguing furiously in support of the deportation and against the Mediation Commission report, Samuel Morse details that the strikes in Arizona mines in June led to a reduction of a staggering 100,000,000 pounds of copper—which is a significant hampering of the war industry reliant on the metal for munitions. Morse argues that "time writes the true verdict" for Bisbee; the deportation, he claims, rid "the district of a large number of aliens and undesirable citizens" that were hampering the war effort in slowing this copper production, and thereby performed a service both local, in support of the community, and national, in support of the war effort by ensuring the material supply necessary for it. The idea of "undesirable citizens" underlies the deportation, which essentially attempted to cleanse the community of anyone or any group seen as having cultural origin from elsewhere—these "undesirable citizens," it turned out, not outsiders, but community members it wished to exclude.

On the morning of the Bisbee Deportation, Sheriff Wheeler printed a warning in a special edition of the newspaper instructing women and children to avoid the streets that day, but also warning the men he and the deputies would round up to deport: "I hope no resistance will be made, for I desire no bloodshed. However, I am determined if resistance is made, it shall be quickly and effectively overcome" (qtd. in Morse). Indeed with the large numbers of armed citizens intruding into the homes of unsuspecting men that morning, it is notable that the deportees reacted without violent resistance. There were only two deaths from the deportation, which are detailed as follows in the Arizona Chapter of the American Mining Congress report on "Deportations from Bisbee" issued around 1917: "squads were detailed to rooming houses and gathered from these a number of men. It was upon one such expedition that the only tragedy of the day occurred, James Brew firing

through a door upon a group of five deputies and killing Orson P. McRae. The latter was unarmed. As Brew continued to shoot, one of the deputies lifted his gun and instantly killed him." The unsuspecting Brew is blamed for the incident and for his own death, even though he was ambushed in his house, in his bed, by a group of armed "deputies." He was killed only after killing a deputy, suggesting that both the deputies and the deportees exercised restraint as the men were gathered. The overall lack of violence also suggests that an overtly violent exclusion of citizens would be antithetical to the goal of the deportation, where those carrying out the deportation utilized the appearance of law and order and, as Sheriff Wheeler stated, "tried to make it legal," in order to exercise control over who could belong to Bisbee and the larger community and who could not. Wheeler and others in charge of the Deportation framed the event in a way that was ostensibly in support of America and a patriotic agenda for the country when the actual Deportation aimed to redefine local citizenship and exclude those in a racial, political, or ethnic minority from participation in the town, making exiles of citizens and workers of Bisbee.

"Bisbee, that copper landscape with bones"

In his poem "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel," Ali makes it clear that he is performing an act of historical counter-narrative for those excluded by the Bisbee Deportation, in part by including the epigraph that situates the poem in this specific historical time and geographic location: "Still bitterly remembered…the labor strife at the roaring copper town of Bisbee, leading to the Bisbee Deportation in July 1917." That the deportation is "Still bitterly remembered" is indeed the case; James McBride even ends his 1999 historical study of the deportation by noting the presence of the deportation that remained in the town: "Although the deportation occurred almost a century ago, the memory of the event

still generates strong feelings in Bisbee. One cannot spend much time there without encountering someone whose family was involved, on one side or the other…one has a sense that 1917 still lives in Bisbee" (75). Thus Ali's poem frames the history of the deportation in a similar way to an actual historical account, capturing the sentiment of the event and how it is perceived in the community, which seems to set the poem in the mode of historical narrative. The ellipses that Ali leaves after "bitterly remembered" in his epigraph indicates a voice trailing off, as if it could say much more about why the deportation is "bitterly" thought of; the epigraph, in this omission, calls the neutrality of telling history into question. The epigraph does not merely give background facts, then, but formally situates loss itself in the history of the incident by way of the ellipses. Moreover, by locating the source of the deportation to be "labor strife," the epigraph works in a language of neutrality, not fully taking a side on the situation as it would by using a more loaded term. "Strife" indicates conflict, but not explicitly exploitation or repression of laborers, and remains outside of an explicit interpretation. The deportation is an act of American exile that the poem wishes to recontextualize, connecting to the voice of the exiled speaker who wishes to make connections among histories of loss throughout *A Nostalgist's Map*.

Ali's precise mapping of the location of "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel" allows for a unique intervention in history in situating this history of exile and disempowerment so that it is locatable to a reader within a specific context of American history: forced exile happened even here, even within recent memory. The poem immediately preceding "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel" in *A Nostalgist's Map* titled "In Search of Evanescence" foreshadows the subject matter of the poem when Ali imagines himself as one of the

deported citizens of Bisbee: "And there was always thirst: a train taking me // from Bisbee, that copper landscape with bones, / into a twilight with no water" (34-36). That there was "always thirst" indicates a persistence to the need for water, never met, the "landscape with bones" an image not only of something dry and lifeless, but also an image that suggests death as a crucial mode of understanding the Bisbee Deportation. As in "Evanescence," throughout *A Nostalgist's Map* there is a persistent representation of the dry desert as containing the history of a lost ocean; this lingers among the poems, creating a pervasive feeling of dehydration that this thirst echoes, while images of water threaten drowning.

The desert dryness in effect becomes unnaturalized as a landscape in Ali's work, transformed from natural space into a landscape of loss—what was once ocean water is now endlessly dry. In the final poem in the collection, "Snow on the Desert," Ali's speaker shares a physical history of loss with the earth itself through this history of the desert. The speaker recollects a moment listening to a famous singer of Ghazals in New Delhi continue to perform after her lights are cut off and her microphone goes dead during an air raid, which leaves her voice far away "as if she had already died" (68). This distance allows for "a moment when only a lost sea / can be heard" (73-74), leaving "a time to think of everything the earth / and I had lost, of all // that I would lose, / of all that I was losing" (77-80). The enjambment between "the earth" and "I" creates a spatial separation of them, even as they are joined by the "and." The pervasiveness of loss across time and tense—that he had lost, would lose, was losing, past, future, and present—creates an inescapable timeline to loss for the speaker. Shoring up this connection between the earth and the speaker, earlier in the poem he declares, "I breathed the dried seas // the earth had lost, / their forsaken shores" (54-56). The dried seas themselves become part of the speaker's physical body as

he breathes them in, thus physically taking in the earth's loss of these seas on the "forsaken shores." The lost sea becomes a physical part of his body, his connection with the earth made through loss, juxtaposing gain and loss together. Similarly, in the poem "I See Chile in My Rearview Mirror," the speaker, who comes to understand the history of loss throughout the Americas, finds more loss through that understanding:

> […] I'm passing skeletal
> figures carved in 700 B.C.
> Whoever deciphers these canyon walls
> remains forsaken, alone with history,
>
> no harbor for his dream. (33-37).

Looking at this ancient art, these "skeletal / figures" themselves seem to be an image of death and loss, art marked on the landscape so long ago as to have lost the context of its original culture. There is a warning for the one interpreting, the one who "deciphers" any type of art: Ali cautions that this art of loss does not bring connection, but only more loss, leaving the one who hopes to connect "alone with history," despite gaining an understanding of shared loss. The "harbor" connects back to the first line of "I See Chile in My Rearview Mirror"—"This dream of water—what does it harbor?" (1). The word "harbor" resonates not only in the meaning of something that is protected, but in its nautical meaning, also as thematically tied to the search for water. So, the question is, what is protected by this dream of water? In the continual return to the dream of water in the desert, of a history of water that is impossible to restore, loss becomes part of the meaning

to decipher from the natural world. All history is loss, not gain, but harbors some hope of connection.

In the collection, Ali frames the understanding of loss often through the view of a solitary speaker, left alone to contend with the physical remnants of history. In "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel," there is also this sense of persistent loss and loneliness, this time through representing a character at a great distance from the personal figure of the poet that appears throughout *A Nostalgist's Map*. The hotel "Keeper" "reads late / into the night" (2-3) and is able to sleep until "Afternoons wake him" (3), undisturbed by guests in this space that is now "Dead." What he hears in those afternoons, though, are "voices speaking in webs" (60), which provides an image of interconnection—a web spatially brings different strands together, seeming to indicate that the voices, together, speak around the same subject. However, a web of voices would be difficult to understand all at once, suggesting a lack of clarity in what to take from the voices. The "Dead Hotel" situates the lonely present in opposition to a past relationship with power and leisure at the hotel: "Drunk senators once gambled / here while their wives blurred // the balconies with silk" (8-10). Money comes to the forefront with the gambling, the silks, and the wives at leisure on the balconies, indicating that these former guests had lavish taste and lifestyles. Past guests even include "an actress whose smile was an era" (11), marking the "Dead Hotel" as an important cultural space. The actress' smile presents a persistently optimistic image in coming to stand in for an "era" rather than for her individuality. Indeed the actress quickly metamorphoses into a representation of history, as she "came down the steps, turned / like the century to look at herself, // then vanished from the mirror / of the pine hatstand" (12-15). The woman becomes a ghost as she "vanished," and this actress performs the role of

myth, with a body that "turned / like the century to look at herself," which suggests a historical inward-turn for the century. Her voice is left behind, though, through the "Letters [that] arrived / for her years after" (16-17) and "When he reads them, // he hears her whisper: 'Something / has happened. What is it?'" (18-19). She is a perpetual voice in the now "Dead Hotel," brought back through the Keeper's material interaction with these letters that never found her. "No one answers" (20) her question "What is it?" in the course of the poem, and the Keeper dares not answer.

What has happened, though, is answered by the poem's epigraph and then explained to the reader by the poetic voice—though not in a direct answer to the actress' question. In describing the Bisbee Deportation in the poem, contrary to the historical reality, Ali claims multiple murders: "The copper mountains echo with rifle shots: / men on strike are being killed // in the mines, the survivors forced / into boxcars and left in the desert // without water" (61). In this he blends truths of the deportations with an exaggerated version: no miners "are being killed // in the mines" in the way the repetitive echo of rifle shots suggests. Using the term "survivors" for the deported men suggests that a multitude that were subject to violent death in the mines or that many were eliminated through murder. Interestingly, Ali received an MFA from the University of Arizona in Tucson, and while living there would have been locally exposed to the story of the Bisbee Deportation. Adding to the suggestion that Ali has steeped the poem in local knowledge, he dedicated the poem to John Hudak, who was the founding president of the Tucson Poetry Festival, according to the Arizona Archives Online. In addition, the University of Arizona houses a massive collection of primary and secondary documents related to the Bisbee Deportation in the Special Collections Library (much of the collection has now been digitized and is widely

available in an online exhibit[23]). While it is possible that Ali's suggestion of mass murder in the Bisbee Deportation is a mistake owing to not investigating the story in full, the incident is very well documented because of the investigation and report by the President's Mediation Commission and other related legal cases. Because of the length of the investigation of the Mediation Commission, the Deportation actually received national press attention and recorded testimony from a multitude of witnesses. That is to say, if many striking men were actually shot in the mines, it would have come out in the interviews by the President's Mediation Commission and the report issued by it; the Commission interviewed deportees as well as those who did the deporting. I was not able to locate a single discrepancy over how many people died in the Bisbee Deportation or the manner in which they died in any primary or secondary source. Thus, Ali either constructed his history mistakenly through the "bitter" myth of Bisbee that he gathered in a casual way from the local community or local experience, or Ali purposefully altered the history of the Deportation in his poem to include a greater degree of violence, which this bitterness seems to suggest. The first option suggests that there is, or could be, a colloquial truth about Bisbee that, despite all the documentation by historians, has been lost to the larger history—if it isn't actually true that more men were shot in the mines, it is at least true in the way those still bitterly remembering have mythologized the event. Either there was more violence, now forgotten, or the poem suggests that the bitterness of the quite dramatic experience is equivalent in experience to the loss of life. If Ali has purposefully altered the history of the Deportation to include mass murder for dramatic impact, this suggests that those narrating what has been lost to traditional history are equally subject to

[23] See http://www.library.arizona.edu/exhibits/bisbee/

issues of truth and then also to an examination of narrative motives. Misremembering throws the process of recovering history into doubt.

Alongside the erroneous suggestion of miners shot in the mines for striking, Ali includes the factual detail that "Their women are leaving / the city," indeed as indeed many women left behind were forced out by the sudden lack of income and resources. The government report confirms that the men deported were "left in the desert // without water" (25-26), a detail that suggests inhumanity in those doing the deporting, especially given this occurred in the heat of summer in the open desert, on cars designed to carry cargo, not people. The central conflict in the poem "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel," however, is not the details of the traumatic event itself, but rather that the event keeps happening for the Keeper long after the singular incident has ended:

> Each night he sees them depart.
>
> Each night he hears laughter from the balconies:
>
> ……
>
> […] Each night
>
> she still asks:
>
> Something has happened. What is it?'" (28-29, 31-33)

The rupture of the deportation is unending; it has created an unanswerable cycle of history that the keeper cannot end himself. The keeper will not tell the actress what has happened; the poem asks "But who will tell her?" (34) and again, "Who will tell her?" (37). This telling would seemingly put an end to the questions, to her "furiously / brushing her hair" (34-35). That she remains "Unanswered" (39) in the end of the poem means "she is leaving this city again, her voice / pressing him back into the silence // of ash-throated men in the desert"

(40-42). The Keeper of the hotel thus becomes victim of the deportation, an "ash-throated" man, in listening to her questioning voice and being unable to answer it—he becomes victim of the event that continues to happen in that connection of conspiring silences: "Every silence in the world / has conspired with every other" (38-39). His inability to answer her question about what has happened turns him into victim of the event itself rather than someone responsible for it. The Keeper is subject to that thirst of the men deprived of water, home, and community. In this, Ali suggests that a failure to narrate the histories of loss that were central to the formation of America makes us all continuing victims of those losses, which will continue to happen.

"Be faithful, / even to those who no longer exist"

In *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, Ali navigates an impossible position as that "nostalgist," recording the losses of the past, but always through their interaction with his own individual spatial and historical experience, which necessarily distorts this recording. In his geographic representation of America in the volume, Ali plays with the notion that "India always exists / off the turnpikes /of America" ("In Search of Evanescence" 47-49), a realization he has upon driving past the exit to Calcutta, Ohio. Extending his location of India within the migratory spaces of America in his remapping of the American Southwest, Ali hopes to connect the spaces of America with past homelands of Kashmir and India. Through this, he can map a route between the cultures that Ali, in between homelands and identities, can use to find and define an already lost but nevertheless needed homeland. Yet Ali is playfully conscious of the troubles in narrating his cross-cultural map in poetry: "when I pass—in Ohio—the one exit / to Calcutta, I don't know I've begun //mapping

America" (21-23). Later he elaborates on his poetic need to aestheticize the experience of cross-cultural encounter through this accidental locating of Calcutta in America:

> When on Route 80 in Ohio
> I came across an exit
> to Calcutta
>
> the temptation to write a poem
> led me past the exit
> so I could say
>
> India always exists
> off the turnpikes
> of America
>
> so I could say
> I did take the exit (41-51)

The speaker's actions are directed by "the temptation to write a poem" about the playful experience, for which he critiques himself and his motives, twice repeating, "so I could say" (46, 50) he experienced Calcutta in America—that India exists here, and that he "did take the exit" (51). The motivation of poetry itself becomes subject of the poem, as Ali critiques his own desire to locate this cross-cultural geographic experience. He plays with the similar sounds of "exit" and "exists" in the poem, repeating exit several times in close succession with "exists," suggesting that there is a sort of rupture with the repeated "exits" where India "exists" in America, even as he places it firmly there.

The word "exist" permeates the volume as Ali locates lost cultures in his mapping of the American Southwest and as the poetic voice connects himself to those who no longer exist in American culture. In "Leaving Sonora," Ali constructs the land itself as remembering in ways that history has not: "The desert insists, always: Be faithful, / even to those who no longer exist" (5-6). Ali obscures which "Certain landscapes" are the ones that "insist on fidelity" (1), or what the "fidelity," in reality means. In the presumably blank—or perhaps haunted—space of the desert, his answer to the insistence of faithfulness is for "a poet of this desert / [to] go deep inside himself for shade" (2-3). Only inside, in his own imaginings, "do the perished tribes live" (4). The land carries with it history; it insists on the history of those that official history does not allow to "exist," but the faithfulness is mediated through that inward turn "deep inside himself" and his own experiences. Declaring this, Ali then takes on the role of the historian, explaining that "The Hohokam lived here for 1500 years" (7), and then shows how "the poet" (8) represented in the poem takes on the role of myth-maker: "the poet sees one of their women, / beautiful, her voice low as summer thunder" (8-9). One of "their" women, Ali describes her in terms of a connection to the land, using the simile of "summer thunder" to aestheticize Native American culture as the image of woman connected to nature. He imagines that "Each night she saw, among the culinary ashes, / what the earth does only through a terrible pressure— / the fire, in minutes, transforming the coal into diamonds" (10-12). The Indian woman is privy to the secrets of the earth, the magical fire from cooking abbreviates the geologic process that changes coal into diamonds, making it an everyday occurrence in the myth that Ali imagines.

Geographic departure and dislocation marks the ability to make cross-cultural connections in the poem, when in the final stanza, Ali declares, "I left the desert at night—to return / to the East" (13-14). In leaving "at night," Ali reflects back on the magic of "Each night" for the Hohokam woman, which is echoed in the "Each night" of "The Keeper of the Dead Hotel"; he seems "to return" to reality in a sense, leaving the "return" formally cut off through enjambment from "the East." The West is put in opposition as a place of mythologizing and reconstructing, as "Tucson's lights / shatter into blue diamonds" (14-15), bringing to life the nightly geologic ritual of the reimagined woman. From the migratory space of the plane, the blue diamond lights "only for a moment…fade / into the outlines of a vanished village" (17-18). His "eyes dazzled" (15) with the sight of the diamond lights and the vanished village, having imaginatively reconstructed "those who no longer exist" (6). Leaving Arizona provides the freedom to see the vanished village, unconstrained by the reality of material space that covers over history. Yet Ali doesn't question his "fidelity" to the landscape in seeing the extinct space of the "vanished village" or "the poet" as "faithful" in his imagining a Hohokam woman. The "vanished village" that "dazzles" the desert landscape provides a map for a lost history in the American Southwest, but Ali leaves unproblematized the link between his reimagining and the "fidelity" that necessitates the acknowledgement of "those who no longer exist."

In trying to rearticulate an "extinct" culture in his poetry, Ali attempts to remap a space for intercultural identity, but in so doing he risks evacuating the cultural spaces of their proper context. To connect with America, Ali utilizes extinct Native American cultures in his formulation of a cross-cultural poetics, memorializing the past loss of societies. As Lucy Maddox writes of representations of Native Americans in the nineteenth century, they

"reduc[e] the complex history of Indian-white relations in the country to a master narrative, representing the 'one unvarying story' of superior white man's triumph over the doomed Indian" (49). Though Ali wishes to give voice to rather than silence extinct cultures, nevertheless he is dependent on the narrative of extinction to draw his cultural connection of loss. Maddox decries "how extensively our contemporary society and even our individual lives have been shaped and delimited by certain hegemonic myths, especially the interdependent myths of patriarchy, of white supremacy, and of 'manifest destiny'" (169). She concludes her work *Removals* by reflecting on "the blindness of nineteenth-century writers to their complicity in the perpetuation of those myths that can now seem to us both so naïve and so damaging in their effects on American culture" (170). More relevant to Ali's mapping, however, is that in her project of "myth-seeking" Maddox makes "the assertion that contemporary criticism, even with its emphasis on de-mythologizing literary discourse and politicizing critical discourse, is still essentially replicating nineteenth-century criticism when it comes to the subject of Indians" (174). Ultimately, Maddox concludes, in contemporary criticism "Either the Indian presence is ignored, or the Indians are *re*mythologized by the critic" (174). Ali falls into the latter category, that of "remythologizing" Native Americans through his poetic remapping of their civilizations as lost and extinct. This is essentially a reassertion of the hegemonic American myths Maddox outlines.

While "Leaving Sonora" depends on an untroubled notion of cultural "fidelity," "I See Chile in My Rearview Mirror" complicates the idea of spatial and historical knowledge, ultimately indicting the speaker who witnesses and draws connections but futilely keeps driving northward into the United States. The speaker travels through the American

hemisphere, looking back at the reflection in his rear view mirror that gives him access to visions of violence, loss and chaos as he moves farther northward across the U.S. border. The speaker locates himself as "driving toward Utah, / keeping the entire hemisphere in view" (5-6). Ali acknowledges what this hemispheric mapping entails, that is, the reduction of material space to a distorted representation: "Columbia in vermilion, Brazil in blue tar, / some countries wiped clean of color" (7-8). Ali points to his limitations of viewing and representing in his hemispheric romp, using the image of a mirror: "Once I went through a mirror— / from there too the world, so intact, resembled / only itself" (13-15). Through the mirror, the world "resembled" itself and yet wasn't—like Alice through the looking glass, things are changed because of his journey and "When I returned I tore / the skin off the glass. The sea was unsealed" (15-16). The unsealing of the sea seems to release chaos in Santiago, Chile, which he can see clearly reflected in his mirror as he reaches "Sedona, Nogales / far behind" (12-13), looking back at the violent personal impact of changing political regimes. In Chile he sees "blindfolded men / blurred in gleaming vans" (31-32), those disappearing, destined for violent ends, yet visible from safety across the United States border. Seeing the chaos of "drunk soldiers" (20) and "a blur / of tanks in Santiago" (18-19), the speaker keeps moving away: "I keep driving in the desert" (22), never turning to look to turning the car around to head South. As he witnesses political upheaval, he keeps moving forward, away from the conflict while keeping it in his vision, engaging with the cultural history and yet recognizing the problematics of that very engagement, of that witness of cultural violence from afar.

Ali places political upheaval in Chile along side the speaker driving past "skeletal / figures carved in 700 B.C." The ancient history of vanished American peoples brings a

greater realization of loss when faced with present-day, immediate violence. Though the extinct civilizations are still faced with loss and irrelevance, unlike the joy and dazzle he finds in "Leaving Sonora," "I See Chile," represents the seeming futility of remapping ancient cultural violence and loss when faced with visible violence on the hemispheric map. In "I See Chile," Ali connects another lost civilization—that of the cliff-dwelling Anasazi—and asks "Did the Anasazi know the darker / answer also—given now in crystal // by the mirrored continent?" (43-45). Immediately, the speaker jumps back to Chile, "the lit stadium in Santiago" (48) that holds "Those about to die" (50). In referencing the Anasazi, and questioning if they knew the "darker" answer, he posits continuity between past cultures and the present, to the chaos and death, the darkness of events happening more recently in Chile. By trying to create a genealogy of dark events on "the mirrored continent" (45), the speaker attempts to make sense and order out of violence, "the ledger of the disappeared" (51) in the eyes of the witness. Regardless, the speaker doesn't turn around—only keeps looking in the mirror at the violence, wondering, "What will the mirror try now?" (52), what he will be a witness to an implicitly be made responsible for through that very witness and through his insistence of "driving, // still north, always followed by that country" (52-53). The poem closes with the image of "citizens so lovesick" (54) that "They demanded the republic // give back, jeweled, their every reflection. / They dig till dawn but find only corpses" (56-58). Finally, "The continent vanishes" (60) from the sight of the speaker, recalling the "jeweled" reflection he has watched as he drives northward.

Ali's primary geography in *A Nostalgist's Map of America* is the Southwest, singled out as an American space of loss by the pervasive image of the lost ocean hidden in the desert's past that Ali returns to several times. However, this insistence on the desert as a

space of loss leaves it available for Ali to historicize, sometimes problematically so as in the case of the Bisbee Deportation. Lawrence Needham suggests that "Ali's stark, yet sublime, poetics are well served by his choice of the American Southwest as the predominant ground and object of his writing" ("In Pursuit" 123). In remapping the space of the Southwest, Needham claims "His subject—lost tribes and vanished villages, vast deserts, geological epochs and cataclysmic changes—are able to support a resonant vocabulary of loss and desolation, as well as the mythic subtexts informing many of his poems" (123). The mapped space of the desert, in Needham's view, materially supports the focus on lost people and places claimed as ancestral. However, this is only made possible by the concentration on the shared "loss" of culture and supposed emptiness of the space, again, a desert lacking the ocean it used to contain; the sea is "a hollow fossil" in the desert ("Desert Landscape" 25). Writing on the transformation of the American Southwest as the nation developed, Mary Pat Brady helps to explain the cultural insistence on the Southwest desert as a space of emptiness. Brady theorizes that in the gradual shoring up of the United States as a nation, the land became separated from original meanings and cultural constructions: "The frontera's abstraction meant that as a space it could be conceptualized as the same everywhere; it was emptied of meaning except when understood through some formal, seemingly scientific exterior schema, such as a map or a grid" (3). Needham finds precisely that in Ali's Southwest—empty of meaning except through the lens applied by Ali, providing a space of "loss and desolation" upon which Ali draws to make his cultural connection. In her examination, Brady finally concludes that "space [is] performative, shifting the grammar of land from passive noun (as object) to active verb (as doing); space is processual, it changes, goes extinct" (5). Though trying to reinscribe meaning in the "vast

deserts" he encounters, Ali's spatial poetics are first based on the notion of emptiness and extinction of the space he wishes to reconstruct.

The desert spaces presented in *A Nostalgist's Map of America* are spaces of desolation in an echo to the personal losses of Ali's speakers. The speakers wish to make a connection to the losses of the past, but ironically shore up those losses in the insistence of a shared ancestry of loss to the present day of the speaker. This is illustrated by Needham, when he imagines that for Ali, "In the wasteland that he scours for traces of life and shards of history, the desert is a particularly apt scene of writing, being both the staging ground for sublime effects and the testing ground for his poetic powers" (123). Needham's language recalls the American Southwest as a nuclear testing ground in which he indeed is able to explore "the nature and efficacy of the poet's vocation in the modern wasteland" (123). Beginning with supposedly empty or evacuated space, the "wasteland" Needham sees represented in the Ali's American Southwest, with Ali picking through the shards of history ripe for the taking, Needham argues that the poet is able to perform the test of his poetic weapons, away from the un-emptied space of society. To Needham,

> Ali's sojourn through the American Southwest represents a period of trial during which he faces the severest test of a poet of the desert: the temptation to lose faith with the desert, to give up, or give out, in the face of stark desolation, to arrest movement and court death – or worse, in terms of his poetics, to resolve the dispersive force of the sublime into a settled representation of some transcendental reality – some mirage of Truth, Beauty, or Art. (123-24)

The evacuation of the American Southwest and its subsequent remapping as "stark desolation" belies the reality of the space and moreover does exactly the opposite of what

Needham claims: "He resists such reassuring closure and the last temptation: to consolidate a broken human world into a version of Self, writ large" (124). However, I argue that Ali's appropriation of the American Southwest, presented "stark desolation" which he needs to rewrite and recover in fact works to "consolidate" the fragments of spaces that all belong to his experience. The American Southwest, South America, New York City, Kashmir in the text ultimately forms the "Self, writ large" that Needham claims it resists—but it is this experience of Self that is the only way to heal the losses of the past. While Needham contends that "his poetry works in quite the opposite way; it shatters the Self and its comforting illusions, and subverts the historical understanding on which it depends" (124), in his poetry, Ali reconstructs history and memory to create a new framework for the Self—one which he acknowledges as distorted in poems such as "I See Chile in My Rearview Mirror." This allows for the Self to experience the ambivalence of history without subverting responsibility for it.

In fact, Ali records and reflects on the very act of appropriating within the poems in the collection, suggesting that he expects a critique of his deployment of histories of loss and violence in America, and further suggesting that appropriation by the poetic "I" is a method of contending with historical loss and disconnection. Needham points out that the poem "A Nostalgist's Map of America" in fact "testifies to the limits of language and art, which fail to take the measure of suffering and are powerless, even false, before death, yet it also records the poet's necessary fidelity to loss, as well as his struggle to remember the past without falsification or sentimentality" (125). Further, he extends his reading with "I See Chile in My Rearview Mirror," where Needham reads a desire to "sweep away frozen representations, leaving in their wake the traces of other histories. His dream of drowning,

a wish for destruction and re-creation, is also a desire to recover the voices and stories of the forgotten from the flotsam and jetsam of history" (126). It is, ironically, in Ali's very desire to revoice the past, to recreate spaces and, through them, hidden histories and lost cities, where Ali is in danger of mapping over and erasing the lost cultures he wishes to bring back to life, even if these experiences of loss remain in his consciousness. While the image disappears from his rear view mirror in "I See Chile in My Rearview Mirror," and the speaker is safely traveling away from the actual site of the violence, Ali suggests that he is unable to untangle the connections forged between himself and elsewhere, and between modern and ancient violence and loss.

In engaging the discourse of loss in America to engage in a cross-cultural mapping project, Ali remythologizes Native American culture, fixing it as extinct, lost, and irrecoverable—save by his remapping, which is nonetheless a heartfelt attempt at finding the means to map a home place for himself through cross-cultural connection to American pasts. And yet, the impulse is complicated, as Jahan Ramazani argues in *The Hybrid Muse*:

> Although the terms 'postcolonial,' 'Third World,' and 'non-Western' have often been criticized for erasing cultural and historical differences, they can be useful in highlighting similarities and differences among various cultures still grappling with their colonial histories. They can help to illuminate the robust variety of indigenous cultures living in the shadow of empire, whereas more local perspectives often make it difficult to recognize such cross-cultural relationships. (4)

Ali's connection to Native Americans is reliant on the abiding image of loss—that is, of cultural extinction—which in turn, does less to connect "indigenous cultures living in the shadow of empire," but the question is, does he erase "cultural and historical differences,"

in seeing the present-day struggles of Chile from his rear view mirror, while driving past the ruins of ancient civilizations? Ali questions the possibility of any recovery, but struggles to connect to the cross-cultural in the landscape of America. Ali draws a map of sites of loss and oppression, connecting back to his own irrecoverable loss of homeland, which itself offers hope through a connected history of loss. At the same time, Ali depends on the loss to construct a cross-cultural map much as do the American authors Maddox identifies; early American authors employ a narrative or myth of loss and defeat to construct a distinctly American identity, whereas Ali draws on the same narrative to break down national boundaries, creating a map of America that harbors the transnational. The move is then complicated—he does not simply appropriate or erase cultural difference, but both stakes connection and mourns the impossibility of claiming what is lost.

While Ali's map of America, in connecting oppressed "Indian" cultures of America and his homeland may in some ways overstep its bounds, Ali's rapid shifting of spaces and the histories contained in them is a function of Ali's loss of a homeland through exile; thus his specific experiences of America as a space and narrative are reflected through these disparate, cross-cultural, sometimes appropriative connections. Ramazani cites the urge in postcolonial poets to "figure the desire to recuperate the precolonial past as the troubled search for an ancestral home, irreparably damaged by colonialism" (10). In searching for the precolonial past in America, Ali strives to map a home for himself, to reclaim a narrative of imagined roots in the similarly oppressed Native American culture. What he finds, as do many postcolonial poets, is that "To return home is in many cases to reenter mere ruins haunted by the murdered and massacred dead" (Ramazani 11). Ali uses space to access the past, fighting against the erasure prompted by material space. He urges for a new

discursive space of the American Southwest that remembers and remaps the vanished Indian villages seen by the poet in his work—this figure of the poet is suggested as the one with the freedom to appropriate, imagine, and connect what otherwise remains lost and distant.

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall theorizes, "cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture…It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return" (226). Hall claims that cultural identity "is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*" (226). In light of the fallacy of fixed cultural origins, Ali's "positioning" of himself within the American cultural landscape both reaffirms his reliance on "myth," particularly in his identification with lost Native American cultures, but at the same time exposes his use of fantasy: there is no true cultural identity outside of the constructed narrative. Ali's map of America is crisscrossed by embedded memories of Kashmir, India, and the varieties of personal experience in the Southwest and other parts of America.

Ali's migratory identification with Indians of the Southwest reflects Homi Bhabha's sense that "Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively…The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (*Location* 2). Engaging with "native" culture of America, Ali stands at the moment of "historical transformation," able to perform, through his poetry, the map of affiliation and connection. Bhabha goes on to talk about "the dangers

of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures" that ultimately "establishes a boundary: a bridge, where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world—the unhomeliness— that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (13). In his drive through America, Ali attempts to take on what Bhabha calls for, that is, "the political responsibility…to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" (12). Counterintuitive to how we might think of appropriation, in appropriating the history of loss in the space he traverses, I argue that Ali attempts to take responsibility for that which has been marginalized through representing the unrepresented.

"the desert refused my history"

In "Beyond the Ash Rains," the opening poem of the first section of *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, Ali thematizes the critical voice that would question his cross-cultural connection through the personification of the desert space. He narrates that "the desert refused my history, / refused to acknowledge that I had lived / there, with you, among a vanished tribe // two, three thousand years ago" (1-4). The desert refuses his assertion of connection between the speaker's own past and that of desert space of the present, as well as his assertion of having lived there or at all, leaving the declaration "I have lived" perilously separated from "there, with you, among a vanished tribe." The ambiguously located desert, nevertheless mapping itself on to the American Southwest through Ali's focus on the American map in the rest of the volume, refuses the cultural connection he offers: the space offers no shelter for his "history." Instead, the "you" of the poem offers the experience of living in "the northern canyons. / There, among the red rocks" (6-7), giving

access to "the relics / of our former life, proof that we'd at last / found each other" (11-13). The material world ultimately confirms the history that the desert initially refuses through the uncovering of cultural relics, proof of a common ancestry. The cultural ancestor that the speaker finds leaves him feeling "singled out for loss" (14); in the cultural connection he has remapped, the speaker already recognizes the tenuous nature of the connection. The narrative of the poem closes with an inescapable sense of desperation:

> You took my hand, and we walked through the streets
>
> of an emptied world, vulnerable
> to our suddenly bare history in which I was,
>
> but you said won't again be, singled
> out for loss in your arms, won't ever again
> be exiled, never again, from your arms. (18-23)

The repetition of "won't again," "won't ever again," and "never again," as well as "singled / out for loss" signals the hope of the speaker for permanent connection undergirded by the knowledge of its ultimate failure in face of the history of exile. Creating a cross-cultural map of loss ultimately leaves both "you" and "I" "vulnerable / to our suddenly bare history" (19-20). In mapping a connection to the American Southwest, Ali bridges the space between cultures, forming a discursive American home for the exiled self. To map what is forgotten in the American desert, Agha Shahid Ali takes on further exile and alienation in order to connect to the history—loss, then, forges the basis for creating a usable *Map of America* in the contemporary world.

Coda: "Out of What is Lost Grows Something Stronger"

> The sea canes by the cliff flash green and silver;
> they were the seraph lances of my faith,
> but out of what is lost grows something stronger
> (Derek Walcott, "Sea Canes" 14-16)

Derek Walcott's elegiac poem "Sea Canes" mourns the loss of faith arising from the loss of friends: "Half my friends are dead. / I will make you new ones, said earth. / No, give me them back, as they were, instead / with faults and all, I cried" (1-4). Mourning for those lost, the speaker "can snatch their talk / from the faint surf's drone / through the canes" (5-7). The poem is steeped in the presence of those lost that are reflected in the natural world, in this case, the voices of those personally loved and lost by the speaker. However, this personal loss offers a window into the ambivalence of loss in the presentation of national origin in the texts explored in my project—on the one hand, the texts deeply mourn the losses of the past, yet ultimately they insist, like Walcott, that "out of what is lost grows something stronger" (16): they redefine national narratives through loss by speaking stories of those no longer present. Where faith is lost on the part of the speaker, he finds "the rational radiance of stone, / enduring moonlight, further than despair" (17-18), the "something stronger" that "brings those we love before us" (20). As in Walcott's poem, the American narratives of origin examined here offer an ambivalent relationship with loss, and therefore with the construction of national origin that arises from loss. The texts remain steeped in loss even while trying to redeem or recover from it. Like in Walcott's poem, they offer a model of endurance beyond despair—endurance of national identity arising from and strengthened by loss itself, where that which is loved is brought into view "with faults and all."

Walcott's Caribbean voice of mourning and strengthening through loss leads me to I end the project as I began—by turning to another Irish poet. This time, I evoke William Butler Yeats, who in his own time situated his texts within the context of cross-cultural struggles to define the Irish nation. Yeats argues for a broad understanding of the ways in which the cross-cultural can simultaneously be national: "A writer is not less National because he shows the influence of other countries and of the great writers of the world. No nation, since the beginning of history, has ever drawn all its life out of itself"(63). Yeats suggests that employing a broad range of cultural material can still be employed in the service of a "National" literature, far from making that writer stand against national literature or the idea of nation. Here, nationality is conceived as a process of communion between nations rather than an individual process; nations share "life" when they exchange culture rather than being dismantled by that contact, suggesting a discourse of hybridity at the heart of Yeats' aesthetics. Yeats proposes an alternative conception to a national literature that relies on geographic or cultural purity: "But if literature does not draw its substance from history, or anything about us in the world, what is a National literature?...It is the work of writers who are moulded by influences that are moulding their country, and who write out of so deep a life that they are accepted there in the end" (62). From this we can infer that far from being anti-American, then, writers who destabilize assumed national foundations of America or who posit loss as a central force of history may be founders of a national idea more usable for literature. Being steeped in "influences that are moulding their country" means that writers need not write only in support of traditional historical narratives to be national writers.

Amy Kaplan suggests, "Foregrounding imperialism in the study of American cultures shows how putatively domestic conflicts are not simply contained at home but how they both emerge in response to international struggles and spill over national boundaries to be reenacted, challenged, or transformed" (16). Kaplan offers a useful spatial image here with conflicts that cannot be "contained at home," having been initiated in response to imperial foundations of America—foundations that have, in the past, been left unexplored in American literary works. Cultural conflicts "spilling over national boundaries" happens throughout the texts of William Faulkner, Maxine Hong Kingston, Willa Cather, and Agha Shahid Ali, often in unexpected ways that speak to changing difficulties of defining national identity and even national spaces. Together the texts suggest that loss, as method and theme, has been a strategy for coping with the conflicts initiated by empire, but as Walcott offers for his loss of faith, they bring about something stronger in the new national narratives that they offer. "Singled Out for Loss" argues that the texts try to resist an easy inclusion in larger, coherent national narratives through stories that demonstrate national origin is an ever-shifting mark. The texts seek to narrate "new" ancestors for the nation, but they also try to resist appropriating them without taking responsibility for the losses perpetuated by history.

I close with a look at Yeats' poem "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death":

> I know that I shall meet my fate
>
> Somewhere among the clouds above;
>
> Those that I fight I do not hate
>
> Those that I guard I do not love;
>
> My country is Kiltartan Cross,

My countrymen Kitlartan's poor,

No likely end could bring them loss

Or leave them happier than before.

Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,

Nor public man, nor cheering crowds,

A lonely impulse of delight

Drove to this tumult in the clouds;

I balanced all, brought all to mind,

The years to come seemed waste of breath,

A waste of breath the years behind

In balance with this life, this death.

Yeats engages in a discourse of local identity here: "My country is Kiltartan Cross, / My countrymen Kiltartan's poor" (5-6), a significant contrast to a large national community; the airman figures his identity in terms of not only a very specific, local place, but a socioeconomic identity as well. Moreover, the speaker suggests that his "poor" community status precludes his participation in larger national concerns. As for his direct community, "No likely end could bring them loss / Or leave them happier than before" (7-8). The suggestion is that this community is already bereft in some ways his death will not "bring them loss" because they are already mired in loss. However, Yeats suggests that the Airman disconnects in part *because* loss is not a possible outcome for his community—there is a danger in the elimination of loss from a community because loss itself can be a force of connection.

Yeats' "Irish Airman" is notable in that he is not driven by nationalism in the way Anderson suggests in *Imagined Communities* that citizens often are, with a citizen driven to "willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (7) as national community. The Airman flatly declares, "Those that I guard I do not love" (4), suggesting the rejection of this national imagined community that he ostensibly guards. Unlike the airman, the texts in my project are deeply mired in both love and hate for the past, and for American communities of local and national varieties. For the Airman, "Nor law, nor duty bade me fight / Nor public man, nor cheering crowds" (9-10)—no legal, ethical, political, or community motivation undergirds the airman's participation in the war, his engagement in this big event of History, in contrast to this nationalistic motivation presented by Anderson. Instead, "A lonely impulse of delight / Drove to this tumult in the clouds" (11-12). The desire for transcendence drives his interactions with this moment in History, which, significantly, restores a personal narrative to impersonal historical events. This transcendent impulse, the search for beauty in experience is critical to restore to historical narratives. At the same time, this lonely impulse is a self destructive one for the Airman. The texts in "Singled Out for Loss" question what it means to have personal access to national myth writ large while attempting to resist the Airman's position of disconnection. "A lonely impulse of delight" implies a deep human need for aesthetic pleasure, "Somewhere among the clouds above" (2) as a motivating spur to human action that could just as easily be interpreted as motivated by nationalistic goals. This impulse itself is ambivalent—on the one hand, the airman preserves a solitary experience that is not able to be subsumed by national narrative, but on the other hand is destructive, not only for the Airman, but, it is suggested, those subject to fighting him—even though he does not "hate" his military enemies. Yeats is

writing against the fervency of Irish nationalism that threatens to flatten and homogenize the experiences of the country, but he ultimately also writes against the "lonely impulse" that materially threatens both the Airman and everyone else in the poem. The texts in "Singled Out for Loss" wish to restore the ability for the Airman's death to "bring…loss" to his community: even while offering critiques of national narrative, they fight the lonely impulses of narrative delight that only distance rather than connect. The Airman's "lonely impulse" is both triumphant in how he maintains the self in the face of overpowering national experiences, but also cautions against the dangers of disconnection from loss and community.

Yeats restores a sense of humanity and personal narrative to flattening historical myths in his portrayal of the Airman, rejecting the lenses of nationalism, heroism, sacrifice through which we might interpret his actions. The authors in my project focus on stories of personal intervention in larger historical narratives, altering our understanding of the narrative much in the way that Yeats does here with his Airman. However, the texts also reject the airman's disconnected positioning that leaves him and his community immune to loss. If anything, the texts insist on the interrelation of all loss, sometimes appropriating all loss out of necessity: they wrestle with collective loss that pushes national boundaries in the service of mourning human losses great and small, losses that ultimately alter and shape the map of the American nation.

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