

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Sacred Geographies:
Religion, Race, and the Holy Land in U.S. Literature, 1819-1920**

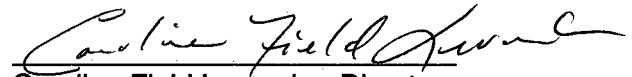
by

Molly K. Robey

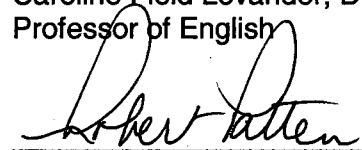
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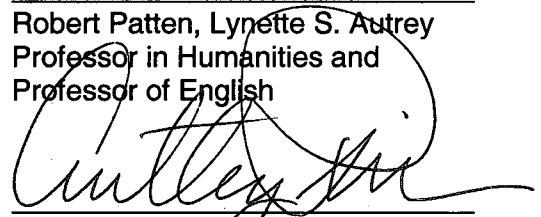
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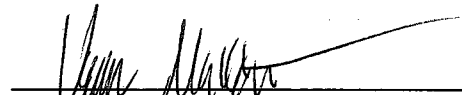
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ABSTRACT

Sacred Geographies:

Religion, Race, and the Holy Land in U.S. Literature, 1819-1920

by

Molly K. Robey

This dissertation explores how representations of the Holy Land shaped nineteenth-century Americans' conceptions of racial identity in the emerging United States. In the nineteenth century, Americans physically encountered Palestine for the first time, exploring, mapping, and essentially inventing the Holy Land during a century of U.S. nation-building, expansion, and imperialism. "Sacred Geographies" reveals how the Holy Land provided a durable and fertile resource for writers wrestling with the place of race in the burgeoning nation. Analyzing a variety of "national" writings, including frontier romances, Gothic tales, slave narratives, and domestic novels, I demonstrate U.S. writers' engagement with a rapidly growing Holy Land industry. Attention to this often overlooked fascination with the Holy Land highlights the interdependence of racial and religious histories in U.S. culture. By examining the Holy Land's fundamental impact on U.S. perceptions of racial and national belonging, "Sacred

Geographies” exposes the flexibility of the racial categories used to constitute U.S. culture, and it demonstrates the vital role religious identity played in the development of U.S. racial ideologies.

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Gale Kenny, Cory Ledoux, David Messmer, Liz Fenton, and Ben Wise, provided helpful feedback and lasting friendship for which I am deeply appreciative. Lilian Crutchfield too deserves thanks for her astute assessments of my writing in recent years. I would also like to express my gratitude to Timothy Marr, one of the Mellon Seminar's invited guests, who continues to offer invaluable guidance and support. As I finished this dissertation, the Illinois Wesleyan University English and Religion Departments provided me with a home away from home. I offer my sincere thanks to Kevin Sullivan, Andrew Smith, Joanne Diaz, and Jason Moralee for their sage advice as I completed this project.

A number of personal relationships have sustained me through the dissertation writing process, and for these relationships I am profoundly grateful. Melissa Merz and Kate Buckley listened to my grumblings with endless patience and good cheer. Sawyer provided companionship during our morning walks and distraction the rest of the day. The Robeys were there, as always, to encourage me, or put me in my place whenever it was required. Laura, Joanna, Melanie, and James remain my most ardent supporters. Though William Robey is no longer with us, his influence can be felt throughout this dissertation. Finally, I thank Robert Erlewine for his unwavering faith.

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INTRODUCTION

Critical Coordinates

In June 2008, I arrived in Chicago, Illinois just in time to see the city embroiled in geographical pandemonium. The city's year long "Festival of Maps," a seemingly innocuous celebration of two-dimensional spatial representations, had suddenly and unexpectedly erupted in controversy. The cause of the controversy was a new exhibit at the Spertus Museum, an institution dedicated to exploring Jewish life and culture. The exhibit, entitled "Imaginary Coordinates," brought together various maps of the region now known as the Middle East. These maps spanned ancient though contemporary periods and represented a variety of religious and cultural perspectives, including Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Israeli, and Palestinian viewpoints. According to the Spertus website, the exhibit was "inspired by antique maps of the Holy Land" and sought to "juxtapose these maps with modern and contemporary maps of the region" and "objects of material culture and artworks" as a means of "charting new spaces, fostering conversation, and imaging new communities."¹ Apparently, the people of Chicago were not interested in the new spaces charted, the conversations fostered, or the new communities imagined by "Imaginary Coordinates." Almost immediately after the exhibit opened, it became the subject of contentious debate in Chicago, and the exhibit was forced to close

temporarily. Although the Spertus issued statements claiming the closing was due to structural and lighting problems, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that the closing was the result of pressure from the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago and major donors who threatened to withdraw their support from the museum.² What was so surprising about the uproar caused by the exhibition was that it was not the calculatedly provocative artworks on display—for instance, a video piece entitled “Barbed Hula,” which aimed to draw attention to Palestinian oppression—that caused some Chicagoans’ public outrage. It was the maps. Visitors apparently took issue with the museum’s depiction of maps of the Middle East as “products of memory and spiritual imagination.”³ What offended viewers was the idea that a map may not be an objective visual record, but instead may be a narrative text shaped by feelings and desires.⁴ The maps on display at the Spertus depicted differing and even contradictory narratives about the space alternately called the Holy Land, the Near East, Palestine, and Israel. Many visitors felt this very diversity of spatial narratives presented a direct criticism of the modern state of Israel. After briefly reopening on a limited basis, the exhibition was shut down permanently on June 20, 2008.

I mention this Chicago controversy not because it demonstrates that many Americans are invested in the Middle East and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict specifically, but because it suggests that geographical representations of Palestine and Israel serve an important function in discussions of U.S. national identity and of Americans’ conceptions of the place of the United States in the

world. Critics of “Imaginary Coordinates” understood the exhibit’s presentation of geographical images as akin to a statement of international policy. The intense reaction provoked by “Imaginary Coordinates” makes increasing sense when we think about how images of Israel and Palestine have figured prominently in articulations of community and nation from the colonial period forward. Beginning with John Winthrop’s famous pronouncement of a Puritan new world covenant in 1630, “America” has been repeatedly defined as a New Israel, a new Holy Land for a new chosen people. As the newly appointed Governor Winthrop informs his fellow colonists that “God” will “delight to dwell among us as his own people and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways,” he encourages the new residents of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to view their emigration as a reenactment of the biblical Israelites’ exodus from Egypt.⁵ The notion of the American Promised Land likewise structured revolutionary rhetoric and early efforts at nation building. In 1776, both Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson suggested that the new national seal should depict an illustration from the biblical book of Exodus.⁶ In the nineteenth century, Holy Land rhetoric continued to infuse U.S. political discourse, surfacing, for instance, in the 1830s in campaigns for westward expansion such as Lyman Beecher’s public address *A Plea for the West*.⁷ Holy Land imagery likewise structured arguments both for and against the propagation of slavery. In his 1852 speech “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” Frederick Douglass invoked the idea of the American New Israel only to caution his audience that in perpetuating the institution of slavery, the United

States was in danger of replicating the downfall of its self-proclaimed forebear. Douglass warns, "it is dangerous to copy the example of a nation whose crimes, towering up to heaven, were thrown down by the breath of the Almighty, burying that nation in irrecoverable ruin!"⁸ The Holy Land appeared too in late-century rationalizations of U.S. imperialism in Hawaii, Cuba, and the Philippines, as when President William McKinley justified the U.S. annexation of the Philippines as the outgrowth of the American Christian mission.⁹ By some estimates, over 1,000 locations in the United States have been named after biblical places, a clear indication of Americans' desire to recreate the Holy Land within the United States' borders.¹⁰ As this brief sample of allusions attests, the Holy Land has a long history as a highly-charged geography in the United States, not only as a historical land of revelation for the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions, but also as an enduring reference point in discussions of national identity.

This study aims to show how the Holy Land as a physical and imagined geography shaped the construction of the United States in the nineteenth century, a period of vital importance in the genesis and evolution of the nation. As the nation came into focus in the years following the Revolution, the Puritan notion of the American New Israel introduced by Winthrop was perpetuated, developed, and circulated to a fragmented and disparate national body through a variety of literary forms. Throughout the nineteenth century, Holy Land imagery saturates U.S. literary culture, becoming a durable and malleable reference point in the ongoing construction of the nation. Representations of the Holy Land

appear in historical frontier romances, Gothic tales, slave narratives, domestic novels, epic poems, and, of course, travel narratives. They surface in the writings of James Fenimore Cooper, Lydia Maria Child, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Edgar Allan Poe, Martin Delaney, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Herman Melville, Maria Susannah Cummins, and Mark Twain among others. The remarkable diversity of the texts in which these Holy Land images materialize suggests the wide range of uses to which representations of religious spaces could be put. For instance, Child, in her 1824 novel *Hobomok*, locates the roots of American character in the Near East, defining her seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay colonists as "citizens of the New Jerusalem."¹¹ By contrast, Delany, in his 1860-61 serialized novel *Blake*, exposes the exclusions upon which such a notion of citizenry is premised. Delany fashions his protagonist Blake as a nineteenth-century Moses who experiences a conversion in the wilderness, crosses the Red River in flight from slaveowners, and leads a community of enslaved individuals to freedom. In Delany's paradigm, the Exodus narratives that enable Child to imagine Anglo-America as the New Jerusalem rightfully belong to African-America. Child and Delany's divergent conceptions of the American New Israel provide just two examples of how the Holy Land, as a powerful and enduring site of national construction, served a variety of conservative and critical purposes throughout the nineteenth-century.

These nineteenth-century Holy Land representations, in contrast to earlier colonial images, exhibit an increasing investment in and a broader geographical

awareness of the physical Holy Land. For Winthrop, that is, the term “Holy Land” is a metaphor for some future state of religious perfection and a synonym for the ancient setting of the Judeo-Christian Bible. For nineteenth-century U.S. writers, the Holy Land is a modern geographical entity, a place Americans encountered through travel, maps, and literary texts. Between 1819 and 1920, a period of U.S. nation-building, expansion, and imperialism, Americans entered the Holy Land for the first time and engaged in a project of exploring, mapping, and essentially inventing the Holy Land. U.S. literature reflects this first century of encounter with the Holy Land, registering the modern topography, culture, and politics of the Near East even as U.S. writers continue to call upon the images of ancient Israel that had been used to structure community formation in the colonial era and eighteenth century. Allusions to Islam and the Ottoman Empire in literary representations of the nation reveal that U.S. writers drew upon modern geographical representations of the Holy Land as well as biblical narratives. Moving beyond the model of Israel, U.S. writers looked to the greater biblical lands, including Egypt, Ethiopia, and Mount Lebanon, for further spatial narratives that helped to articulate the boundaries and borders of the nation. This expanded focus—historically and geographically—in representations of the Near East enabled the Holy Land to serve a variety of conservative and critical purposes in the ongoing configuration of the nation.

In particular, the Holy Land proved to be a fertile resource for U.S. writers wrestling with the place of race in the burgeoning nation. As U.S. writers looked

to the model of Israel to define their anxious and uncertain new nation, representations of the Holy Land facilitated not only the identification of a new chosen people, but also the exclusion of “others” from national belonging. For example, in the popular 1827 frontier romance *Hope Leslie*, which takes place in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, a Native American village is referred to as “Jerusalem” by the author Sedgwick.¹² By naming this particular village—a place from which indigenous Americans have been exiled—Jerusalem, Sedgwick simultaneously associates Indians with the white “Israelite” settlers of the Massachusetts colony and disavows indigenous claims to the American Promised Land. Imagining colonial America as a new Holy Land, Sedgwick positions Native Americans as old Israelites whose claims to the American Promised Land have been superseded by the new, decidedly Protestant Christian, chosen people. Defining Native Americans fundamentally as religious others, Sedgwick narrates their expulsion from the nation. A decade later Poe similarly draws on Holy Land geography to articulate the exclusion of other nonwhite subjects from the nation. In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), Poe displaces the acute anxieties that infused the slaveowning culture of the U.S. South in the 1830s onto the island of Tsalal, a place Poe compares to Babylon. Many critics have noted that Tsalal appears to embody white racist fears of slave uprising, functioning as a nightmarish landscape in which aggressive black natives deceive and brutally murder the white merchant sailors who disembark on their shore. Poe, linking the Tsalal natives to the Babylonians,

an empire that successfully defeated the ancient Israelites, excludes black Americans from national belonging and at the same time predicts the downfall of the American New Israel at the hands of those “others” which it has excluded. In short, American conceptions of racial identity, upon which a cohesive national identity depends, emerge in these episodes through representations of the Near East. From the prairie deserts of Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales to the biblically-inscribed Hawaii of Twain’s *Following the Equator*, I argue, U.S. literary culture sustains a comparison between the United States and the Holy Land in order to secure, disseminate, and at times contest the construction of racial difference in U.S. culture.

As this study investigates the Holy Land’s role in narrating the exclusion of certain groups from the nation, it seeks to uncover the tangled histories of religious and racial identity in U.S. culture. In the nineteenth-century United States, histories of Native American dispossession, African enslavement, and racial science coincided with the development of evangelicalism, millennialism, and biblical geography, though these events have rarely been examined together. Attention to U.S. fascination with the Holy Land highlights the connections between U.S. racial and religious histories, demonstrating how narratives of racial otherness and religious otherness were often interdependent. Maria Cummins, for example, writing as the United States teetered on the brink of civil war, sets her novel *El Fureidîs* in Mount Lebanon, a region then plagued by sectarian hostilities. As Cummins dramatizes U.S. racial and regional tensions

against the backdrop of a small village in Lebanon, she looks to the Holy Land's religious diversity as a possible model for a racially diverse post-emancipation United States. As she links U.S. and Holy Land landscapes, Cummins ultimately racializes Muslimness, embodying antebellum ideas about nonwhite individuals in the figure of Abdoul, a Bedouin Arab.¹³ In Cummins's novel, the racial tensions afflicting the pre-Civil War United States are rendered indistinguishable from international interfaith conflict. By examining the Holy Land's fundamental impact on U.S. perceptions of racial and national belonging, this study demonstrates the vital role religious identity played in the development of U.S. racial ideologies.

In his 1850 novel *White Jacket*, Melville writes, "we Americans are the peculiar chosen people—the Israel of our time," a statement that illustrates the Holy Land's function as a powerful and enduring site of national construction.¹⁴ The consequence of such a national narrative becomes clear as Melville expounds upon this declaration of American election, or "chosenness":

Seventy years ago we escaped from thrall; and, besides our first birthright—embracing one continent of earth—God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans. . . . The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours.¹⁵

Melville's assertion exposes the manner in which religious spatial narratives both conceal and facilitate the operation of U.S. empire. Melville's conception of the American Israel tells us that the United States was conceived of within a global religious framework, a web of sacred geographies. In order to "contextualize and clarify" the "exceptionalism that has long been central to the nation's conception of its privileged place" in the world, as Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine phrase it, we need to trace how religion has traveled along the nation's imperial routes. We need to examine how religion and religious narratives have preceded and followed continental expansion, international commercial ventures, and overseas territorial acquisition.¹⁶ We need to ask how narratives that emerge from a distinctly Protestant Christian tradition have transformed colonies and empires into sacred geographies. In short, we need to examine how conceptions of sacred geography— notions that the Holy Land and United States are theologically and historically linked Promised Lands—have helped to naturalize the borders and boundaries of the nation.

Geography: Secular and Sacred

Geography has long been viewed as fundamental to the construction of national identity in the United States. Paradigmatic studies of American culture, most notably Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Frontier in American History* (1920), argued that the landscape of North America shaped the development of

American character and society.¹⁷ National identity, in this view, is bound to the collective experience of America's physical geography. Subsequent scholarship has promoted a less deterministic relationship between territory and national character, but has maintained a connection between space and national identity. As Wai Chee Dimock writes, the association of territory with national culture is a "founding concept" of American Studies: "physical space, in this paradigm, is endlessly reinscribed in other spheres of life: it becomes a political entity, an economic entity, a cultural entity."¹⁸ Re-conceptualizing American geography as an imagined landscape, numerous literary scholars have argued that the American landscape is a literary construction that U.S. authors have propagated in order to foster a sense of national identity.¹⁹ In this analysis, landscape does not shape the development of the national subject, but rather functions as a metaphor for the nation.

More recently, scholars such as Martin Brückner, Susan Schulten, and Bruce Harvey have suggested that the "construction of the American subject was grounded in the textual experience of geography itself."²⁰ That is, geography as a discipline, as a particular kind of text and textual practice concerned with recording, drawing, and writing the earth, has molded Americans' perceptions of themselves and their nation.²¹ Geography textbooks, maps, and atlases, Brückner writes, "provided many ordinary people with a vehicle for describing and defining their personal place in both the local and global community."²² These geographical texts became more and more readily available to U.S. readers in

the late-eighteenth century as mass-produced objects of study in the classroom and entertainments for the home, helping to stabilize the physical and cultural borders of the nation. The works of prominent U.S. geographers such as Jedidiah Morse, William Woodbridge, Emma Willard, Samuel Goodrich, Samuel Augustus Mitchell, and Arnold Guyot promoted a U.S.-centric global consciousness by contrasting “America” with representations of places and peoples outside the nation’s uncertain political boundaries. Geography, by representing the United States as a nation and by visualizing the nation’s place in the world, cultivated a sense of national identity.

The spatial preoccupations of American literary studies have given rise in recent decades to transnational, postnationalist, and hemispheric approaches that view the nation as a product of a complex web of regional, national, and international forces. A growing number of monographs, special issues of academic journals, and edited collections in U.S. literary studies express a desire to decenter the nation as an object of study by contextualizing and thereby elucidating the nation’s construction.²³ Drawing attention to various sites—New Orleans, Cuba, even Jamestown—and conflicts—the Haitian Revolution, the Barbary Coast Wars, and the U.S.-Mexican War—that highlight transnational encounters, literary critics have demonstrated that an international consciousness and an imperial ethos have marked the United States from the inception of the republic.²⁴ Such study has revealed the nation to be, as Levander and Levine state in their collection *Hemispheric American Studies*, a “relational

identity that emerges through constant collaboration, dialogue, and dissension.”²⁵ Analyzing the literary productions surrounding one particular international context, the capture of white Americans by Algerian “Barbary pirates” in the 1790s, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon claims, the consolidation of “new forms of nationalized (and racialized) identity” in the early United States took place “in a global-transatlantic context rather than a solely national one.”²⁶ As Americans attempted to establish the parameters of national belonging in the nineteenth century, to shore up the “artificially hardened borders and boundaries of the U.S. nation,” and to resolve the contradiction between national ideals and the exclusions of particular groups from the nation, they conceptualized the United States within an international framework.²⁷

The Holy Land, as this study demonstrates, provided one particularly vital geographical context for the consolidation of nationalized identity and the production of the national subject in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, directing attention to the Holy Land highlights how religion and religious identity are woven into the intricate web of the regional, national, and global forces that agitate and shape the nation. In the early-nineteenth century, Americans encountered the physical Holy Land—the land known as Palestine—for the first time, and this encounter deeply affected U.S. perceptions of the nation. In the 1820s and 1830s, in the wake of an intense period of evangelical fervor in the United States, Palestine became an important focus of U.S. missionary and geographical efforts. In 1819, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign

Missions (ABCFM) sent its first two missionaries to the Holy Land. Arriving in early 1820, Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons commenced their mission of converting Jews, Christians, and Muslims to Protestant Christianity.²⁸ As Ussama Makdisi writes, in “this American quest to reclaim the world for Christ, no place figured more profoundly than the Holy Land.”²⁹ Ironically, the ABCFM cast their Holy Land missionary endeavor in terms that evoked the puritan “errand into the wilderness.” The *Missionary Herald*, the official journal of the ABCFM, reported that the missionaries sought to create a “city on a hill” in the Holy Land, echoing Winthrop’s famous ambition for the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which was itself a reiteration of a phrase extracted from the Gospel of Matthew.³⁰

In the ensuing decades, growing numbers of Americans—missionaries, travelers, and geographers—ventured to the Holy Land. John Lloyd Stephens, one rather famous professional adventurer, recounted his daring exploration of the cursed land of Idumea in the travel narrative *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petræa, and the Holy Land* (1837).³¹ The theologian Edward Robinson, along with his former student, the ABCFM missionary Eli Smith, traveled extensively throughout the Near East, surveying the Holy Land and attempting to uncover long lost biblical sites. *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petræa* (1841), the product of that rigorous excursion, formed the basis for the modern field of biblical geography.³² President James K. Polk sent Lieutenant William F. Lynch of the U.S. Navy to survey the Dead Sea and the River Jordan in 1848. Lynch’s findings, published in 1849 as the *Narrative of the*

United States' Expedition to the River Jordan and the Dead Sea, ultimately “shared shelf space with Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.”³³ As the century progressed, the Holy Land became an increasingly popular travel destination that offered both a sense of secular adventure and spiritual affirmation. By the late 1840s, travel to Holy Land was increasingly possible for those of means, a more and more frequent addendum to the grand European tour. Following the U.S. Civil War, travel to the Holy Land developed into a veritable tourist industry. Established itineraries from Alexandria or Jaffa to Jerusalem and outlying areas became routine, as evidenced by the *Quaker City* package tour that inspired Mark Twain’s popular 1869 travel narrative *The Innocents Abroad*.³⁴

This encounter with the Holy Land informed the development of what Hilton Obenzinger calls a “Holy Land mania” in the United States.³⁵ As scholars such as Obenzinger, John Davis, Burke O. Long, Tim Marr, and Brian Yothers have recently demonstrated, the Holy Land became a virtual national preoccupation in the nineteenth century, generating a full-scale explosion of material culture.³⁶ Those Americans unable to travel to Palestine could encounter the Holy Land through a growing number of literary and visual texts. In the late eighteenth century, readers could experience the physical Holy Land through European travel narratives and Jedidiah Morse’s *American Geographies*.³⁷ By the 1830s, U.S. readers were consuming U.S. missionary memoirs of the Near East by Parsons (1824) and Fisk (1828) as well as Stephens’s celebrated travel

narrative. In subsequent decades an outpouring of Holy Land travel narratives, including Bayard Taylor's *The Lands of the Saracen* (1855), William C. Prime's *Tent Life in the Holy Land* (1857), David F. Dorr's *A Colored Man Round the World* (1858), James Turner Barclay's *The City of the Great King* (1858), Sarah Barclay Johnson's *Hadji in Syria*, William M. Thomson's *The Land and the Book* (1859), Caroline Paine's *Tent and Harem* (1859), and Twain's *Innocents Abroad*, helped many U.S. readers feel intimately familiar with the places and peoples associated with the biblical lands.³⁸ According to one of the nation's preeminent geographers, Samuel Augustus Mitchell, it was imperative that anyone seeking to "peruse the Sacred Scriptures or any portion of early history intelligently" have "some knowledge of" the "ancient geography" of the Bible.³⁹ Geography textbooks and atlases attempted to fill this void. Such tomes as *A New System of Ancient Geography* (1826), *Bible Atlas* (1832), *Mitchell's Ancient Geography* (1852), *The Cerographic Bible Atlas* (1859), and the *Manual of Biblical Geography* (1884) added to the wealth of Holy Land material accumulating in the United States.⁴⁰ In these geography books and atlases, maps of contemporary Palestine accompanied illustrations of the routes of the wandering Israelites and the travels of the apostles. These visual representations were complemented by landscape paintings, scenic engravings, scale models of Jerusalem, Holy Land panoramas, and eventually photographs and stereoscope images that sought to document the Holy Land and deliver it to an enthusiastic U.S. market. By the

1890s, the cultural productions of Holy Land mania could be viewed in any U.S. home or Sunday school.

The territory called the Holy Land, also known as Palestine in the nineteenth century, was largely invented in the nineteenth century through these efforts of mapping and cultural reproduction. That is, American perceptions of the region they called the Holy Land transformed in the nineteenth century; what was once viewed as an indistinct space relevant only for its former importance as the setting of the Judeo-Christian Bible and its usefulness as a metaphor came to be seen as a modern geographical entity that mattered deeply to Americans as Americans. "Palestine" was a general regional designation used by Americans and Europeans in the nineteenth century, although the name had little geopolitical significance in the region. Drawn from the Greek "Philistia," which identified the land occupied by the Philistines, later called "Palæstina" by the Romans, the name Palestine in the nineteenth century indicated roughly the area now governed by the modern state of Israel. In the nineteenth century, this region was occupied by the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Palestine fell within the Ottoman province of Damascus, but was not an independent province or state. U.S. travelers, writers, and readers often used Palestine and the Holy Land interchangeably, but they also used the term Holy Land more broadly as a synonym for Syria, the region surrounding and including Palestine, which contained Mount Lebanon, Damascus, and other sites mentioned in the Bible, such as the cities of Tyre and Sidon. This greater Holy Land became in the

1820s and 1830s a focus of American geographical efforts. The Holy Land provided not only a language for constructing and consecrating the U.S. nation, but also a new frontier for U.S. exploration. Though Palestine remained an ambiguous region of the Ottoman Empire, the Holy Land was increasingly represented in U.S. geography books as a discrete, independent territory, a place whose physical boundaries had been fixed through Americans' cartographic and literary endeavors.

Ironically, U.S. access to the Holy Land in the nineteenth century was facilitated by a series of events that demonstrated the onset of modernization and reform efforts in the Near East. Since 1516, the Ottoman Empire had occupied and governed Syria. By the nineteenth century, Ottoman power had become diffused in the region, with authority delegated to local governing bodies. Syria was divided into three "vilayets," or provinces: Aleppo, Damascus, and Tripoli.⁴¹ The reigns of Sultan Selim III (1789-1907) and Mahmud II (1808-1839) initiated governmental reforms aimed at reducing corruption and concentrating authority, hastened by a nine-year loss of Palestinian and Syrian territory. In 1831, following a disagreement with Mahmud II, Mohammed Ali, an Albanian-born Ottoman soldier who had installed himself as the pasha, or governor, of Egypt, invaded and conquered Greater Syria. During the ensuing Egyptian occupation, Ali intensified modernization efforts that increased safety for U.S. travelers, both by granting religious tolerance to non-Muslims and by tempering the Bedouin tribes known to rob vulnerable foreigners. Nine years later, the Ottoman Empire

resumed control over Syria, and Abdul Medjid I, the new sultan, continued reform efforts, largely in the interest of international diplomacy. In part courting European interests, the sultan had declared all Ottoman subjects “equal before the law regardless of their religion” in 1839.⁴² Although U.S. travelers and writers would largely see the Holy Land as a stagnant region frozen in time, in reality they encountered a land undergoing great change, a land with an increasing Western presence and under increasing pressures from Western powers.

Literary critics have frequently neglected to perceive the intertwined constructions of the Holy Land and the United States even as they have focused attention on literary representations of the Near East. The notion of the United States’ self-identification as a New Jerusalem or new Zion received much attention in early American Studies, in foundational works such as Perry Miller’s *Errand into the Wilderness*, Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land*, R. W. B. Lewis’s *The American Adam*, and Sacvan Bercovitch’s *American Jeremiad*.⁴³ These influential studies outlined a relationship between national identity, Puritanism, and landscape that explicated and celebrated American “uniqueness.”⁴⁴ The insularity and supremacy inherent in such accounts of national identity as stable, white, masculine, and Christian, obscures the fact that the Holy Land provided a much broader and considerably more flexible reference point in discussions of national belonging from the colonial period through the nineteenth century. Likewise, these critics missed the significance of modern geographical efforts in the Holy Land.

A greater sense of the relationship between geographical representation, national identity, and global politics may be gained from Edward Said's formative work *Orientalism* (1978), though Said and subsequent scholars of Orientalism have largely neglected the impact of religion on national identity and imperialism.⁴⁵ The "Orient" in Said's initial formulation, is a feminized, eroticized space, distinguished from masculine, western-European powers as part of an imperial, colonial project. Although many scholars (including Said) have since chided Said's insufficient attention to gender, local particularities, and U.S. imperialism, they have generally upheld *Orientalism's* articulation of the relationship between geography, ethnocentrism, economics, and political power.⁴⁶ The prevalence of popular religious movements in the nineteenth-century United States—evangelical Protestantism, tract societies, millennialism—and the religious nature of many U.S. efforts in the Near East—missions, biblical geography, and biblical tourism—suggest that the relationship between religious identity and imperialism needs to be more fully examined. Recent scholarly works created within transnational and hemispheric frameworks that focus on U.S. Orientalism specifically—most notably Malini Johar Schueller, Bruce Harvey, Melani McAlister, and Douglas Little—continue to reproduce visions of the Holy Land as a metaphorical space and an object of U.S. imperialism, failing to account for the complex consequences that occur when national metaphor becomes material reality or when a colonial target is perceived as a pre-national homeland.⁴⁷

Other scholars who situate themselves more particularly within the field of U.S.-Holy Land studies have offered nuanced accounts of the relationship between religion, empire, and nation-building but have continued to overlook how Holy Land imagery and encounter informed the very racial concepts upon which U.S. national identity was founded.⁴⁸ Lester Vogel, John Davis, Hilton Obenzinger, Burke O. Long, Tim Marr, and Brian Yothers have examined the cultural products resulting from U.S. obsession with the Holy Land, and yet, these scholars neglect to show how this Holy Land interest was reflected widely in U.S. literary culture, manifested not only in travel narratives, atlases, and scale models, but also in frontier fiction, domestic novels, and Gothic tales.⁴⁹ “Sacred Geographies” fills this gap by demonstrating how American conceptions of racial identity emerged through representations of the Near East. Analyzing the Holy Land as a space both imagined and experienced during the nineteenth century, this study seeks to uncover the Holy Land’s enduring legacy in forming, propagating, and challenging the racial logics embedded in U.S. identity.

A “Moral and Political” Map of the World

“Sacred Geography,” writes Mitchell, “is a description of those parts of the earth that are mentioned in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. It refers more particularly to Palestine or the Holy Land, and may be said to commence with the creation of the world.”⁵⁰ Quite simply, sacred geography is a subset of

the larger geographical discipline concerned primarily with the topography and features of the greater Bible lands. Yet, the phrase “sacred geography” also functions as a synonym for the Holy Land itself. Perhaps the most significant part of Mitchell’s definition, however, is his declaration that sacred geography “may be said to commence with the creation of the world.” This small statement indicates that sacred geography is not merely a particular type of modern geographical study, but is an enduring and fundamental category, a kind of space that exists from the inception of the universe. What Mitchell is implying here is that political divisions and topographical features are not the only distinctions that may be mapped; religion too distinguishes space.

In this study, I use the term “sacred geographies” to indicate a way of conceptualizing space through religious narrative, to draw attention to the way that religion and religious conceptions of space have affected global frameworks. Perhaps the foremost theorist of sacred space, Mircea Eliade, proposed a half-century ago that within the religious individual’s worldview, space is mapped through a distinction between the sacred and the profane. For this religious individual, religion and religious difference primarily shape identification and meaning. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade defines “sacred” space as supernatural space that reveals “absolute reality” to individuals and communities. “Space is not homogeneous” in a sacred geography; “some parts of space are qualitatively different from others.”⁵¹ These qualitative differences, the differences between sacred (extraordinary) and profane (ordinary) spaces, create spatial

meaning and re-center the religious individual's or religious community's worldview. That is, within the framework of sacred geography, religiously-determined borders are primary; they establish the fundamental modes of belonging and identification.

Eliade's notions of sacred space do not necessarily encapsulate the worldviews of nineteenth-century Americans, who lived in a world of fluctuating national and cultural borders, constructed on political, racial, and gendered, as well as religious, grounds, but Eliade's ideas suggest the influence religious narratives may have in shaping spatial perceptions. In *Chosen Peoples*, Anthony D. Smith insists "the very core of traditional religions, their conception of the sacred and their rites of salvation" are "vital for nationalism and the nation."⁵² This assertion is certainly born out in early-national U.S. literary productions, in which the identification of "America" as a new Promised Land becomes a common refrain. As writers attempted to define the uncertain nation's unstable boundaries, they looked to religious narrative as a way to configure national belonging. We can see how national, imperial, and religious spatial frameworks converged in the nineteenth century by examining the "Moral and Political Chart" found within William Woodbridge's *Modern Atlas*, designed to accompany the ubiquitous schoolroom textbook *Rudiments of Geography*. In this map, the globe is partitioned by religion, state of civilization, and manner of government. The map emphasizes cultural borders rather than political boundaries. In the map's key, we find the list of symbols used to identify Christian, Catholic, Protestant,

Greek, “Mahometan,” and Pagan spaces and the list of colors used to distinguish “Savage,” “Barbarous,” “Half-civilized,” and “Civilized” cultures (a spectrum that predictably proceeds from dark to light).⁵³ Here we see the world mapped through religious distinctions, and we also see how those distinctions could enable nationalist and imperial projects. In Woodbridge’s map, Protestant Christianity is transparently associated with civilization and democracy and implicitly linked to whiteness. Non-Christianity, on the other hand, amounts to barbarity, savagery, and racial otherness. Woodbridge’s map illustrates how Americans perceived the United States’ position within a web of religious, cultural, and political forces. Whether or not individual Americans, including the authors profiled in this study, embodied the religious worldview Eliade examined, it is apparent that religious narrative helped shape the way various spaces were viewed and defined in relation to each other.

In this study, I trace the influence of these sacred geographical frameworks from 1819 to 1920, the first century of U.S.-Holy Land encounter. Juxtaposing writings traditionally perceived as national—the frontier romance, the slave narrative, and the domestic novel—with Holy Land-centric writings—the biblical geography, the missionary narrative, and the pilgrimage epic—I draw attention to the interwoven histories of religion and race that underscore the Holy Land’s legacy in U.S. culture. Analyzing a rich Holy Land archive recovered from popular magazines, geography textbooks, and travel narratives, I re-contextualize both lesser-known and long-familiar U.S. literary works, fashioning

a new literary genealogy that connects rather than separates early-national romance and Gothic fiction, antebellum sentiment and U.S. travel literatures. These literary genres, often regarded as components of discrete traditions, may be reconceived within a larger collective tradition that considers the United States' relationship to sacred geography.

The Lay of the Land

The individual chapters that comprise this dissertation reveal the Holy Land's persistence as a literary trope in U.S. literary culture throughout the nineteenth century, operating as a touchstone for writers of frontier fiction, Gothic tales, anti-slavery narratives, and domestic novels. Although the texts analyzed throughout this dissertation represent a wide range of authors and styles, they share a common quality of highlighting the relationship between geography and literature. The texts analyzed in the following pages exhibit a fascination with physical geography, drawing attention to maps, borders, and topography. More than just an interest in landscape, these texts demonstrate a modern geographical literacy. Delany, for example, describes Blake's repeated state border crossings as events in and of themselves, even when Blake merely travels from one slave state to another. Each time Blake traverses a state line, he enumerates the distinctions between the states, a process that seemingly naturalizes these often-arbitrary boundaries. Cummins explains in her preface to *El Furiel's* that she

studied the geography of Syria while writing her Mount Lebanon-set novel. The resulting novel revels in the natural features of Lebanon and the routes of travel and trade that tourists and pilgrims followed in the Near East. In *Following the Equator* (1897), Twain includes maps, scenic photographs, and countless illustrations of natives that resemble the images found in geography textbooks of the period. These literary allusions to geographical forms suggest that the relationship between literary nationalism and geography was deeply entrenched.

This study's first two chapters examine the emergence of Holy Land imagery in early-national literary culture. Examining works by writers of historical frontier fiction, including James Fenimore Cooper, Lydia Maria Child, and Catharine Sedgwick, and the Gothic fiction of Edgar Allan Poe, I demonstrate that during a period that spans the 1820s through the 1840s, U.S. literary culture engages in a project of mapping biblical narrative over U.S. landscapes. Chapter one, "Citizens of the New Jerusalem: Frontier Fictions and the American New Israel," shows how the construction of the American frontier in Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823-41), Child's *Hobomok* (1824), and Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827) was shaped by the concurrent invention of the Holy Land. Placing frontier fiction in the context of biblical geography, a project of mapping the land of the Bible that emerged in the same period in which frontier fiction flourished, I show how U.S. authors superimpose biblical narrative and modern Holy Land geography onto the American frontier. This mapping results not only in the consecration of the United States as a New Holy Land, but also in the

construction of racial otherness through images of religious otherness. As U.S. writers identify indigenous Americans as racial others and as Jews in particular, they justify the expulsion of the “Indian” from the national family. Racial identity, I argue, emerges in U.S. literature through representations of the Holy Land.

The dissertation’s second chapter, “Eschatology and the Arabesque: Poe, Prophecy, and the Topography of Race,” further reveals the Holy Land’s impact on the mapping of race in the United States. In this chapter, I show how Edgar Allan Poe’s fascination with the fulfillment of biblical prophecy in the Holy Land shaped his literary obsession with degeneration, a theme that has been linked to Poe’s investments in racial difference and U.S. slavery. Despite Poe’s troubled relationship to the U.S. literary canon, scholars have demonstrated that Poe was a conscious, if sometimes reluctant, participant in the development of a national U.S. literature, a conclusion confirmed by Poe’s contributions to the Holy Land mania that gripped the United States in the nineteenth century. Analyzing Poe’s fiction, including “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), “Ligeia” (1838), and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) in the context of Poe’s “Review of Stephen’s ‘Arabia Petræa’” (1835) and essay “Palæstine” (1836), I show how biblical prophecies about the Holy Land helped consolidate notions of the United States as a New Israel threatened by the specter of racial otherness. Although Poe was deeply critical of attempts to fashion a distinctly national literature, his writings share with self-consciously national frontier fiction a preoccupation with Near Eastern geography. These first two chapters demonstrate how the creation

of a national literature in the United States was deeply entangled with the modern geographical invention of the Holy Land.

The next two chapters of the dissertation explore the tensions that arise when geographical narratives come into conflict with lived realities. Drawing from the nationalist literary foundation outlined in chapters one and two, I turn to antislavery writings and domestic fiction of the 1850s and 1860s, asking how antebellum authors appropriate Holy Land geography as the nation approaches civil unrest. In "The New (African) American Israel: Holy Land Mania, Martin Delany's *Blake*, and the Black Nationalist Mission," I argue that Martin Delany's U.S. and Cuban-set novel *Blake* (1860-61) invokes the Holy Land in order to critique the underlying racial logic of the nation and to promote an alternative black nationalism. Recognizing how Holy Land images have helped to embed racial hierarchies within the nation, Delany appeals to biblical geography in order to reshape racial nationalism. Placing *Blake* in the context of *Missionary Herald* articles and abolitionist writings of the 1840s and 1850s, I show how Delany fuses the slave narrative and missionary narrative in order to construct Cuba as a *newer* Holy Land that exposes the constructed nature of U.S. national identity. Delany's vision of African American nationalism in Cuba challenges the foundations of the American New Israel that structure not only U.S. racial hierarchies, but also abolitionist and African American claims to national belonging.

“Homes Divided: Domesticity, Distress, and the Islamic Other,” this study’s fourth chapter, examines representations of Christian-Muslim conflict in domestic literature of the 1860s and 1870s, demonstrating that the Holy Land factored centrally in imagining the rupture and reunification of the nation before and after the U.S. Civil War. Many scholars have shown that domestic fiction writers attempted to moderate the sectional debates and racial hostilities of the mid-century United States, but little consideration has been given to the manner in which writers, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, Maria Susanna Cummins, and Sarah Barclay Johnson, script domesticity in the Holy Land and write the Holy Land into the U.S. domestic sphere as they do so. Analyzing travel narratives alongside domestic fiction, I argue that images of the Holy Land enabled writers to assuage anxieties aroused by national discord and to imagine the reunion of a racially and regionally divided nation through the exclusion of racial difference as religious difference.

Having explored the way the Holy Land consolidates, challenges, and reconstructs the place of race in the nation, I turn in my fifth and final chapter to the Holy Land’s function as both an ideological foundation for and an object of western imperialism. “Evangelical Empire: The Sacred Geographies of Mark Twain’s *Following the Equator*” investigates the relationship between the identification of the United States as a New Israel and the global colonizing impulses of the late-century United States. I argue that Twain traces the roots of U.S. imperialism to the Holy Land, showing how imperial aggression is sanctified

by the mapping of biblical narrative over colonial territory (much like it was mapped over the U.S. frontier in the historical frontier romances of the 1820s and 1830s). Reading Twain's transnational travel narrative *Following the Equator* (1897) through the lens of his earlier Holy Land travelogue, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), I demonstrate how sacred geography operates as touchstone in Twain's writings, illuminating the contradictions and failings of the U.S. nation. In *Following the Equator*, Twain displaces the Holy Land, surveying a series of others' sacred spaces, including places in Hawaii, India, and South Africa, which expose the contingency of the United States' chosen status. In an era of increasing westward development and international venture, Twain locates various alternative holy lands as a means of disavowing the American New Israel Empire.

Although recent scholarship has given increasing attention to American Holy Land travel and exploration, "Sacred Geographies" is the first study to uncover the Holy Land's pervasive presence in the development of racial and national identity in the nineteenth-century United States. Previous critical analyses of the Holy Land in U.S. literature, whether decidedly national or pointedly transnational, have perpetrated a "fundamentalism" of sorts; they have viewed the Holy Land as ancillary to rather than constitutive of U.S. national identity. In contrast, this study suggests the full extent to which U.S. national identity and its underpinning racial logic depend upon, are developed through,

and finally construct an enduring perception of their inevitability through recourse to the Holy Land, both real and imagined.

Notes

¹ The exhibit opened May 2, 2008 and closed June 20, 2008. The Spertus Museum, "Imaginary Coordinates,"

http://www.spertus.edu/exhibitions/past/imaginary_coordinates.php (accessed July 28, 2008).

² Patty Gerstenblith, "'Imaginary' Exchange of Ideas at Spertus?" *Chicago Tribune*, June 24, 2008.

³ Manya A. Brachear and Charles Storch, "Controversy Closes Show at Museum," *Chicago Tribune*, June 21, 2008.

⁴ The concept of a map as a visual narrative has been generally accepted in geographic and cartographic studies. See Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography throughout History*, trans. Tom Conley, ed. Edward H. Dahl (1992; translation, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁵ John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 40. This pattern of national self-construction as a Holy Land is not unique to the United States. For a comparative analysis of religious nationalism and the prevalence of new Israel rhetoric, see William R. Hutchison and Harmut Lehmann, eds., *Many Are Chosen: Divine Election and Western Nationalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

⁶ Irving L. Thompson, "Great Seal of the United States," in *Encyclopedia Americana*, XIII (1967), 362. Cited in Cherry, *God's New Israel*, 65.

⁷ Lyman Beecher, "A Plea For the West," in Cherry, *God's New Israel*, 122-130. Beecher delivered this speech in various cities in order to raise funds for the Lane Theological Seminary, of which he became the seminary's first President in 1832. The speech was originally published in 1835.

⁸ Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" in *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 116.

⁹ Quoted in Philip S. Foner, *Mark Twain Social Critic* (New York: International Publishers, 1958), 249.

¹⁰ Moshe Davis, "Biblical Place Names," in *With Eyes toward Zion: Scholars Colloquium on American-Holy Land Studies*, ed. Moshe Davis (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 246-52.

¹¹ Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok*, in *Hobomok and Other Writings on Indians*, ed. Carolyn L. Karcher (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 65. Further references are parenthetically cited *H*.

¹² Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*, ed. Mary Kelley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 87. Further references are to this edition and are parenthetically cited *HL*.

¹³ Cummins's representation of Abdoul in *El Fureid's* provides an opportunity to take up Amy Kaplan's suggestion that American Studies needs "to go beyond simply exposing the racism of empire and examine the dynamics by which Arabs and the religion of Islam are becoming racialized through the interplay of templates of U.S. racial codes and colonial Orientalism." "Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, October 17, 2003," *American Quarterly* 56, no.1 (March 2004): 5.

¹⁴ Herman Melville, *White Jacket, Or, The World in a Man-of-War* (1850; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 153.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, "Introduction: Essays Beyond the Nation," in *Hemispheric American Studies*, ed. Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 3.

¹⁷ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: H. Holt, 1920); See also Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1967), and Douglas R. McManis, *Colonial New England: Historical Geography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

¹⁸ Wai Chee Dimock, "Deep Time," *American Literary History* 13, no.4 (2001): 755.

¹⁹ For a few representative studies see, Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995).

²⁰ Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 6; Susan Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Bruce Harvey, *American Geographics: U.S. National Narratives and the Representation of the Non-European World, 1830-1865* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001).

²¹ Brückner notes that the term "geography" is derived from the Greek word meaning "to record, draw, and write the earth." *Geographic Revolution*, 6.

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

²³ Some influential and recent studies that draw attention to the impact of transnational encounter and global imperialism on literary culture and nation formation include Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds. *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); John Carlos Rowe, ed. *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Paul Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Ralph Bauer, *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn, eds. *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). Recent special issues of journals have announced this transnational and hemispheric direction in the fields of literary and

historical studies; see for example Djelal Kadir, ed., "America, the Idea, the Literature," special issue, *PMLA* 118, no.1 (2003); Sandhya Shukla and Heidi Tinsman, eds., "Our Americas: Political and Cultural Imaginings," special issue, *Radical History Review* 89 (2004); and Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, eds., "Hemispheric American Literary History," special issue of *American Literary History*, 18, no. 3 (Fall 2006).

²⁴ For a sample of studies that center on New Orleans, Cuba, Jamestown, the Barbary Coast Wars, the Haitian Revolution, and the U.S.-Mexican War respectively, see Kirsten Silva Gruesz, "Delta Desteraddos: Antebellum New Orleans and New World Print Culture," in *Look Away!* 52-79; Rodrigo Lazo, *Writing to Cuba: Fillibustering and Cuban Exile in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Anna Brickhouse, "Hemispheric Jamestown" in *Hemispheric American Studies*, 18-35; Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "Slaves in Algiers: Race, Republican Genealogies, and the Global Stage," *American Literary History* 16, no.3 (2004): 407-436; Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); and Rosemary King, *Border Confluences: Borderland Narratives from the Mexican War to the Present* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004).

²⁵ Levander and Levine, introduction to *Hemispheric American Studies*, 5.

²⁶ Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "Slaves in Algiers: Race, Republican Genealogies, and the Global Stage," *American Literary History* 16, no.3 (2004): 408.

²⁷ Levander and Levine, introduction to *Hemispheric American Studies*, 3.

²⁸ See Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 63.

³⁰ "Objects of the Missions to the Oriental Churches, and the Means of Prosecuting Them," (1839) in *The Missionary Herald: Reports from Ottoman Syria, 1819-1870*, ed. Kamal Salibi and Yusef K. Khoury (Amman, Jordan: Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies, 1995), 3: 161; The biblical phrase is extracted from the famed Sermon on the Mount: "a city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden." Matthew 5:14 (NRSV).

³¹ John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petræa, and the Holy Land* (1837; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970). Stephens had been studying law, but became a professional adventurer and author following the success of

Arabia Petræa. His travels in Latin America and his exploration of Mayan ruins are credited with initiating Western archaeological efforts in Central America.

³² Edward Robinson, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petræa* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1841).

³³ Robert E. Rook, *The 150th Anniversary of the United States Expedition to Explore the Dead Sea and the River Jordan* (Amman, Jordan: American Center of Oriental Research, 1998), 9; William F. Lynch, *Narrative of the United States' Expedition to the River Jordan and the Dead Sea* (1849; Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850).

³⁴ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad, Or, The New Pilgrim's Progress*, 2 vols. (1869; reprint, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1904).

³⁵ Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), xii.

³⁶ See John Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Burke O. Long, *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps, Models, and Fantasy Travels* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Brian Yothers, *The Romance of the Holy Land in American Travel Writing, 1790-1876* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Press, 2007). For information on U.S. interests and involvement in the Near East in the nineteenth-century, see also David Finnie, *Pioneers East: The Early American Experience in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); James A. Field, *America and the Mediterranean World, 1776-1882* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969); Lester Vogel, *To See a Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Moshe Davis, *America and the Holy Land: With Eyes toward Zion-IV* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1995); and Bryan F. Le Beau and Menachem Mor, eds. *Pilgrims and Travelers to the Holy Land* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 1996).

³⁷ Alphonse de Lamartine's travel account was particularly popular after it was translated into English in 1835. *Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*. 3 volumes (London: Bentley, 1835); Jedidiah Morse's *American Geography* offered glimpses at the globe, and his *American Universal Geography* presented a more extensive view of America's position within the

world. *The American Geography; or, A View of the Present Situation of the United States of America* (Elizabeth Town, NJ: Shepard Kollock, 1789); *The American Universal Geography, or, A View of the Present State of all the Empires, Kingdoms, States, and Republics in the Known World, and of the United States of America in Particular* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793).

³⁸ Bayard Taylor, *The Lands of the Saracen; or, Pictures of Palestine, Asia Minor, Sicily, and Spain* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1855); William C. Prime, *Tent Life in the Holy Land* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1857); David F. Dorr, *A Colored Man Round the World* (1858; reprint, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); James Turner Barclay, *The City of the Great King: or, Jerusalem, As It Was, As It Is, and As It Is To Be* (Philadelphia: J. Challen, 1858); Sarah Barclay Johnson, *Hadji in Syria* (Philadelphia: J. Challen, 1858); William M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book; or, Biblical Illustrations Drawn from the Manners and Customs, the Scenes and Scenery of the Holy Land*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1859); Caroline Paine, *Tent and Harem: Notes of an Oriental Trip* (New York: D. Appleton, 1859); Elizabeth W. Champney, *Three Vassar Girls in the Holy Land* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1892).

³⁹ Samuel Augustus Mitchell, *Mitchell's Ancient Geography, Designed for Academies, Schools, and Families: A System of Classical and Sacred Geography* (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait and Co., 1852), 5.

⁴⁰ Jedidiah Morse and Sidney E. Morse, *A New System of Ancient Geography, Ancient and Modern*, 25th ed. (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1826); John Lothian, *Bible Atlas* (Hartford, CN: Newton Case, 1832); Sidney E. Morse, *The Cerographic Bible Atlas* (New York: Sidney E. Morse and Co., 1859); J.L. Hurlbut (Jesse Lyman), *Manual of Biblical Geography* (Chicago: Rand, McNally and Company, 1884).

⁴¹ Philip K. Hitti, *History of Syria* (New York: MacMillan, 1951), 664.

⁴² Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3.

⁴³ Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950); R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Sacvan Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of

Wisconsin Press, 1978). Other significant works that detail this relationship include Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: the Evangelical United Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and Clifton Jackson Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: the First Half Century of The American Board of Foreign Missions, 1810-1860* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

⁴⁴ Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, ix.

⁴⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁴⁶ See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity, and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Malini Johar Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); John Carlos Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Estuko Taketani, *U.S. Women Writers and the Discourses of Colonialism, 1825-1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Mohammed Bamyeh, ed., *Palestine America* spec. issue of *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102: 4 (Fall 2003); and Christopher Mark McBride, *The Colonizer Abroad: American Writers on Foreign Soil, 1846-1912* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁴⁷ See Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms*; Harvey, *American Geographics*; Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Little, *American Orientalism*.

It should be noted that interesting studies on British representations of the Near East have been published recently that effectively complicate the traditional conception of Orientalism. Eitan Bar-Yosef in *The Holy Land in English Culture* eloquently asserts, "Britain's imperial ethos was embedded in the Protestant vocabulary of 'Chosen People' and 'Promised Land.'" Bar-Yosef argues, "when the so-called Orientalist drive to the Levant was super-imposed on the long-standing religious impulse toward the same geographical terrain—as was the case with British interests in the Holy Land—the

discourse that emerged could be much more ambiguous than postcolonial criticism has hitherto acknowledged.” *The Holy Land in English Culture, 1799-1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2005), 196, 4. Similarly, in *Victorian Narrative Technologies in the Middle East*, Cara Murphy focuses on representations of the Suez Canal in British culture, showing how these representations illuminate “the way that narratives worked as one of the technologies that made imperial projects possible.” *Victorian Narrative Technologies in the Middle East* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 5.

⁴⁸ Two notable exceptions to this trend include Melani McAlister’s *Epic Encounter* and Scott Trafton’s *Egypt Land*. Both McAlister and Trafton examine the greater biblical lands as privileged sites upon which national anxieties, particularly those surrounding issues of race, are projected. McAlister asserts that U.S. representations of Middle East “have been consistently obsessed with the problem of domestic diversity.” Biblical film epics, for instance, acknowledge inequalities of race, class, and sex in the United States, seeking to resist or assuage the tensions that arise from these inequalities. Trafton presents a similar argument, asserting that Egypt has served as a “multivaried sign” in discourses of racial science, nationalism, and imperialism in the United States. In these analyses, the difference between Holy Land Mania and Egyptomania is essentially one of locality. *Epic Encounters*, 11; *Egypt Land: Race and Nineteenth-Century American Egyptomania, 1800-1900*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 5.

⁴⁹ Contemporary scholarship on U.S. cultural productions of the Near East owes a great debt to the America-Holy Land project initiated by Moshe Davis, Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, Robert Handy, and others in the early 1970s. Through their efforts, hundreds of materials were recovered and catalogued, books were re-issued in print, and many scholarly texts were generated. While their contributions are immeasurable, many of their theoretical assumptions now visible must be considered problematic. In executing a joint U.S.-Israel project, this collection of Jewish and Christian theologians and historians presumed not only that the relationship between the U.S. and Israel was exceptional, but also that Zionism was righteous. As Obenzinger explains, their work generally viewed “the nineteenth-century history of the region as Israeli prehistory, the proper study of which tends to validate the Western ‘rediscovery’ of Palestine and the various pre-Zionist, Christian notions of ‘Jewish restoration’ in the historical inevitability of the founding of the Jewish state.” *American Palestine*, 7.

⁵⁰ Mitchell, *Mitchell's Ancient Geography*, 147.

⁵¹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego: Harcourt, 1959), 21, 22; Since the publication of *The Sacred and the Profane*, many scholars have critiqued and revised Eliade's theories. Eliade's most significant critic, Jonathan Z. Smith, has argued that the distinction between "sacred and "profane" is not essential but rather constructed; the relation between the terms as signifiers matters more than their referents. See *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1978) and *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987.)

⁵² Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), 15.

⁵³ William C. Woodbridge, "Moral and Political Chart," in *Modern Atlas: Physical, Political and Statistical* (1823; reprint; Hartford, CN: Belknap and Hammersley, 1843), plate 2.

CHAPTER ONE

“Citizens of the New Jerusalem”:**Frontier Fictions and the American New Israel**

In the opening paragraphs of *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), James Fenimore Cooper describes one “holy lake” to his readers:

[Its] waters were so limpid as to have been exclusively selected by the Jesuit missionaries to perform the typical purification of baptism, and to obtain for it the title of lake “du Saint sacrement.” The less zealous English thought they conferred a sufficient honor on its unsullied fountains, when they bestowed the name of their reigning prince, the second of the house of Hanover. The two united to rob the untutored possessors of its wooded scenery of their native right to perpetuate its original appellation of “Horican.”¹

Poised at the intersection of English and French colonial conflict in the mid-eighteenth century, the ironically placid “holy lake” is embedded in a territory disputed by French, English and native inhabitants of the Americas. Discrepancy over the lake’s name underscores these contests of possession. The French “du

Saint Sacrement,” English “George,” and native “Horican,” represent religious, political, and indigenous claims respectively, claims the novel reveals to be complexly tangled. Cooper curiously eschews these colonial and indigenous appellations, calling the body of the water simply the “holy lake.” By the novel’s conclusion, the lake provides the setting for the novel’s violent climax, the brutal Fort William Henry massacre. Its shore littered with English, French, and Native American bodies, the “holy lake” becomes a “bloody arena” (*LM*, 3). Cooper, by supplanting the names earlier assigned by French, English, and indigenous Americans with the “holy lake,” asserts the existence of an American national culture that is both distinct from colonial and indigenous cultures and the product of their encounter. More importantly, Cooper’s act of renaming consecrates American landscape, embracing a notion of American space as sacred that was commonplace in the colonial and early-national periods. Through this process, Cooper tacitly sanctifies a history of dispossession and violent contest in North America. In this simple act of mapping the American frontier as sacred space, Cooper demonstrates how religious narrative could be used not only to erase indigenous claims to the Americas, but also to conceal the nascent United States’ own imperial foundations.

Cooper’s “holy lake” is both the physical site at which French, English, and Indian clash violently in 1757, and also a figurative site at which ideological investments in the American New Israel emerge in 1826. In the colonial and early-national period, North America (and later the United States) was often

characterized as a New Israel or New Jerusalem, a new Promised Land for a new chosen people. Fusing religion and landscape in the “holy lake,” Cooper reinforces this familiar rhetorical association of the United States with ancient Israel even as he draws attention to the historical contests that underlie such associations. The idea that America is a new Holy Land has a long history.²

Comparisons between America and Israel figured prominently in colonial rhetoric and revolutionary debate. Perhaps the most famous example of American identification with the Holy Land is found in John Winthrop’s sermon “A Modell of Christian Charity,” delivered in 1630 aboard the flagship *Arbella* bound from England to the newly chartered Massachusetts Bay Colony. Winthrop, the colony’s first governor, explained to his fellow colonists that they were entering into a special “Covenant” with God:

. . . the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us as his owne people and will command a blessing upon us in all our wayes, soe that wee shall see much more of his wisdome, power, goodness and truthe than formerly wee have beene acquainted with. Wee shall finde that the God of Israell is among us, when tenn of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when hee shall make us a prayse and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantacions: the lord make it like that of New England: for wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us.³

The colonial covenant Winthrop describes, which came to be known as the “errand into the wilderness,” encouraged the English colonists to view their migration as a symbolic reenactment of the biblical Israelites’ escape from bondage in Egypt.

In the eighteenth century, such comparisons between America and Israel continued to structure community building and to set the terms for postcolonial independence. In 1776, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson each individually proposed that the new national seal should depict an image of Israel’s exodus. Franklin advocated an illustration of “Moses lifting his hand and the Red Sea dividing, with Pharaoh in his chariot being overwhelmed by the waters.” Jefferson preferred “a representation of the children of Israel in the wilderness, led by a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night.”⁴ Though neither founding father shared Winthrop’s Calvinist religious perspective, each relied upon the same biblical narrative Winthrop had earlier employed as they sought to define the new nation. Seven years later, Ezra Stiles, the President of Yale University, echoed such sentiments when he called the United States “God’s American Israel” in a sermon celebrating a recent election.⁵

Although this history has been well-documented by American Studies scholars, little research has been completed on the ongoing significance of the Puritan notion of the New American Israel as the nation comes into focus in the years following the Revolution. Images of the United States as a new Holy Land

have a particularly noticeable presence in the historical frontier romance, a genre that developed as part of a conscious effort to cultivate a national literature and culture in the United States. Hardly unique among the images found in popular early-national fiction, the “holy lake” of *The Last of the Mohicans* relies on representations of sacred space to secure new conceptions of national belonging. Similar references to American sacred geography populate Lydia Maria Child’s *Hobomok* (1824) and Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* (1827), both set in seventeenth-century Puritan Massachusetts, as well as Cooper’s other Leatherstocking Tales: *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841). As these authors attempted, in Carolyn Karcher’s words, to “forge a nationalist consciousness and cultural identity” through the creation of a national literature and to write themselves into U.S. history as “American Scotts,” they display a general fascination with the Holy Land, packing their frontier romances with biblical names and narratives.⁶ Child puts forth exuberant descriptions of colonial America as God’s “holy temple” (*H*, 5). Sedgwick’s characters describe seventeenth-century Massachusetts as a “promised land” (*HL*, 73). And Cooper’s protagonist Natty Bumppo declares that the North American wilderness bears “the divine hand” of the “creator.”⁷ Karcher has claimed that as writers of frontier fiction sought to fashion national identity by distinguishing the United States from England, they were also faced with the task of justifying “the complete obliteration” of Native American culture.⁸ In frontier fiction, early-national writers were working to

reconcile national ideals, such as freedom and equality, with the exclusion of Native Americans, African Americans, and white women from the body politic.⁹ This chapter investigates why during a period of much anxious questioning about what united the United States and distinguished Americans from the English, Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick define Americans as “citizens of the New Jerusalem” (*H*, 65). Their frontier fiction curiously naturalizes the borders and boundaries of the nation through representations of the Holy Land.

These early nineteenth-century Holy Land representations, in contrast to colonial images of America as the new Promised Land, register an increasing investment in the material, rather than metaphorical, Holy Land. In the early-nineteenth century, Americans encountered the “real” Holy Land—the land known as Palestine—for the first time, and this encounter deeply affected perceptions of the nation. For Winthrop, the Holy Land is a religious allegory describing some future state of religious perfection and a synonym for the region of the Near East that provided the ancient setting for the Bible. For Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick, the Holy Land is a modern geographical entity. During the same period in which these early-national writers were working toward developing a national identity, U.S. theologians and geographers were re-conceptualizing the Holy Land as a place, a map-able territory.¹⁰ Beginning in 1819 with the disembarkation of the first U.S. travelers in Palestine, the missionaries Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons, Americans engaged in a project of surveying, examining, and representing the Holy Land. The resulting travel narratives, biblical geographies,

illustrations, and atlases reveal how American attitudes towards the Holy Land were changing. In the late eighteenth century, Jedidiah Morse, the first American geographer, had informed readers that the contemporary Holy Land was “only famous for what it ha[d] been” and interesting only for its historical importance.¹¹ At the turn of the century, Palestine was commonly considered a barbaric place that offered nothing but ruins to the traveler. By the 1820s, perceptions of the Holy Land were shifting, and Americans were beginning to view the Holy Land as a rich repository of religious history, a place that affirmed Christian teachings and provided a ground for conceptualizing a national culture.

In this chapter, I examine the ways that early-national U.S. literary culture perpetuates, develops, and circulates comparisons between the United States and the Holy Land in order to stabilize a particular kind of national identity, an identity that depends upon racial categories. The historical frontier fiction of the 1820s and 1830s has long been perceived as a vital site for the construction of race in U.S. culture, and as I will demonstrate, the construction of racial identity in such writings is in effect dependent upon the construction of the American frontier as a new Holy Land. In mapping the frontier as Holy Land, early national writers of historical fiction not only superimpose biblical narrative onto the American landscape, but also draw upon contemporary geographical representations of the Holy Land in creating a particular vision of the colonial period. The American New Israel that Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick imagine resembles not only the land of the Bible, but also the contemporary Palestine that

U.S. theologians and geographers were making increasingly accessible to American readers through travel narratives and geographies. The vision frontier fiction writers produce—a vision of colonial history as typological narrative and of American landscape as sacred geography—helps to shore up a national past that dispels and narrates the expulsion of racial others from the national family.

In order to see how Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick identify and exclude racial others from national belonging using religious spatial narratives, it is vital to examine the project of mapping the Holy Land, or biblical geography, that developed in the early decades of the nineteenth-century. As Americans traveled to the Holy Land to survey the land and its features, they superimposed biblical narrative over the landscape they encountered. Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick similarly overlay colonial American landscape with biblical narratives and names, a project that results in a conflation of religious and racial otherness. For instance, in *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick locates “Jerusalem” in seventeenth-century Massachusetts (*HL*, 87). Here, however, Jerusalem is a former Pequot settlement, from which the original inhabitants have been exiled. Within this Jerusalem, Sedgwick identifies one particular site as the Indian “holy of holies,” a sacrificial rock where the tribe returns to execute its enemies. As Sedgwick maps these sacred Jewish spaces onto the American frontier and implicitly aligns Indians with Jews, she articulates the intercultural encounter between indigenous Americans and the manifestly Protestant Christian British colonists as an encounter with religious difference. Religious otherness in this scene becomes

the language through which Sedgwick expresses racial difference. By identifying Indians as religious others, the non-chosen, Sedgwick communicates their incompatibility from the nation. Sedgwick's use of religious spatial narrative here shows how the racial logic embedded in U.S. national identity emerged, in part, through representations of the Holy Land. Examining the development of biblical geography and the subsequent invention of the Holy Land in the 1820s-1840s illuminates the process by which early-national U.S. authors sought to map the new nation as sacred space.

Biblical Geography and the Invention of the Holy Land

When Cooper published his initial *Leatherstocking* novel *The Pioneers* in 1823, the first U.S. travelers had already arrived in Palestine, their small presence signaling the Holy Land's measurable transformation from allegorical emblem to crucial terrain in the construction of American identity. Levi Parsons and Pliny Fisk, the first U.S. missionaries to the Holy Land and the first U.S. citizens to publish Holy Land memoirs, embarked for the Near East in 1819. Sent into the field by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), Parsons and Fisk sought to establish a station from which to begin the serious work of converting Jews and others to Protestant Christianity. A diversity of forces were at work in bringing Fisk and Parsons to the Holy Land—widespread religious fervor, anxious millennialist expectation, and a growing conviction

among New England theologians (and increasingly the greater U.S. population) that the Holy Land mattered as a material territory, and that, as Americans, they had a unique claim on Palestine. In the nineteenth century, Holy Land territory offered a new frontier for the unfolding and extension of U.S. destiny. At the same time the United States expanded west, it also went east, exploring and surveying the lands associated with the Judeo-Christian Bible.

The project that began in the 1820s and became known as biblical geography, a process of reconstructing Near Eastern territory as the Holy Land through historical analysis, geographical survey, and the excavation of biblical sites, presumed that Palestine was “one vast tablet whereupon God’s messages to men have been drawn, and graven deep in living characters.”¹² Biblical geography, as it was formed through the travels and writings of missionaries, geographers and theologians, contended that the “Land and the Book” together comprised “the ENTIRE and ALL-PERFECT TEXT.”¹³ This simultaneous summary and mission statement, made by the missionary William M. Thomson in 1859, describes quite explicitly the perceived stakes of the project pursued by the United States’ first geographers and writers of the Holy Land. The landscape of Palestine was starting to be viewed as a kind of scriptural testament. Many Protestant Christians believed it could somehow supplement and affirm the Bible’s teachings. Palestine was reconceived of as a text that needed to be read alongside the Bible.

Between 1819 and 1841 the Holy Land was effectually constructed and consecrated through the efforts of U.S. spiritual and secular travelers—“explorer-prophet[s],” who included not only Fisk, Parsons, and Stephens, but also, and perhaps most significantly, Edward Robinson, the theologian whose 1841 book *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petræa* proved to be the definitive work of biblical geography published in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ In a process of stops and starts, often dependent on changing Near-Eastern conditions and political policies, these “pioneers east,” to use David Finnie’s expression, charted their way through a land they perceived as uncharted and ancient.¹⁵ By 1841, when Cooper published his final Leatherstocking novel, biblical geography had become an established pursuit and a recognizable genre. At least one hundred biblical sites had been rediscovered and renamed, enabling eager Americans at home and abroad access to ancient Israel in the region that now formed Ottoman-governed Syria. Because U.S. theologians and travelers had produced the most authoritative and substantial works in the field, biblical geography itself was considered a distinctly U.S. science, an “honor” it coincidentally shared with the emerging “American school” of ethnology.¹⁶

Biblical geography, a project that sought to map the Holy Land, attempted to remake the Near East, a region most Americans believed had fallen into degradation and ruin, into a place that allowed U.S. travelers and writers to experience the land of the Bible and to “reimagine—and even to reenact—religio-national myths.”¹⁷ The performance of biblical geography entailed the mapping

and surveying of lands and peoples associated with the Bible. Biblical geographers departed from standard geographical practices in that they did not provide accounts of the land, its natural features, and its political divisions, but rather superimposed the Bible's account of the land, its natural features, and its political divisions onto Palestine. As Bruce Harvey writes, biblical geography was an attempt to harmonize "the Word, the world of the Holy Land, and words about the latter."¹⁸ Biblical geographers essentially overlaid Near Eastern territory with biblical narrative, making the Holy Land, as Obenzinger claims, an "over-textualized landscape."¹⁹

In 1838, the U.S. theologian Edward Robinson joined one of his former Andover students, Eli Smith, a missionary with the ABCFM, on a tour that would produce the standard model for modern biblical geography, *Biblical Researches*. Traveling from Cairo to Beirut, the two men combined their respective expertise—Robinson's extensive knowledge of Hebrew and religious literature spanning the ancient and modern periods and Smith's fluency in Arabic and familiarity with Syria—to uncover the current locations of over 100 biblical places and expose the erroneous nature of many long-visited sites and traditions. The deeply methodical and detailed *Biblical Researches* that resulted from their efforts proved hugely popular. The original edition comprised three volumes and included illustrations and maps drawn from Robinson's calculations and findings. Subsequent editions were published in 1856 and 1874. A supplement was added in 1842, and in 1856, a sequel of sorts was published, titled *Later Biblical*

Researches in Palestine, and in the Adjacent Regions, as was a separate collection of maps drawn by Heinrich Kiepert, which originally appeared in *Biblical Researches*, now titled *Four Maps to Accompany the Biblical Researches in Palestine of E. Robinson and E. Smith*.¹ Throughout the nineteenth century, *Biblical Researches* remained a respected text and made Edward Robinson the authority on sacred space in the nineteenth-century Holy Land.

The result of these efforts was a biblical geography that that could be mapped onto Palestine apart from and oblivious to the modern political realities of the Near East. As U.S. travelers and theologians “rediscovered” biblical sites and cities, ancient Hebrew place names replaced Arabic and European names in western atlases and guidebooks. This process of rediscovering and renaming gave Americans at home and abroad access to ancient Israel in modern Palestine. American readers could encounter the biblical Holy Land from the comfort of their own parlors, and U.S. travelers to the region could envision themselves transported to the ancient world of the Bible. Neil Asher Silberman writes, “Biblical cities, once identified, could now be physically resurrected and take their places as shrines in a new sacred geography.”²⁰ And in fact, when the British government assumed control of Palestine in the early twentieth century, biblical Hebrew names officially replaced the Arabic and Turkish names that had been used in the region for centuries.²¹ The map of the Holy Land that U.S. biblical geographers created and superimposed over the region eventually was legally imposed on Palestine.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the construction of the Holy Land through biblical geography is to examine some representative maps of the region. A fairly typical map of Asia found in Sidney E. Morse's *A New Universal Atlas of the World on an Improved Plan*, which was published in 1825, reveals how the Near East was viewed during the early-national period.²² A second map, depicting the Holy Land, which was published in Ralph S. Tarr and Frank M. McMurry's 1902 atlas of *Asia and Africa* shows how the project of biblical geography had come to shape the way Americans perceived the Near East.²³ In the 1825 map, Syria is labeled as a province of Turkey, also known as the Ottoman Empire. Within Syria, a few sites of biblical importance are labeled, including Mt. Sinai, the Dead Sea, Jerusalem, and Damascus. In the 1902 map, the level of detail is considerably greater, and, significantly, the Holy Land has been removed from its Asian context. Examining this 1902 map of the Holy Land, there is no way to know where the Holy Land is located in the world. Only the Mediterranean Sea informs the reader's knowledge of the Holy Land's location. The 1902 map also contains a number of significant features absent in the 1825 map. First, the map employs Hebrew names. The port city known as Jaffa in the nineteenth century is labeled as "Joppa," its biblical name. Second, the map divides the Holy Land into provinces—such as Galilee, Samaria, and Judea—that correspond to the first century, not to the nineteenth century. Curiously, the map's title and key provide no temporal indicators that would suggest this map is a historical map or biblical map. Instead, the map appears to represent a modern

geographical entity. And indeed, the map depicts railroad routes, a symbol of modern technology that clearly indicates that the map represents the modern Holy Land. Third, the map provides northern, southern and eastern borders for the Holy Land, complete with longitude and latitude coordinates. These borders, however official they appear, do not correspond to any political reality in the region. The area depicted in the map is simply part of Syria. Comparing these two maps, we see how biblical geography transformed Syria into the Holy Land. By mapping biblical narrative over the region, biblical geographers, in effect, created a modern Holy Land. These maps naturalize the borders of the Holy Land. They imply that the Near East has remained unchanged since the first century, the period of Christ. Ultimately, such maps invite viewers to perceive Palestine specifically and the Near East generally as spaces that affirm the Bible.

It is worth noting that the Holy Land U.S. missionaries, travelers, and biblical geographers encountered as they mapped biblical narrative over Palestine was perceived as a space of decay and desolation. Travelers to the region frequently described Palestine as a space of decline and ruin, a space that both affirmed biblical prophecies (of Israel's destruction) and called for U.S. intervention. The supposedly desolate landscape of Palestine equally disappointed and thrilled travelers, as it stood as a testament to the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and an invitation for Americans as a new chosen people to restore the Holy Land. Before departing for his missionary work in 1819, Parsons spoke of Jerusalem as a place "plundered," "demolished," in a state of "perpetual

desolation.”²⁴ His partner Fisk claimed it probable that any Christian traveler would “be affected even to tears” upon seeing the “venerable scenery” of the Holy Land ruined, depressed, and destroyed, made to bear witness to the current Muslim “reign of error.”²⁵ Parson’s and Fisk’s depictions of Palestine’s darkness and primitiveness accomplish two significant feats: first, they verify biblical narrative, visually confronting travelers and readers with the “accomplishment of prophecy”—the destruction of the Holy Land; second, they indicate that Palestine provides a special kind of access for U.S. travelers and readers, a temporal proximity to religiously meaningful moments.²⁶ Robinson, in *Biblical Researches*, claims he and Smith are walking in the footsteps of “Abraham and Jacob, of Samuel and Saul, of Jonathan and David and Solomon,” tracing their “historic incidents and deeds,” by implication becoming participants in a religious history.²⁷ Touring the outlying country around Jerusalem, Robinson writes, “It was like communing with these holy men themselves, to visit the places where their feet had trod, and where many of them had held converse with the Most High.”²⁸ Even though the Holy Land appeared to many to be in a state of ruin, its decay illuminated Scripture and granted immediacy to biblical narrative.

Cooper even gives voice to the commonplace perception of the Holy Land’s degeneration in *The Prairie*. The frontiersman Natty Bumppo recounts what he has heard about the Holy Land to the naturalist Dr. Battius; “I remember to have heard it, then and there said that the blessed Land was once fertile as the bottoms of the Mississippi, and groaning with its stores of grain and fruits; but

that the judgement [sic] has since fallen upon it, and that it is now more remarkable for its barrenness than any qualities to boast of" (*PR*, 239). Bumpgo goes on to assert that the Mississippi, the Rocky mountains, and the American forests provide stronger testaments to God's power and presence than do the ancient biblical lands. Disagreeing with Bumpgo's easy dismissal of the Near East, Battius implores, "Look into the plains of Egypt and Araby, their sandy deserts teem with the monuments of their antiquity; and then we have also recorded documents of their glory, doubling the proofs of their former greatness, now that they lie stripped of their fertility" (*PR*, 238). Though the men differ in their assessments of the Near East, they both embrace a commonplace perception of the Holy Land's degeneration. Bumpgo and Battius, as they debate the relative merits of North American and Near Eastern landscapes, not only reveal Cooper's partiality for the American wilderness, but also implicitly communicate the idea that the United States is the Holy Land's obvious inheritor.

This deteriorated modern Holy Land was likewise marked by sectarian tension and interfaith hostility, and these circumstances too seemed to encourage U.S. involvement. In his 1819 sermon, Fisk lists "Mahommedans, and Jews; and Roman Catholic, Greek, Armenian and Syrian Christians" as the principle "classes" inhabiting the Holy Land and provides brief summaries for each.²⁹ In his 1828 memoir, Fisk classifies, counts, and catalogues the individuals he meets in the "mixed multitude" as he travels "through the 'great and terrible wilderness'" of the Holy Land.³⁰ *Biblical Researches* similarly

includes an appendix that purports to define and characterize every religious community currently living in the Holy Land. Americans perceived religious diversity in modern Palestine and Syria as a considerably complex issue, involving complicated relationships between Jews, Muslims, Christians, and the members of various sects both affiliated and unrelated to the major monotheistic traditions. In *Biblical Researches*, Robinson summarizes, Palestine has been “one of the chief seats of strife and fierce contention,” throughout history, “which were not in all cases appeased without bloodshed.”³¹

For those Americans invigorated by the Second Great Awakening and its characteristic religious fervor the restoration of the Holy Land entailed political overhaul in the Near East, the establishment of Christian superiority in the region, the return of Jews to Palestine, and the eventual conversion of Jews in the Holy Land. Excited at the prospect of ushering in the Second Coming, many Americans participated in missionary and colonization movements. Millennialism, or the belief that the Second Coming was at hand, represented an extreme vision of U.S. national mission in the Holy Land, but the logic that supported such expectation, that the United States was the new Promised Land, was prevalent. U.S. travelers, writers, and readers experienced in the Holy Land what Hilton Obenzinger calls “an exegetical landscape at the mythic core of Anglo-America’s understanding of its own covenantal mission.”³² That is, the Holy Land bolstered Americans’ sense of their own national destiny, their own legacy as the new Holy

Land. In the original Holy Land, U.S. travelers uncovered a new frontier upon which to unfurl U.S. destiny.

Mapping the American New Israel

The frontier, the ever-westward moving “meeting point between savagery and civilization,” that Frederick Jackson Turner famously identified in 1893, has been celebrated as the quintessential American experience and critiqued as a deeply problematic national narrative.³³ Like the concept of nation itself, the frontier is no longer believed to constitute an impermeable boundary, a line, but rather, as Renée Bergland states, an “uncharted and unstable” place, a “region where meanings shift as cultures encounter each other.”³⁴ As the definition of frontier has transformed in an American Studies increasingly aware of transnationality and globalization, the historical frontier romance has been studied as a vital site of national construction through intercultural, and in particular, interracial, encounter. The frontier depicted in early-national historical fiction is a space of confrontation between Europeans and Native Americans through which the “American” is somehow created. In many frontier romances, the “disappearance of the native” is represented “not just as natural but as having already happened.”³⁵ In working to exclude the indigenous American from national belonging, U.S. writers frequently present the Indian as unalterably different from the Anglo American, as incapable of incorporation into the national body.

The exclusion of the indigenous American from national belonging in frontier fiction is accomplished, in part, through representations of the Holy Land. An illustration entitled, "Our Predecessors Viewing the 'Promised Land,'" demonstrates how the frontier as Holy Land becomes a site of racial construction.³⁶ This image appeared as an advertisement for the Ohio Centennial in 1888. The illustration depicts an American frontiersman and his family looking westward. In the middle ground of the picture, we can discern a man on a plow and farther back in the frame we see an industrial complex and railroad. It appears that the "predecessors" of the title are looking not only westward, but also toward a future of progress and prosperity. In the foreground of the picture, in the same plane as the rugged pioneer, his wife, and their child, but yet distinctly separate from the family, sits an indigenous American. This figure sits resigned and defeated, facing eastward or, we might say in this case, backward. The "our" that we read in the advertisement's caption clearly does not include this figure. The advertisement clearly equates Ohio, or more broadly, the United States, with the Holy Land. As the advertisement conveys the sacredness of the U.S. West, it implies that the frontiersman and his family are the new chosen people, the new elect inhabitants of a new Holy Land. The advertisement also shows us, unmistakably, who is not chosen. In this image, the idea of the American New Israel facilitates the expulsion of the Native American from the nation.

As historical frontier romances worked to consolidate national identity, they ironically underscored the same logic that supported biblical geography. While no direct evidence exists that confirms Cooper, Child, or Sedgwick studied travel narratives or geographies of the Near East as they wrote their historical writings, similar patterns appear in their novels and the works of biblical geographers. Nationalist fiction in effect supplied the *Books* to accompany the *Land*, whereas biblical geography attempted to provide access to the *Land* that complimented the *Book*. Geography and literature, “both writings about places and spaces,” Michael Crang argues, are related “processes of signification.”³⁷ The historical and ideological confluence of biblical geography and the historical frontier romance not only corroborates Crang’s claim, but also suggests that religious geographical frameworks helped shape the construction of the nation.

Anxious about their young republic’s national identity and cultural autonomy, early-national writers naturalize the political and cultural borders of the United States through religious narrative.³⁸ Mapping the American frontier as a sacred space, Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick position and define the United States within a web of religious spaces. In *Hobomok*, Child’s rebellious heroine Mary Conant gives voice to such conceptions as she locates the American frontier within a global religious geography. Addressing the evening star, Mary represents the early-national crisis of American identity as a question about religious pluralism:

Fair Planet . . . how various are the scenes thou passest over in thy shining course. The solitary nun, in the recesses of her cloister, looks on thee as I do now; mayhap too, the courtly circle of king Charles are watching the motion of thy silver chariot. The standard of war is fluttering in thy beams, and the busy merchantman breaks thy radiance on the ocean. Thou hast kissed the cross-crowned turrets of the Catholic, and the proud spires of the Episcopalian. Thou hast smiled on distant mosques and temples, and now thou art shedding the same light on the sacrifice heap of the Indian, and the rude dwelling of the Calvinist. And can it be, as my father says, that of all the multitude of people who view they cheering rays, so small a remnant only are pleasing in the sight of God? (*H*, 48)

In this speech, Mary makes a purportedly secular appeal to a planetary body in order to question whether God sanctions inequality. Pining for Charles, the lover she cannot marry because of his religious otherness, Mary expresses an attitude of “religious liberalism” and “democratic egalitarianism,” as Gretchen Murphy explains.³⁹ Mary’s ecumenism, however, underscores the fact that the globe she describes is one in which spaces and communities are religiously constituted. In imagining Mary questioning whether the religious differences between herself and Charles are meaningful, Child is asking, what are the boundaries of the nation? Moreover, the physical geographies Child invokes triangulate a relationship between the terrains of Europe, the Holy Land, and the Americas.

Child moves from the turrets and spires of Europe to the temples and mosques that represent Judaism and Islam in the Holy Land to the sacred spaces of North America, endorsing the notion of a direct relationship or lineage between the Holy Land and the United States, even as she meditates on the exclusion that can be justified by religious distinction. At a moment when the geopolitical borders of the United States are in flux and national character remains undefined, Child, however hesitantly, shows how sacred geographies can be used to naturalize the boundaries of the nation.

As Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick map the frontier, they superimpose biblical narrative and modern Holy Land geography onto historical American landscapes. In *Hobomok*, Mr. Conant refers to the town of "Salem" as God's "tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion" (*H*, 16). The Puritans in *Hobomok* openly proclaim the Massachusetts colony a "second Canaan" (*H*, 7). Similarly, in Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, characters call their Massachusetts home "a promised land" (*HL*, 73). These explicit identifications of the United States with the Holy Land are reinforced by consistent references to England as "Egypt." Other, more specific biblical place names appear as well. In *Hope Leslie*, the Fletcher family names their isolated home "Bethel" (*HL*, 41). Cooper names a floating fortress built by English colonists in *The Deerslayer* the "ark." In *The Prairie*, an American Indian encampment replete with intercultural chaos is called "Babel" (*PR*, 318). In the same novel, Cooper describes the U.S. prairie as "the desert" and represents

his protagonists as wandering Bedouins searching for a "Pharos," a beacon named for an island off the Egyptian coast.⁴⁰

Beyond the transposition of biblical place names onto the U.S. frontier, Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick map biblical narrative onto the U.S. through the reproduction of biblical characters. The members of the Massachusetts colony of *Hope Leslie* define themselves as Israelites, calling themselves "a suffering people in the wilderness" (*HL*, 19). Mr. Fletcher, in fact, takes his self-identification as an Israelite so seriously that he re-performs the errand into the wilderness. Mr. Fletcher "mortified at seeing power . . . perverted to the purposes of oppression and personal aggrandizement" within the colony moves again away from the Egypts that have followed him to Massachusetts (*HL*, 16). Child echoes such sentiments when she calls the English colonists in *Hobomok* the "citizens of the New Jerusalem" (*H*, 65). Child also identifies individual biblical characters on the frontier, dubbing one character a "Rachel" at the moment she receives a marriage proposal (*H*, 27). Cooper similarly includes two biblically named characters in *The Deerslayer*, Judith and (Hetty) Esther Hutter. Like their namesakes, Judith and Esther attempt to save their endangered community respectively through the seduction and persuasion of powerful men.⁴¹ Similarly, in *The Prairie*, Cooper traces the wanderings of the "Ishmaelites of the American deserts" (*PR*, 40). These nomads, who travel across the prairie, familiarize Bumppo with a religious law of vengeance that exemplifies a typical Protestant perception of Judaism. By reproducing biblical names and narratives on the

American landscape, frontier writers designated the United States as a new Holy Land and consecrated “Americans” as a new chosen people.

Yet, frontier novels go beyond biblical narrative in mapping the United States as a new Holy Land; they also superimpose modern Holy Land geography onto the U.S. frontier. Historical frontier romances contain numerous references to the contemporary Near East. In *Hope Leslie*, for example, Hope describes Native American clothing as an “oriental costume” (HL, 266). Elsewhere in the novel, England is aligned with the Ottoman Empire and Islam. The novel’s villain, the Roman Catholic loyalist Sir Philip Gardiner, is compared to a “Mahometan saint” and his mistress is called “a fit Hourī” (HL, 199). Hope’s Aunt Grafton, who maintains an identification with English culture, especially English fashions, is fixated with her friend’s “Turkish sleeves” (HL, 165). Similarly, in *Hobomok*, the colony’s governor compares England’s flag of the Red Cross—the symbol of a united church and state—to “the half-moon of Mahomet,” the Turkish flag (HL, 43). In the governor’s vision, the Massachusetts colony resembles Palestine: a sacred place suffering under the yoke of a tyrannical, occupying power. Such allusions to the modern Holy Land not only reinforce notions of the United States as a new Holy Land, but also implicitly call for Americans as the new chosen people to identify with and invest in modern Palestine.

Recalling descriptions of contemporary Palestine, the American frontier of Cooper’s, Child’s, and Sedgwick’s novels is a space of sectarian tension and interfaith hostility. The Puritans of *Hobomok* direct a great deal of animosity

toward the Episcopalians Charles and Samuel Brown, who seek to establish their own church in the colony. The Puritan colonists claim the English and Anglican loyalties of such characters are analogous to Satanism, Islam, and Roman Catholicism. Interestingly, the Puritans' disagreements over the Episcopalians disclose their own theological chaos. As they debate "numerous controversies," Conant and his fellow Calvinists reveal the ironic lack of consensus that marks their religious community (*H*, 57). Child comically refers to such conversations as "holy and edifying discourse[s]" and describes the colony as a "scene of tumultuous faction, and domineering zeal" (*H*, 12, 7). Critiques of Puritan stodginess, narrow-mindedness, and hypocrisy were common in the antebellum period, but Child's critique is less interested in diagnosing Puritan pathology than it is in representing the difficulties of inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue.

Hobomok's Puritans are not the only community threatened by sectarian squabbling. In *Hope Leslie*, Puritanism is portrayed as a religion of habitual, and perhaps meaningless, dissent. The colony's leadership quarrels over Hope Leslie's propriety instead of contemplating vital theological matters. Similarly, Cooper bookends the Leatherstocking series with portraits of two divisive interfaith communities. Cooper's Williamstown residents in *The Pioneers* bicker intensely about the prospective denomination of the village church under construction, exposing that community's underlying religious tensions. In *The Deerslayer*, another religiously varied community assembles—this time on an ark—to perform a pivotal funeral ritual. On Lake Glimmerglass, Bumppo,

Chigachgook, Harry, Judith, and Hetty bury the murdered anti-patriarch Thomas Hutter at sea, as each worships in a distinctly different manner. The scene remains one of “holy tranquility” only because, as Cooper notes, “no other priest than nature” presides over the “wild and singular” rite (*DS*, 286, 288, 288).

These representations of intra and interfaith conflict not only recall contemporary depictions of the Holy Land, but also speak to contemporary anxieties about sectarianism and religious diversity in the United States. According to Colleen McDannell, the nineteenth century was a period during which Americans were preoccupied with forming an “evangelical ‘Protestant consensus’” that would eradicate sectarian conflict.⁴² Building nonsectarian benevolent associations, such as the American Tract Society, the Sunday School movement, and various maternal societies, U.S. Christians attempted to solve “social and spiritual problems” as a manner of working “toward the perfectibility of the nation.”⁴³ Sectarianism was viewed as a national threat, as the prominent Protestant minister Lyman Beecher makes evident in his well-known address *A Plea for the West*.⁴⁴ In *A Plea for the West*, Beecher endorses a nationalist expansionist mission while he argues that sectarianism remains the most serious obstacle facing development and democratization in the American West.

Early-national visions of colonial America also evoke contemporary descriptions of Palestine as a bleak landscape in need of restoration. For example, the Massachusetts new “Canaan” of *Hobomok*, is described as a “bleak and sterile” place (*H*, 7). *Hobomok*’s seventeenth-century narrator describes the

appearance of this Promised Land as he disembarks after his transatlantic voyage:

I was in a new world, whose almost unlimited extent lay in the darkness of ignorance and desolation. Earth, sea, and air, seemed in a profound slumber,—and not even the dash of the oar broke in upon their silence. A confusion of thoughts came over my mind, till I was lost and bewildered in their immensity. The scene around me owed nothing of its unadorned beauty to the power of man. He had rarely been upon these waves, and the records of his boasted art were not found in these deserts. I viewed myself as a drop in the vast ocean of existence, and shrunk from the contemplation of human nothingness. . . . [M]y philosophy nearly forsook me when I saw our captain point to six miserable hovels, and proclaim that they constituted the whole settlement at Naumkeak. The scene altogether was far worse than my imagination had ever conceived." (*H*, 7)

This vision, in which America appears dark and desolate, recalls contemporary interpretations of a degraded and decayed Holy Land. The image of American "deserts" in particular directs our attention to the perceived bleakness and infertility of seventeenth-century Massachusetts, indicating a land that invites cultivation (as many thought Palestine did). *Hobomok's* new world offers a space in which "piety," and Americanness are encountered at their most "primitive."⁴⁵

Election and the Invention of Race

The process of mapping the U.S. frontier through biblical narrative and Holy Land geography serves not only to consecrate the U.S. nation, but also to condemn and exclude some individuals from national belonging. In *Hobomok*, the tyrannical Puritan Mr. Conant compares Charles and Samuel Brown, the Episcopalians, to the idolatrous Israelites of the Bible who abandon their God after being released from bondage in Egypt. Conant claims the Browns “kneel to Baal,” a declaration that at once articulates his own chosen status and excludes the Browns from membership in the community (*H*, 9). In this instance Egypt becomes a synonym for England. In other instances, “Egyptian” operates as a more general insult that separates some individuals from the American elect. For instance, in *Hope Leslie*, the mysterious native woman Nelema is implicitly identified as Egyptian. Sedgwick writes that as Nelema performs a healing ritual, she waves a wand “making quick and mysterious motions, as if she were writing hieroglyphics on the invisible air” (*HL*, 104). By marking Nelema’s ritual as an impermeable one that resembles Egyptian language, Sedgwick conveys the Massachusetts colony’s sense of antagonism to its indigenous neighbors. Biblical naming, in these cases, provides immediate and unquestioning grounds for exclusion from the community.

In frontier fiction, we do not only see European colonists equated with Israelites and Native Americans with Egyptians. As early national writers map the American frontier as a new Israel, they curiously identify indigenous Americans as religious others. Sedgwick, in *Hope Leslie*, aligns Indians with Jews specifically. Sedgwick describes an Indian village as a native "Jerusalem," writing that "perhaps from the affection its natural beauty inspired," it "remained the residence of the savages long after they had vanished from the surrounding country. Within the memory of the present generation the remnant of the tribe migrated to the west, and even now some of their families make a summer pilgrimage" (HL, 87). In this passage, Sedgwick envisions Jerusalem as the sacred space of the Pequots, from which these indigenous Americans, like the ancient Israelites, have been exiled. Within this native Jerusalem, Sedgwick describes a scene that occurs at a site she calls the Indian "holy of holies," a reference to the space in which the Torah was kept within the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (HL, 91). In this scene, the young protagonist Everell Fletcher is nearly executed by the Pequot chief Mononotto, though the chief's daughter Magawisca rescues him by jumping in front of her father's swinging hatchet, sacrificing her own arm. By likening this setting of violence to the most sacred space in Judaism, Sedgwick reinforces a distinctly Christian notion of the Hebrew God as the cruel, vengeful father. Although it would seem that this association of American Indians with Jews would unite indigenous Americans with the self-identified "Israelite" settlers, it does the opposite. By aligning Indians and Jews,

frontier writers incorporate indigenous America into a Judeo-Christian teleology. The Christian colonists become the new chosen people, the new Israelites, usurping indigenous Americans' chosen status and usurping their rights to the American Promised Land.⁴⁶

Child's and Cooper's frontier narratives provide further examples of how Native America was positioned within a Judeo-Christian spatial framework. Child, even as she attempts to write from an indigenous perspective, insists upon Anglo American inheritance of the American Promised Land. "As for the poor, unlettered Indians," Child explains, "it exceeded their comprehension how buffaloes, as they termed them, could be led about by the horns, and be compelled to stand or move at the command of men; and they could arrive at no other conclusion than that the English were the favorite children of the Great Spirit" (*H*, 29). Here Child suggests, rather radically, that seventeenth-century colonists and Native Americans worship the same God, who she refers to by the allegedly Native American term "Great Spirit." Yet, Child asserts that the Anglo-American colonists are the favorite children of this God; they are the new chosen people. In *The Deerslayer*, Cooper implicitly aligns indigenous America with Judaism. Cooper writes of the American wilderness, "the woods themselves were as silent, and seemingly as deserted, as the day they came fresh from the hands of their great Creator" (*DS*, 91). In this scene, Bumppo watches "a flood of glorious light" descend on Glimmerglass Lake, which he calls a "yet unchristened sheet of water" (*DS*, 93). Cooper's description of the lake as "unchristened"

suggests an unfulfilled religious narrative, a landscape awaiting Christian conversion. By implication, Cooper aligns uncultivated native America with Judaism, a state most nineteenth-century Christians understood as an incomplete Christianity. Though critics have often focused on Bumppo's "Deistic" proclivities, it is clear Cooper implicitly maps the United States as a new, decidedly Christian, Holy Land.

As frontier fiction characterizes Native Americans as religious others, it communicates their incompatibility with a tacitly Protestant-Christian nation. Indigenous Americans are not part of the elect, or chosen, so they cannot be part of the American New Israel. Moreover, in frontier fiction, religious difference becomes the basis for representing racial difference. That is, religious otherness comes to represent the inherent and essential difference between "American" and Indian.

For instance, in Cooper's novel *The Deerslayer*, when Hetty Hutter quotes biblical scripture to the Iroquois chief Rivenoak, she is answered with shouting and violence. The novel represents the Iroquois' aggressive reaction to the Bible as proof of their innate inability to comprehend not merely English words but Christian truths. In another scene in that same novel, Bumppo trades ivory "idols"—chess pieces—to the Iroquois in exchange for the release of his captured friends (*DS*, 172).⁴⁷ The mere sight of these figurines produces an "exclamation of rapture" from one Iroquois warrior, who is rendered physically powerless in the face of such sacred objects (*DS*, 177). In this scene, Cooper informs his reader

not only that Indians are idolaters and therefore not capable of being included in the American Israel, but also that this religious otherness is embodied. The Iroquois warrior experiences a physiological reaction to the chess pieces. In these episodes intercultural conflict is equated with religious incompatibility, and perhaps more significantly, religious otherness is rendered corporeal.

The consequences of mapping United States as the American New Israel—the construction of racial difference through narratives of religious otherness—are seen most vividly in Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, as the title character and her long-lost sister Faith are reunited. In the novel, Hope is raised by Puritans in a New England settlement, and Faith, who is captured as a child, is raised by members of the Pequot tribe. After being separated for many years, the two sisters reunite as young women only to find their sisterly bond severed. During their separation, Faith has adopted the culture of the Pequots, married the chief's son Oneco, and converted to Roman Catholicism, a religion most U.S. Protestants considered decidedly un-Christian in the nineteenth-century. Faith has been *indianized* and *catholicized*, and, as the novel makes clear, these dual conversions are inextricably connected. When Hope sees her long-lost sister, she is so repulsed by the "aboriginal peculiarities" of Faith's clothing that she does not recognize her (*HL*, 228). Hope repeatedly attempts to anglicize Faith's clothes by removing various Pequod items and adding European garments. Yet with each layer Hope removes or adds, she becomes increasingly frustrated. She realizes Faith's transformation is fundamental rather than fashion oriented.

During this time, Faith takes hold of “a crucifix” hanging from her neck and “fervently presse[s it] to her lips” (*HL*, 229). This religious image seems to be offered as an explanation for why Faith cannot return to English society even if she removes all of her native clothing. The cross acts as a racial marker; it stands for Faith’s Indian-ness. Sedgwick writes that as the two sisters are brought together, the “contrast between” their “two faces” is “striking” (*HL*, 229). The sisters no longer resemble each other. Although Faith is Hope’s biological sister, she has become racially other. Pointedly, Sedgwick offers an image of religious difference as a way of articulating this fundamental racial distinction.

Faith’s marriage to the Indian Oneco presents only one example of racial intermarriage articulated as religious conversion or religious transgression. Indeed interracial marriage is defined frequently in frontier fiction as interfaith marriage, and these interfaith unions function as an important site through which Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick define the parameters of chosenness and national belonging. The literary representation of miscegenation is perhaps the most extreme embodiment of the intercultural encounter engendered by the frontier, and, as Bergland writes, racial intermarriage is a key component of the frontier romance.⁴⁸ Matters of “intercultural contact and racial intermarriage,” Susan Opfermann notes, are “central” to the construction of national belonging, “because it was by excluding the savage Other that ‘American’ society historically defined itself.”⁴⁹ The topic of interracial marriage has previously drawn Cooper’s, Child’s, and Sedgwick’s novels together in literary, and in literary critical,

conversation.⁵⁰ Critics have generally argued that Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick wrote such interracial relationships into the frontier romance in response to each other and in order to legitimize and, conversely, critique gendered and racial structures of power in the new nation. Yet, what becomes clear reading Cooper, Child's, and Sedgwick's frontier fiction is that the construction of racial otherness as religious otherness informs their portraits of racial intermarriage.

As Child portrays Mary's decision to wed the Indian Hobomok, she likens it crucially to Roman Catholic ritual. A "broken and confused mass" of thoughts follows Mary's discovery of the death of her beloved Charles, which we may interpret as a pointed reference to Catholic ceremony as well as a description of the general weight of Mary's heartbreak (*H*, 121). As Mary remembers the "idolatry" Hobomok has paid her, she proposes to him, telling him she is willing to become his wife (*H*, 121). Anti-Catholicism stands in here as a distancing mechanism, a way for Child to represent racial intermarriage without endorsing it. In consenting to marry Hobomok, Mary clearly commits a religious transgression. Despite the fact that Mary and Hobomok appear to share a "religion of the heart," Child focuses an almost ethnographic attention on the exotic rituals of their wedding ceremony, which include walking around the wigwam, holding and breaking a witch-hazel wand, and smoking a pipe (*H*, 124-5).⁵¹

Cooper's representation of interracial marriage through interfaith marriage is perhaps best exemplified through his portrait of Duncan Middleton and Inez Augustin de Certavallos in *The Prairie*. Inez, I suggest, represents an important

revision of Cora Munro, the character from *The Last of the Mohicans* who has attracted much attention from literary critics as Cooper's most definitive representation of racial otherness. Sandra Zagarell explains, "Cooper attributes Negro blood to the dark, decisive, and sexually vital Cora Munro and ultimately kills her off."⁵² Cora, whose father confesses her racial impurity, is not an acceptable partner for Duncan Heyward (Middleton's grandfather) or Bumpo, the novel's white heroes. Instead, Cora's racial difference makes her vulnerable to the desires of Magua, the novel's fierce Indian villain. Inez, who appears in Cooper's fiction only a year after Cora, is both dark, sexualized other *and* religious other. Like Cora, Inez becomes a captive and an object of desire for "good" and "bad" Indians, in this case, Hard-Heart and Mahatoree. A Roman Catholic and the daughter of a Spanish-descended landowner, Inez remains vulnerable to Indian sexual advances even after she marries the Anglo-American Duncan. Cooper describes Duncan and Inez's courtship as a series of religious negotiations and attempted conversions. Religious difference constitutes "a stubborn and, nearly, irremovable obstacle" for the couple (*PR*, 158). Although Inez and Duncan eventually marry, their union remains curiously fragile.

While interracial marriage illuminates the construction of the racial other through the language of religious difference, the marriages between white, Protestant characters that frequently conclude works of historical frontier fiction establish the boundaries of the nation. In Michael Davitt Bell's assessment of the early-national historical romance, he argues, "the romantic attachment of hero

and heroine” comes to define “historical progress.”⁵³ Gretchen Murphy, claims that in the conclusion of the frontier romance, the “national household is refounded in the companionate marriage.”⁵⁴ The family brought into being at the end of the frontier novel signals the founding of the nation, articulating and importantly naturalizing the terms of national belonging for contemporary readers. In *Hobomok*, as many scholars note, the title character disappears and is essentially forgotten. Hobomok divorces Mary, allowing her to wed her first love Charles, who raises Hobomok and Mary’s son as his own. Most astoundingly, the marriage of Mary and Charles in the novel’s conclusion reveals the fundamental religious sameness between Charles, an Episcopalian, and Mary’s father, a Calvinist. “Disputes on matters of opinion would sometimes arise,” Child writes, but such disagreements, “always brought to amicable termination,” reveal an underlying similarity, religiously and racially, in the men (*H*, 149). Likewise, in *Hope Leslie*, the union of Hope and Everell and the simultaneous disappearance of Magawisca appears to reify the white, Protestant borders of the nation. In the same manner, Cooper’s concluding portrait of marriage in *The Last of the Mohicans* links the “fair, angelic, and nearly imbecile half-sister Alice” to the novel’s white hero Heyward.⁵⁵ These images offer a clear picture of the national household Bell and Murphy describe, a household pointedly averse to interracial and interfaith marriage.

Perhaps the most striking evidence that religious otherness comes to stand for racial difference in frontier fiction is the impossibility of Native American

conversion to Christianity. In *Hope Leslie*, Governor Endicott suggests that it is the colonists' duty to methodically convert indigenous Americans to Christianity, proclaiming, "the Lord's chosen people had not now, as of old, been selected to exterminate the heathen, but to enlarge the bounds of God's heritage, and to convert these strangers and aliens, to servants and children of the most high" (HL, 283). Sedgwick's notion that Native Americans may be incorporated into the Christian community insinuates that they may also be capable of incorporation into the nation. Yet early national novels demonstrate again and again how hopeless the prospect of a Christian Indian is.

Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick each indicate the potential of Indian conversion, only to subsequently dismiss it. In *The Deerslayer*, Bumppo remarks to his young friend Chingachgook, "you'll be christianised one day, I make no doubt, and then 'twill all come plain enough" (DS, 350). Bumppo's prophecy, as Cooper's devoted reader's already know, proves true. Chingachgook, called "John" later in his life, is indeed converted to Christianity by Moravian missionaries, an event narrated in the previously-published *Leatherstocking* books. But despite this actual Christian conversion, Chingachgook's death reveals the Indian's inability to assimilate Christianity. As Chingachgook approaches death, he claims, "my fathers call me to the happy hunting-grounds. . . I look—but I see no white-skins; there are none to be seen but just brave Indians" (P, 421). Confused at this decidedly un-Christian representation of the afterlife, Reverend Grant expresses concern that Chingachgook has abandoned

his Christian beliefs. Bumpo informs the minister that Chingachgook's beliefs, despite his conversion, continue to be determined by his race: "No—no—he trusts only to the Great Spirit of the savages. . . . He thinks, like all his people, that he is to be young ag'in, and to hunt, and be happy to the ind of etarnity" (*P*, 422). As if to emphasize this ultimately essential religious condition, Bumpo insists on a Christian burial for himself in *The Prairie*. Although he declares Hard-Heart his only "son," Bumpo rebukes the Indian warrior's offer of a grand Pawnee funeral, explaining, "it is little an Indian knows of white fashions and usages" (*PR*, 384). Bumpo instead entrusts his burial to the virtual stranger Middleton, asking him to attain a proper gravestone with Bumpo's name, time of death and "something from the holy book" inscribed upon it (*PR*, 384).

Similarly, Hobomok's "instinctual Christianity," which has been duly noted by critics, never results in conversion.⁵⁶ Though Hobomok has "never read of God," he has "heard his chariot wheels in the distant thunder, and seen his drapery in the clouds" (*H*, 34). Hobomok's spiritual compatibility with Mary is repeatedly emphasized, and Mary claims legitimacy for Hobomok's native religion, saying that she cannot "persuade herself that her marriage vow to the Indian was any less sacred, than any other voluntary promise" (*H*, 136). Still, Hobomok is deeply associated with religious otherness in the novel. He first appears in the novel as Mary performs a pagan ritual in the woods, and the marked attention given to Mary and Hobomok's marriage and divorce

ceremonies highlights Hobomok's religious difference. As Nancy Sweet writes, "religious-based dissent" is at the center of Mary's relationship to Hobomok.⁵⁷

Similarly, the portrait of the Magawisca in *Hope Leslie* suggests and then extinguishes the possibility of Indian conversion. Hope and Magawisca are "doubles," as Zagarell writes, who present the "possibility of a sisterhood that crosses racial boundaries."⁵⁸ Motherless, impassioned, defiant, and even in love with the same man, Magawisca and Hope indicate the potential for Anglo-Indian spiritual compatibility and Native American inclusion in the nation. As if to emphasize their likeness, the two women even disguise themselves as one another in order to facilitate Magawisca's escape from jail. Sedgwick describes Magawisca as having a "discreet and quiet way with her . . . more common among Christian women" (*HL*, 254). Although the women share a moral vision, conversion never becomes a legitimate prospect for Magawisca. Magawisca herself explains the impermeable chasm between white and Indian as she, standing trial for treason, refuses to submit to the colony's political-religious structures:

Take my own word, I am your enemy; the sun-beam and the shadow cannot mingle. The white man cometh—the Indian vanisheth. Can we grasp in friendship the hand raised to strike us? Nay—and it matters not whether we fall by the tempest that lays the forest low, or are cut down alone, by the stroke of the axe. I would have thanked you for life and

liberty; for Mononotto's sake I would have thanked you; but if you send me back to that dungeon—the grave of the living feeling, thinking soul, where the sun never shineth, where the stars never rise nor set, where the free breath of heaven never enters, where all is darkness without and within”—she pressed her hand to her breast—“ye will condemn me to death, but death more slow and terrible than your most suffering captive ever endured from Indian fires and knives I demand of thee death or liberty. (*HL*, 292).

Here Magawisca gives voice to the cult of the vanishing American, the idea that the disappearance of the American Indian was inevitable. At the same time, Sedgwick anachronistically reimagines Patrick Henry's famous revolutionary declaration, “Give me liberty or give me death” as the utterance of a Native American woman in the seventeenth-century. By placing these words in the mouth of Magawisca, Sedgwick makes a case for indigenous cultures' foundational importance in the making of the nation. Yet as Sedgwick presents this radical narrative of inclusion, she reminds the reader of Magawisca's incapacity for national belonging. Magawisca throws off her outer covering, revealing the physical deformity which Gustavus Stadler calls “a violently inflicted absence” that “becomes the marker of the native role in American nation-building.”⁵⁹ Magawisca's missing arm represents not only her exclusion from the nation, but also her ineffaceable religious difference. It remains a marker of a (supposedly) superseded Jewish law, a sign of the vengeful Father. The absent

arm reminds us of the holy of holies, of the native Jerusalem. Magawisca's incomplete body represents the perceived incompleteness of Judaism and the need for a new chosen people to (re)claim American sacred space.

Conclusion

At first glance, Cooper's, Child's, and Sedgwick's writings seem far removed from the Puritan project of imagining America as a new Promised Land. These authors are not rallying colonists to a sense of community, but rather presenting stories of intercultural conflict in the interest of defining the "American." Indeed, all three authors exhibit a general distrust of New England's Puritan foundations. And yet, these writers draw upon familiar typological imagery as they shore up a particular vision of the national past.

As U.S. writers mapped the American frontier as a new Holy Land they imaginatively consecrated the United States and defined "Americans" at a time when there was much anxious questioning about what united the diverse populations of the fragile nation-state. This process of mapping helped to establish the parameters of racial difference in U.S. culture, and it helped to naturalize the exclusion of these newly-constituted racial others from the nation. Finally, this mapping encouraged Americans to set their sights on Palestine and to feel that as Americans they should be involved in the exploration and restoration of the Holy Land.

Notes

¹ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826; reprint, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993), 2. In a footnote, Cooper tells us the lake is now known as Lake George, 2n. Further references are parenthetically cited *LM*.

² This history has been well documented in Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* and Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*.

³ Winthrop, "Modell of Christian Charity," 40.

⁴ Irving L. Thompson, "Great Seal," 362.

⁵ Ezra Stiles, "The United States Elevated to Glory and Honour," in *God's New Israel*, 83.

⁶ Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 18; Leslie Fielder writes that "throughout his life," Cooper was "tagged 'the American Scott.'" *Love and Death in the American Novel*, (1960; reprint, Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive, 1997), 179. Scholars have shown in the past three decades that the influence of Sir Walter Scott's historical romances was exhibited equally in the writings of Cooper's contemporaries Child and Sedgwick. The comparison between these writers and Scott is commonplace in nineteenth-century reviews and in twentieth and twenty-first-century literary scholarship.

⁷ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Deerslayer* (1841; reprint, Ware, England: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), 216. Further references are to this edition and are parenthetically cited *DS*.

⁸ Carolyn Karcher, "Introduction" to Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), xv.

⁹ Karcher states, "the American historical novel inevitably exhibited the same central contradiction as America itself—the contradiction between an ideology based on the premise that all men are created equal and a political structure based on the assumption that people of color and white women do not fall under the rubric 'men.'" *The First Woman in the Republic*, 18.

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that people of color and white women do not fall under the rubric 'men.'" *The First Woman in the Republic*, 18.

¹¹ Jedidiah Morse, *Geography Made Easy* (New Haven, CN: Meigs, Bowen, and Dana, 1784), 200.

¹² Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1: xv.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 107.

¹⁵ Finnie, *Pioneers East*.

¹⁶ Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 15. Nelson's *National Manhood* explores in depth the coterminous developments of white male civic identity and scientific professionalism through new fields such as gynecology, racial science, and anthropology.

¹⁷ Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 5.

¹⁸ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 98.

¹⁹ Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 37.

²⁰ Neil Asher Silberman, "Desolation and Restoration: The Impact of a Biblical Concept on Near Eastern Archaeology," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 54, no. 2 (1991): 78. See also Neil Asher Silberman, *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archeology, and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1799-1917* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

²¹ The British Mandate of Palestine officially began in 1920 at the bequest of the League of Nations following World War I. Great Britain's military had occupied Palestine since 1917.

²² Sidney E. Morse, *A New Universal Atlas of the World on an Improved Plan* (New Haven, CN: Jocelyn, 1825), plate 27.

²³ Ralph S. Tarr and Frank M. McMurry, *Asia and Africa* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), plate 259.

²⁴ Levi Parsons, "The Dereliction and Restoration of the Jews: A Sermon Preached in Park-Street Church Boston, Sabbath, October 31, 1819," in Pliny Fisk and others, *Holy Land Missions and Missionaries* (1819; facsimile, New York: Arno Press, 1977), 5.

²⁵ Alvan Bond, *Memoir of the Rev. Pliny Fisk, A. M., Late Missionary to Palestine* (1828; facsimile, New York: Arno Press, 1977), 295.

²⁶ Robinson, *Biblical Researches*, 2: 77.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2: 148.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2: 148.

²⁹ Pliny Fisk, "The Holy Land an Interesting Field of Missionary Enterprise: A Sermon, Preached in the Old South Church, Boston, Sabbath Evening, October 31, 1819," in *Holy Land and Its Missions*, 26.

³⁰ Bond, *Memoir of Pliny Fisk*, 267.

³¹ Robinson, *Biblical Researches*, 2: 24.

³² Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 3.

³³ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: H. Holt, 1920), 3. Turner first presented this paper at the American Historical Association meeting during the Chicago World's Columbia Exposition in July 1893. For the next eighty years, literary critics and scholars of American Studies grappled with what they saw as the central role of the frontier in U.S. national mythology. Henry Nash Smith in 1950 claimed that the frontier and the "vacant continent" beyond it were central national archetypes. Following in Smith's footsteps, R. W. B. Lewis envisioned the frontier as a "wilderness Eden" upon which the American *Adam* could form his individualistic self. In 1960, Leslie Fielder claimed the frontier was the "ideal boundary' between two cultures, one 'civilized and cultivated,' the other 'wild and lawless.'" Richard Slotkin moved toward an understanding of the frontier as a site of encounter, a violent clash in the wilderness that enabled symbolic "regeneration" and renewal. Richard Drinnon, in *Facing West*, redefined the experience of the frontier as one characterized by "repression" and "racism." With *The Land Before Her*, Annette Koldony introduced the frontier as a site of "idealized domesticity," a site through which women fantasized of a of "a home and a familial community within a cultivated garden." *Virgin Land*, 4; Lewis, *The American Adam*, 103; Leslie Fielder, *Love and Death*, 179; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 5; Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (1980; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), xxv, xxvi; Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), xiii.

³⁴ Renée Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 67.

³⁵ Laura Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 35.

³⁶ "Our Predecessors Viewing the 'Promised Land,'" Aultman Miller & Co., Akron, Ohio, 1888.

³⁷ Michael Crang, *Cultural Geography* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 44.

³⁸ Scholars have previously analyzed religion as a subject in Cooper's, Child's, and Sedgwick's works. Generally in these studies, religion appears to be a resource for imagining "Americanness" and/or another manifestation of the nation's power structure. Such studies have usefully elucidated similarities and differences (generally gendered) in these writers' aims and strategies. For analysis of religion in Child's and Sedgwick's writings, see Nancy F. Sweet, "Dissent and the Daughter in *A New England Tale* and *Hobomok*," *Legacy* 22, no.2 (2005): 107-125; Gretchen Murphy, "Separate (Hemi)Spheres: John Quincy Adams, Lydia Maria Child, and the Domestic Ideology of the Monroe Doctrine," in *Hemispheric Imaginings*; Christopher Castiglia, *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). For analysis of religion in Cooper's works, see David W. Noble, "Cooper, Leatherstocking and the Death of the American Adam," *American Quarterly* 16, no.3 (1964): 419-431; Robert Milder, "The Last of the Mohicans and the New World Fall," *American Literature* 52, no. 3 (1980): 407-429; Daryl E. Jones, "Temple in the Promised Land: Old Testament Parallel in Cooper's *The Pioneers*," *American Literature* 57, no.1 (1985): 68-78; Ivan Melada, "'Poor Little Talkative Christianity': James Fenimore Cooper and the Dilemma of the Christian on the Frontier," *Studies in the Novel* 18, no. 3 (1986): 225-237; Lawrence J. Oliver, "'Their Foot Shall Slide in Due Time': Cooper's Calvinist Motif," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 42, no. 4 (1988): 432-447; Max L. Loges, "Cooper's *The Prairie*," *Explicator* 63, no.2 (2005): 74-76.

³⁹ Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings*, 56.

⁴⁰ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Prairie* (1827; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1987), 105, 120. Further references are to this edition and are parenthetically cited *PR*.

⁴¹ The Book of Judith is a non-canonical text in Jewish and Protestant traditions, but it is included in Orthodox Christian and Roman Catholic versions of the Old Testament. Within the book, Judith, dressing herself opulently, succeeds in seducing and decapitating the invading general Holofernes, thereby saving the Jewish people. In the *Book of Esther*, which appears in the Hebrew Bible, Queen Esther, wife of King Ahasuerus of Persia, thwarts a plot to exterminate the Jews of the empire. The prime minister Haman plots to have the Jews of the realm killed with the permission of Ahasuerus, who does not know that his wife Esther is Jewish. Esther requests an audience with the king, during which she informs him she is Jewish, risking her own life. Since Ahasuerus has already issued an edict compelling the murder of the Jews, he passes a new law permitting the Jews to arm and defend themselves.

⁴² Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986): 17.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Beecher, "A Plea For the West," 122-130.

⁴⁵ Bond, *Memoir of Pliny Fisk*, 281.

⁴⁶ During the colonial period, Europeans and colonists entertained the idea that indigenous Americans were one of the ten lost tribes of Israel. These ten tribes originated in the northern part of the Kingdom of Israel and were exiled by the Assyrians in the eighth century B.C.E. The Spanish missionary Bartholeme de las Casas was convinced that Native Americans originated in ancient Israel. For the next few centuries, religious figures continued to support this perception. Nineteenth-century U.S. travelers to the Near East ironically reinforced the association of indigenous America with the Holy Land. Frequently in their travel narratives and memoirs, U.S. writers compare the Bedouin Arabs they encounter in the Near East to Indians. This commonplace analogy, which allowed U.S. travelers to imagine the Holy Land itself as a replication of the historical American frontier, bolstered U.S. identification with the Holy Land. For further analysis of the Holy Land as projected American frontier, see Obenzinger, *American Palestine*.

⁴⁷ These chess pieces, which are discovered by Bumpo in Thomas Hutter's trunk, provocatively connect indigenous America to Africa. The ivory pieces, products of Africa, appear to be products of piracy—stolen objects. These religiously other objects evoke

images of the slave trade and suggest further associations between religious and racial otherness.

⁴⁸ Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 66. Because the term “miscegenation” was not introduced until 1860, “racial intermarriage” is a more appropriate phrase to use when discussing the Native American-Anglo American marriages in *Hobomok* and *Hope Leslie*.

⁴⁹ Susan Opfermann, “Lydia Maria Child, James Fenimore Cooper, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick: A Dialogue on Race, Culture, and Gender,” in *Soft Canons: American Women Writers and Masculine Tradition* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 27, 31, 31.

⁵⁰ Frequently, Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick have been discussed collectively or in pairs. Karcher’s introduction to *Hobomok* and her literary critical biography of Child, *The First Woman in the Republic*, convincingly argue that the three writers existed in conversation with each other. Louise Barnett writes that Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick are the only three frontier fiction writers to publish representations of Indian-white marriages (in *Hobomok*, *Hope Leslie*, and Cooper’s *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*). Opfermann’s article on the three continues Karcher’s exploration of the writers’ shared themes, paying particular attention to their re-imaginings of each other’s representations of racial intermarriage. Barnett, *The Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism, 1790-1890* (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1977); Opfermann, “A Dialogue on Race, Culture, and Gender.” For further analysis of Cooper’s, Child’s, and Sedgwick’s depictions of interracial relationships, see Harry Brown, “‘The Horrid Alternative’: Miscegenation and Madness in the Frontier Romance,” *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 24, no. 3-4 (2001): 137-51; Domhnall Mitchell, “‘Acts of Intercourse’: Miscegenation in Three Nineteenth-Century American Novels,” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 27.2 (1995): 126-141; and Stephen Carl Arch, “Romancing the Puritans: American Historical Fiction in the 1820s,” *ESQ* 39 (1993): 107-132.

⁵¹ Karcher, “Introduction” *Hobomok*, xxiv.

⁵² Sandra A. Zagarell, “Expanding ‘America’: Lydia Sigourney’s *Sketch of Connecticut*, Catharine Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*,” in *Redefining the Political Novel: American Women Writers, 1797-1901*, ed. Sharon M. Harris (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 55.

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- ⁵³ Michael Davitt Bell, "History and Romance Convention in Catharine Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*" *American Quarterly* 22 (1970): 214.
- ⁵⁴ Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings*, 48.
- ⁵⁵ Zagarell, "Expanding 'America,'" 55.
- ⁵⁶ Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings*, 55.
- ⁵⁷ Sweet, "Dissent and the Daughter," 108.
- ⁵⁸ Zagarell, "Expanding 'America,'" 56.
- ⁵⁹ Gustavus Stadler, "Magawisca's Body of Knowledge: Nation-Building in *Hope Leslie*," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 1(1999): 46.

CHAPTER TWO

Eschatology and the Arabesque: Poe, Prophecy, and the Topography of Race

In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison writes of Edgar Allan Poe, “No early American writer is more important to the concept of American Africanism.”¹ Citing Poe’s novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), Morrison demonstrates that a “dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence” is at the center of the most “championed characteristics of our national literature.”² Poe’s ongoing literary obsession with amorphous darkness, Morrison asserts, informs and was informed by racial anxieties in the United States. In *Pym*, the young title character, having survived a shipboard mutiny, shipwreck, and starvation, finds himself on the fantastical South Pole island of Tsalal, a place that appears to function as a displaced U.S. South. The island’s native inhabitants, described as “muscular and brawny” with “jet black” skin, “thick and long wooly hair,” and black teeth, embody white racist fears of slave insurrection in the 1830s.³ After disembarking on the island with the crew of the *Jane Guy* (the ship that has rescued Pym from his earlier perils), Pym observes the supposed primitiveness of the Tsalal natives with the white superiority typically found in travel narratives of the period. These seemingly simple natives, however, orchestrate a massacre

of the crew. Only Pym and his companion Dirk Peters, a sailor of mixed Indian and white ancestry, survive. In this nightmarish fantasy of black uprising, Pym is left the last white man standing.

Critical interpretations of *Pym* as a racial allegory have frequently hinged on three phrases that are carved into the rocky landscape of Tsalal.⁴ On the island, Pym finds his way through a series of ravines, which the narrative's appendix later informs the reader spell out the words "to be white," "to be shady," and "the region of the South" in Egyptian, Arabic, and Ethiopian respectively (*TP*, 883). Indeed, the final lines contained in the book's appendix are an explanation of these inscribed terms. These words return the reader to Tsalal and redirect attention to the racial apocalypse that transpires on the island. The fact that these words are written in Egyptian, Arabic, and Ethiopian—languages associated with the Bible and with biblical lands—suggests that the U.S. South was not the only landscape Poe had in mind as he imagine Tsalal. These linguistic inscriptions draw the reader's attention to the "over-textualized landscape" of the Holy Land.⁵ The Tsalal landscape becomes not only a displaced South, but also a displaced Holy Land, and this spatial association equates *Pym's* picture of black uprising with apocalypse. The phrases carved into the Tsalal landscape assume the essence of prophecy, and they do so at a time when U.S. Christians were becoming increasingly preoccupied with eschatology, the study of the coming of the messianic era and the end of history. Poe,

articulating a relationship between racial apocalypse and biblical prophecy, ironically reinforces notions of the United States as a new Holy Land.

Since the publication of Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, literary critics have investigated the subject of race in Poe's writings with increasing interest. Uncovering Poe's relationships to a national imperial unconscious, U.S. Southern identity, and the antebellum slavery debate, scholars have dismissed the long-standing notion that, as J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg write, Poe was "in many ways the most un-American of our early writers."⁶ Poe's longstanding reputation as an "exotic alien, a strange and otherworldly purveyor of pure poetry, fractured psyches, and un-American gloom" has recently given way as scholars have placed Poe's writings in their historical context.⁷ It is by historicizing Poe's "inexplicable fantasies," writes Joan Dayan, that they "become intelligible."⁸ Made "intelligible" through such investigations, Poe's complex attitudes toward the subject of race have located the author squarely at the center of national and regional racial anxieties.

Despite recent critical efforts that investigate Poe's relationship to his historical context and to the issues of racism and slavery in particular, very few scholars have examined the recurring themes of racial apocalypse in Poe's writings in the context of contemporary American interests in the Holy Land and the growing millennialist movement in the United States. Scholars have only recently begun to connect Poe's enduring interest in the arabesque with U.S. imperialism and Orientalism. Images of the arabesque, an "ornamental design" of

Near-Eastern origin characterized by “flowing lines of branches, leaves, and scroll-work fancifully intertwined,” appear frequently in Poe’s writings, and as Jacob Rama Berman notes, these images are frequently connected to themes of disintegration and dissolution.⁹ Berman suggests that Poe’s “aesthetic fascination with decadence and decay,” often represented in arabesque images, is informed by the author’s perceptions of Arab culture.¹⁰ Similarly, Betsy Erkkila and Malini Johar Schueller have demonstrated how Orientalism shapes Poe’s writings. Erkkila and Schueller place Poe within an early-national conversation “at once national and global” regarding “imperial conquest” and race.¹¹ Analyzing *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827) and *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems* (1829), Erkkila suggests that Poe’s Near-Eastern themed poems “participated in the broader politics of imperial struggle in the nineteenth-century” by positing the Orient as a “space for the imaginative figuration of white fear and white desire.”¹² Erkkila writes, “Orientalism intersects with Africanism and a whole series of social subordinations—of black to white, female to male, nature to spirit, body to mind, democratic mob to genteel aristocrat—in the formation of Poe’s poetics of whiteness.”¹³ Schueller argues that within Poe’s tale “Ligeia” specifically, the Orient becomes conflated with the U.S. South. “Ligeia” in Schueller’s analysis is “a paradigmatic tale about the crisis of nationalism and the problems of embracing either Euroamerican colonial aspirations or alternative Southern nationalism.”¹⁴ Ligeia, Schueller asserts, embodies stereotypes of the Orientalized other and the racial other, enabling Poe’s critique of both imperial

nationalism and southern nationalism. Although these studies present a vital transnational perspective on Poe's writings, they neglect to consider how Poe's representations of racial apocalypse in particular are informed by contemporary cultural investments in the Holy Land.

In the 1830s, the period during which Poe published his most substantial body of work, a Holy Land "mania" was taking hold in the United States. As we saw in chapter one, the Near East—and in particular, Palestine—fascinated nineteenth-century Americans, and was becoming accessible to Americans as a modern geographical entity. Early-national U.S. authors drew upon contemporary representations of Palestine as they crafted self-consciously national historical novels. These works of frontier fiction mapped the United States as a new Holy Land, in the process embedding racial hierarchies into the nation. U.S. readers voraciously consumed not only these historical romances, but also biblical geographies, travel narratives, and magazine articles about Palestine. For many Americans, Palestine was the Holy Land, a space of religious revelation and historical conflict for the three Abrahamic monotheistic traditions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the 1830s, the publications of the first U.S.-authored Holy Land travel narratives and geographies made Palestine accessible to Americans and were thought to provide an ongoing testament to biblical veracity. The Holy Land that readers encountered in these texts was a degenerate place, languishing in ruin, as Poe pronounced, under the Islamic "yoke" of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ However, this apparent deterioration of the Holy Land did not disprove

Judeo-Christian theological teachings, but rather affirmed them. U.S. writers, travelers, and ministers viewed Palestine's decay as evidence of biblical prophecy fulfilled, of the veracity of the Bible's predictions of a Holy Land laid waste. Poe himself stated that the contemporary Holy Land illustrated "the visible effects of the divine displeasure."¹⁶

Americans' increasing interest in the Holy Land and its prophesied degeneration ironically coincided with anxieties about slave rebellion and racial degeneration in the United States, a theme that pervades much of Poe's writing. In 1831, the bloodiest slave insurrection in U.S. history took place in Southampton County, Virginia. The revolt, incited by "General Nat" Turner "produced what became known as the Great Southern Reaction, which ended all talk of emancipation and instead increased the control and disenfranchisement of slaves."¹⁷ Stories circulated in newspapers about the brutality of the Turner rebellion and about how innocent white women and children had fallen victim to the slave uprising. In the aftermath of the rebellion, over 200 slaves, many of them not complicit in Turner's insurrection, were executed. The Turner rebellion loomed large in the minds of slaveholding white southerners. Yet it would be a mistake to assume this period was one of general unease only in the U.S. South. Racial tensions and hostilities between abolitionist and pro-slavery Americans were mounting in the U.S. North as well. Philadelphia, the city in which Poe resided from 1838 to 1844, was home to multiple race riots in the 1830s. Elise Lemire writes, "On numerous occasions and in response to various perceived

outrages, white mobs took to the streets of Philadelphia and other cities, wrecking buildings, and other personal property and attacking—and sometimes killing—the human subjects of their wrath.”¹⁸ The targets of these pointed attacks were usually free African Americans and white abolitionists. In an increasingly fractured United States, questions about the future of slavery and interracial relations were coming to a head.

In Poe’s writing, themes of racial degeneration are often represented through images of contamination and uprising. As Dayan notes, in such stories as “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Poe “moves us back to a time when a myth of blood conferred an unpolluted, legitimate pedigree.”¹⁹ The Usher family upsets the fantasy of the racially pure white body, family, and lineage by presenting the aristocratic family as mysteriously diseased and incapable of reproduction. By contrast, “Ligeia,” as Dayan writes, brings us “forward to an analytics of blood that ushered in a complex of color.”²⁰ The deceased, dark Ligeia, who supernaturally possesses the body of her husband’s second—manifestly fair—wife, represents “the ineradicable stain, the drop” of non-white blood “that could not be seen but must be feared.”²¹ In the case of “Ligeia,” a “vision of apocalyptic doom” is associated with “figures of blackness.”²² In other stories, we see this preoccupation with blackness as well. The anxiety surrounding fears of an “apocalyptic uprising of blacks” appears to inform “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” in which two white women are brutally murdered by an orangutan, and “The Black Cat,” in which the narrator fears his own pet is plotting to kill him.²³

As Poe addresses regional and national preoccupations with race, he frequently draws upon images of the Holy Land. In works as diverse as “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), “Ligeia” (1838), and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Poe probes national paranoia and reveals his own investment in Holy Land mania. In “Usher,” for instance, Roderick Usher’s physical deterioration is described as the degeneration of his “Hebrew” features into an “Arabesque” appearance.²⁴ This progression—from Hebrew to Arab—mirrors American interpretations of the modern Holy Land’s degeneration under Muslim rule. As critics have shown, Roderick’s mysterious illness and the cessation of his family line—his degeneration and his family’s de-generation—likewise embody anxieties about racial contamination and blackness.²⁵ The Ushers are literally killed by their property, and the plantation-like House of Usher is swallowed up by the estate’s amorphous black tarn. By likening Roderick Usher’s decline to that of the Holy Land, Poe shows how biblical prophecy helped to solidify notions of the United States as a new Holy Land threatened by the specter of racial uprising.

In this chapter, I argue that the concurrent themes of racial and biblical apocalypse that appear in Poe’s writings are not coincidental. Although Poe only briefly aligned himself with the project of developing a U.S. national literature, he shares with early-national writers such as Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick an interest in mapping the United States as a new Holy Land.²⁶ In contrast to these self-consciously national writers, Poe does not superimpose biblical narrative and

modern biblical geography onto the American landscape, but rather draws upon notions of biblical prophecy to elucidate anxieties about racial difference and the institution of slavery in the United States. Analyzing a selective sample of Poe's fiction, including "Usher," "Ligeia," and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* in the context of Poe's nonfiction writings about the Near East, I demonstrate how biblical prophecies about the Holy Land helped consolidate notions of the United States as a New Israel threatened by the specter of racial otherness. Ironically then, the racial and regional anxieties that jeopardized the stability of the young nation helped solidify a national narrative of the United States as American New Israel.

In order to demonstrate the influence of the Holy Land on Poe's writing and the author's interest in biblical prophecy, I will first briefly examine Poe's essay "Palæstine," which appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in February 1836, and his "Review of Stephens' 'Arabia Petræa,'" which appeared in the *New York Review* in October 1837. These two essays, rarely studied, not only reveal that Poe was indeed aware of and interested in the contemporary discourse surrounding the Holy Land, but also cast his subsequent literary efforts in a new light. In these essays, we glimpse a Poe knowledgeable about biblical text, interested in religion, and fascinated by the prospect of landscape as a testament to the fulfillment of scriptural prophecies. This Poe, despite what critics have uncovered about the author's general Christian apathy, expresses a kind of religious fundamentalism. With this context in mind, I will trace these essays'

themes—including prophecy, millennialism, and the construction of sacred space—in Poe’s tales and in *Pym*, showing how many of Poe’s fictional works illustrate a striking investment in the Holy Land at the same time they “reproduce the conversation surrounding” the institution of slavery.²⁷ Finally, I will reflect on how Poe’s interest in prophecy shaped perceptions of the nation and the racial logic intrinsic to national identity.

Poe and “Palæstine”

U.S. fascination with the Holy Land remains an overlooked historical context for Poe’s work, one that further underscores the impact of national cultures on Poe and Poe’s affect on the development of a national literature. Poe contributed his own research and writing to the growing body of Holy Land literature, publishing the essay “Palæstine” in 1836 and a review of John Lloyd Stephens’s *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land* in 1837. A working journalist and editor, Poe was “a shrewd pragmatist, who courted a broad readership.”²⁸ As such, we can deduce Poe’s perceptions about public interest as well as his own knowledge of and interest in Near Eastern themes from his nonfiction Holy Land writings. In “Palæstine,” the reader discerns Poe’s familiarity with Holy Land history and geography. In the “Review of Stephens’ *Arabia Petraea*,” the reader learns substantially more about Poe’s personal evaluation of Near Eastern narratives and his investments in the Holy Land. Known as a staunchly

independent and uncompromising literary critic—James Russell Lowell characterized Poe as “the most discriminating, philosophical, and fearless critic” in the United States—Poe is unlikely to have sugarcoated his assessment of Stephens’s narrative.²⁹ Poe’s review also marked an important but often overlooked moment in his career, his first major publication in a national magazine. The publication of this overwhelmingly positive review helped Stephens sell over 21,000 copies of *Incidents of Travel* during its first two years in print, which in turn helped establish Poe’s national reputation as a literary critic. Scholars have rarely directed attention to these nonfiction Holy Land writings, and yet, they provide a striking new lens through which to reread Poe’s corpus, a lens that highlights Poe’s continuing fascination with the Holy Land.

Poe writes in “Palæstine” that the most notable thing about the modern Holy Land is its history as the “the scene of the birth, sufferings, and death of our Redeemer.”³⁰ Perhaps the most notable thing about Poe’s article is that it tells us what Poe was reading about the Near East in the 1830s and discloses his assessment of his audience’s interests in the Near East. Apparently, Poe presumed his readers were predominantly interested in the natural geographical features of the modern Holy Land, viewed as the setting of biblical narrative. Poe first briefly recounts the historical origins of the name Palestine, derived from the “Philistæi, who inhabited the coast of Judea.”³¹ Then Poe proceeds to inform his readers about the current political state of the Holy Land and its historical political divisions in the first century. Finally, Poe devotes the remainder—and bulk—of

the article to the unique geography of Palestine, in which he describes bodies of water, landscape features, and towns in reference to their representation in the Bible.

Although a presumably factual account, “Palæstine” reveals Poe’s peculiar investments in the Holy Land. According to J.O. Bailey, “Palæstine” was practically plagiarized from Abraham Rees’s *Cyclopædia*.³² Bailey claims that Poe drew from at least fifteen articles in the *Cyclopædia*, including articles on “‘Palestine,’ ‘Canaan,’ ‘Galilee,’ ‘Samaritans,’ ‘Judea,’ ‘Jordan,’ ‘Asphaltite Lake,’ ‘Lebanon,’ ‘Carmelus,’ ‘Tiberias,’ ‘Epiphanius,’ ‘Casaera,’ ‘Samaria,’ ‘Jericho,’ and ‘Jerusalem.’”³³ What may be most telling in Poe’s article is what he chose to alter from Rees, mostly notably, spelling. Beginning with the title of the essay “Palæstine,” Poe pointedly chose to use “Latin, or archaic-looking spellings.”³⁴ Judea becomes “Judæa.” Galilee becomes “Galilea.” Jerusalem becomes “Jeruschalaim.” These unique spellings, Bailey writes, may be the result of Poe’s “desire to make the essay look learned” or “his sense of the greater mystery and romance of the unfamiliar word.”³⁵ I would suggest that Poe’s use of atypical and archaic names suggests his desire to emphasize the ancientness of the Holy Land above all. Poe’s interest in language also manifests itself in his description of the northern mountain range of Libanus, a name Poe explains derives from the Hebrew word “Lebanon,” meaning “white.”³⁶ The snowy summits that inspired this name cradle a valley “so beautiful that some have called it a terrestrial paradise.”³⁷ Poe’s association of “whiteness” with earthly paradise here is

pointedly accomplished through the deployment of Hebrew. Poe's imagination also finds its way into the article through fanciful inaccuracies. Most notably, Poe claims that "Earthquakes are now frequent" in the region surrounding the Dead Sea.³⁸ No contemporary source suggests that earthquakes were frequent in this region. In sum, "Palæstine" suggests Poe was considerably less interested in providing a fact-based account of the Holy Land than he was in conveying the mystical quality of the Near East.³⁹

Poe's review of Stephens's *Incidents of Travel* further reveals Poe's estimation of the modern Holy Land. When Stephens's *Incidents of Travel* was published in 1837, it joined a growing body of Holy Land literature that sought, in Poe's words, "to throw light upon the Book of Books."⁴⁰ Though a notoriously brutal critic, Poe praises Stephens in his review, declaring *Incidents of Travel* has "strong claims upon the attention of all who read" as a theological aid (*TP*, 549). Because modern Palestine was perceived to have remained almost identical to the "ancient" Holy Land, contemporary travel writers' accounts of the Holy Land, such as Stephens's, were thought to present the world of the Bible to their readers, thereby confirming the Bible's validity and affirming Christian theology. Essentially, Palestine's "steadfast resistance to innovation" made the geography of the Holy Land a kind of supplemental sacred text (*TP*, 553). Stephens's *Incidents of Travel* and other Holy Land travel narratives provided access to this sacred text. Poe argues moreover that *Incidents of Travel* has unique "claims to public attention" in that it illustrates the accomplishment of biblical prophecies

(*TP*, 550). Poe suggests that by providing this evidence, such travel accounts may eventually become the “most powerful . . . instrument in the downfall of unbelief” (*TP*, 549).

Poe claims that Stephens’s account of the Holy Land both confirms the unfolding of biblical prophecy in the Near East and illuminates prophecy’s defining features (*TP*, 550). These features—“Literalness” and “obscurity”—make prophecy unintelligible, Poe claims, and yet explain its enduring power (*TP*, 554). Stephens’s narrative testifies to the Holy land’s prophesied general degeneration, and it also, if accidentally, tests the accuracy of one particular prophecy—the curse of Edom. During his travels, Stephens inadvertently traversed the biblical Edom (now called Idumea), a region regarding which the ancient prophets had declared, “none shall pass through . . . forever and ever” (*TP*, 556).⁴¹ The fact that Stephens survived his journey through Edom stirred up “anxieties over literalist interpretations of prophetic texts.”⁴² His successful travels seemingly challenged the correctness of the prophets and by extension the validity of the Bible itself. Poe, reexamining the prophecy in its original context and language, shows the curse actually reads: “For an eternity of eternities (there shall) not (be any one) moving about in it” (*TP*, 558). When this statement is read “with the usual allowance for that hyperbole which is a main feature, and indeed the genius” of the Hebrew language, Poe asserts, it becomes apparent that the prophecy means “only to predict the general desolation and abandonment of the land” (*TP*, 559). In Poe’s analysis, Stephens’s journey affirmed rather than

disproved the prophecy of Edom, revealing its literal accomplishment, which had been concealed by the obscurity of the Hebrew language. The prophecy became “intelligible only when viewed from the proper point of observation—the period of fulfillment” (*TP*, 554).⁴³

Poe’s account of biblical prophecy in the review places him, rather unexpectedly, within the contemporaneous conversation surrounding millennialism. Analyzing prophecy’s characteristic literalness and obscurity, Poe illuminates a method not only of analyzing the accomplishment of prophecy, but also of anticipating its continued unfolding. By 1837, belief that the United States was the New Zion, a new Promised Land in which Christian society was being perfected, convinced many U.S. Christians that the millennium, or the thousand years of Christian rule that would precede the Second Coming of Christ, was imminent. Religious reform movements and Christian tract societies emerged, hoping to improve U.S. morals and domestic institutions in order to hasten the millennium. U.S. missionaries embarked for Palestine, intending to convert Jews and restore the Holy Land in order to set the stage for the Second Coming. One notable group of millennialist Christians, the Millerites, even went so far as to set a date for the impending Second Coming—March 1843.⁴⁴

Considering the dearth of information on Poe’s religious beliefs and practice, it is perhaps surprising that Poe exhibits an interest in biblical revelation and millennialism in his review of *Incidents of Travel*.⁴⁵ Yet, Poe in the review acknowledges with certainty his conviction that the ultimate prophecy—the

world's end—will be accomplished. “Hereafter,” Poe writes, “when the ends of Providence shall be thoroughly answered, it will not fail to give way before the influence of that very Word it has been instrumental in establishing; and the tide of civilization, which has hitherto flowed continuously, from the rising to the setting sun, will be driven back, with a partial ebb, into its original channels” (*TP*, 553). Although it is not clear from this statement whether or not Poe believed the millennium was at hand, he clearly embraces a brand of Scriptural fundamentalism in the review. Developing new conception of prophecy, Poe presents the Bible not only as an authoritative text, but also and perhaps more intriguingly, as an elusive, affecting, and effective text.

Degeneration in the Holy Land and the House of Usher

“The Fall of the House of Usher”—the story of a man who visits a childhood friend suffering from a mysterious disease, only to see the friend and his sister swallowed up in the apocalyptic implosion of their mansion—remains one of Poe’s most widely-read tales and a touchstone for critics investigating Poe’s preoccupation with degeneration. Degeneration, prophecy, and apocalypse—themes overtly identified in Poe’s review of Stephens’s *Incidents of Travel*—organize “Usher.” At its most basic, “Usher” may be read as a tale about prophecy and its unfolding. Roderick Usher predicts his own and his sister Madeline’s destruction, and the narrator of the tale observes as this prophecy is

gradually accomplished. This thematic investment in prophecy enables Poe to speak specifically, however cryptically, to racial anxieties in the United States. In the story, the House of Usher functions as a surrogate Holy Land, a landscape upon which prophecy is accomplished and which serves as a testament to its accomplishment. As the story explores the relationship between sacred space and text, it meditates, as Leland S. Person writes, on the perversity of the “master-slave relationship.”⁴⁶ The house is not only the site of the unfolding of prophecy, but also a peculiarly “sentient” possession belonging the Usher family (*TP*, 239). The ancient mansion and its environs evoke images of aristocratic southern plantation culture. Louis Rubin has claimed that “Usher” dramatizes the disintegration of the slaveholding southern aristocracy.⁴⁷ Significantly, this collapse is figured in terms of Holy Land degeneration and biblical apocalypse.

The first images we receive of the House of Usher present an image of the U.S. South as a space of decay and darkness. As the narrator comes within view of the House of Usher, he notes immediately the “insufferable gloom” that washes over him (*TP*, 231). The “melancholy” estate is pointedly rendered in a color palate of black and white that underscores perceptions of the South’s racial landscape. The narrator surveys a scene comprised of the “white trunks of decayed trees,” the “black and lurid tarn,” “the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems” (*TP*, 231). This description points to both the stark contrast between black and white and, conversely, the racial ambiguities present in southern slaveholding culture. Pointedly, whiteness appears sickly in this portrait. The

estate and its continuously emphasized decay represent a vision of southern plantation culture in decline.

Importantly, as the narrator enters this scene, he introduces distinctive regional characteristics that reinforce the southern resonance of “Usher’s” unnamed setting. The narrator’s analytical propensity, his insistence that the “shadowy fancies” that crowd his mind when approaching the house must be the result of mere “combinations of very simple natural objects,” suggests a typical Yankee skepticism (*TP*, 231). The stereotypical northeastern traits the narrator exemplifies would have been most certainly out of sorts in this dark landscape. Analyzing *Pym*, Faflik writes, “Poe gives us pairs that point toward distinctive regional attributes, or at least toward Yankee-Cavalier caricatures.”⁴⁸ This statement could apply equally well to “Usher,” in which Poe contrasts the narrator’s Yankee rationalism and responsibility with Roderick’s Cavalier emotionalism and belief in fate. A man of property and leisure, Roderick exemplifies perceived characteristics of the “Cavalier,” or southern gentleman.⁴⁹ The “time-honored” Usher “race,” Poe writes, “had been noted . . . for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself, through long ages, in many works of exalted art, and manifested, of late, in repeated deeds of munificent yet unobtrusive charities” (*TP*, 232). As Poe scripts the reunion of these two men, following a long absence, he draws attention to these regional distinctions. The narrator observes, “Upon my entrance, Usher arose from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length, and greeted me with a vivacious warmth which had

much in it, I at first thought, of an overdone cordiality" (*TP*, 234). Roderick's languid position as the narrator enters the room marks his Cavalier character. The narrator's discomfort as what seems an excessively warm greeting from Roderick identifies his colder Yankee nature.

The setting, over-determined by these regional stereotypes, is further complicated by Near Eastern imagery. The overwhelming sensations and visions provoked by the House of Usher makes the estate distinct from other spaces, the very definition of sacred space in Eliade's classic formulation (*TP*, 231). The "peculiar" Usher space exhibits interesting parallels to the Holy Land (*TP*, 233). The primary "feature" of the house and family, Poe writes, is their "excessive antiquity" (*TP*, 233). "Antiquity" and "ancientness" are repeatedly used to describe the house, which, like the contemporary Holy Land, appears unchanged and unchanging, only deteriorating. The house's "extensive decay" and its "crumbling condition" likewise echo portraits of the yet un-restored Holy Land (*TP*, 233). Another parallel emerges in the conflation of the Usher mansion and landscape with the Usher family in the "quaint and equivocal appellation of the House of Usher" (*TP*, 232). This merging of the Usher estate and the Usher family, repeatedly emphasized in the story, resembles the conflation of the chosen people and the Promised Land in the appellation "Israel."

Moreover, the space constituted by the House of Usher and its environs recalls the portrait of Palestine Poe created earlier in "Palæstine." The "atmosphere peculiar" to the house of Usher bears a striking resemblance to the

unusual air Poe attributes to the Dead Sea (*TP*, 233). The narrator of "Usher" declares a "pestilent and mystic vapor" emanates "from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn" of the Usher estate (*TP*, 233). Similarly, Poe claims, the atmosphere that surrounds the Dead Sea is comprised of "vapours" that appear "pestilential" and "volumes of smoke" that "issue" regularly "from the lake."⁵⁰

This Holy Land imagery, perhaps most significantly, permeates Poe's description of Roderick's mysterious illness. Poe's portrait of Roderick's disintegration and decay, as Berman suggests, is linked with images of the arabesque.⁵¹ In "Usher," the arabesque appears in fact synonymous with decay, as seen in Poe's much-cited description of the story's central figure:

Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the wan being before me with the companion of my early boyhood. Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity;—these features, with an inordinate expansion

above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten. And now in the mere exaggeration of the prevailing character of these features, and of the expression they were wont to convey, lay so much of the change that I doubted to whom I spoke. The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous luster of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity. (*TP*, 234)

In this passage, Roderick Usher's wild, "Arabesque" hair signifies his marked deterioration and seeming regression into an inhuman state. However, I want to point out that Poe's representation of decay in this passage depends upon not only the word "Arabesque" but also the word "Hebrew." Poe aligns the healthy, younger Roderick with "Hebrew" and the degenerate, sickly Roderick of the current moment with the "Arabesque." It is the progression between these two terms through which Poe expresses Roderick's decline. These Hebrew and Arabesque images, I argue, draw us not only geographically to the Near East, but also to a particular reading of the Near East as Holy Land.

Moreover, the amalgamation of imagery Poe deploys in "Usher" draws us to a reading of the U.S. South as degraded Holy Land. Roderick, the last of the "the Usher race," epitomizes not only the southern cavalier, but also the biblical

prophet. In the story, Roderick Usher declares, “I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results,” an obscure statement that exemplifies Poe’s definition of prophecy as its meaning becomes intelligible only at the tale’s conclusion (*TP*, 235). As scholars have attempted to diagnose Roderick, to discern what physical or psychological malady causes his deterioration, they have overlooked the vital fact that Roderick’s “nervous affection” seems to provide him with the ability to divine the future (*TP*, 240). The narrator, summoned to the Usher house to support his friend during his mysterious illness, remains skeptical throughout the story, convinced that Roderick’s visionary powers are the result of insanity rather than divine inspiration. Yet even the narrator must confront the accomplishment of Roderick’s prophecies by the tale’s end.

Roderick’s prophecies reinforce the story’s picture of U.S. South as decaying Holy Land. Presented through a series of texts—obscure utterances, paintings, and poetry—Roderick’s prophecies presage the House of Usher’s destruction at the hands of a dark uprising. One of Roderick’s artworks, which the narrator calls a painting of “an idea,” depicts a dark, muddled tomb that foreshadows Madeline’s death and entombment in the house as well as Roderick’s chaotic death at the hands of his erroneously interred sister (*TP*, 237). This picture of the Ushers physically overwhelmed by figures of darkness is reiterated in Roderick’s poem “The Haunted Palace.” The poem further illuminates Roderick’s prophetic vision, narrating the story of an idyllic palace that

grows decrepit and imprisons its resident king, allegorically illustrating the House of Usher's degeneration and the Usher family's virtual incarceration in their home. Erkkila writes that the palace is "in its unsullied form, an emblem of the white mind," and the poem "enacts the compulsive dream-turned-bad of mid-nineteenth-century American fantasy—the fall of the white mind to the dark and 'hideous throng.'"⁵² Stanzas four, five, and six depict an apocalyptic vision of monarchy overthrown:

And all with pearl and ruby glowing
 Was the fair palace door,
 Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing
 And sparkling evermore,
 A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty
 Was but to sing,
 In voices of surpassing beauty,
 The wit and wisdom of their king.

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
 Assailed the monarch's high estate;
 (Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
 Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)
 And, round about his home, the glory

That blushed and bloomed
 Is but a dim-remembered story
 Of the old time entombed.

And travelers now within that valley,
 Through the red-litten windows see
 Vast forms that move fantastically
 To a discordant melody;
 While, like a rapid ghostly river,
 Through the pale door;
 A hideous throng rush out forever,
 And laugh—but smile no more. (*TP*, 238-9)

The king of the “happy valley” depicted in the poem experiences great prosperity and appears to live a life of leisure (*TP*, 238). The king’s life of opulence even includes a group of “Echoes,” servants without individual identities whose single function is to sing the king’s praises. This existence is doomed of course. As E. Arthur Robinson writes, “fantastic forms and sounds” overtake “the palace,” and the “ruler of the realm” loses “control of his domain.”⁵³ Erkkila writes, “the ‘phantoms’ that haunt” the palace “conjoin a terror of the dark other and the democratic mob with the specter of insurrection and blood violence.”⁵⁴

“The Haunted Palace” highlights the association of property and prophecy that connects the U.S. South and Holy Land as revelatory landscapes in the story. Although no slaves are present in “Usher” and no evidence confirms that the Ushers are slaveholders, slavery and the threat of slave insurrection are evoked in the story’s obsession with property. What frightens Roderick is the Ushers’ destruction at the hands of their own property. At the beginning of the story, the narrator observes that Roderick is “enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and whence, for many years, he had never ventured forth” (*TP*, 235). Roderick attributes his illness quite clearly to his house. He believes “the mere form and substance of his family mansion had . . . obtained over his spirit—an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought upon the *morale* of his existence” (*TP*, 235). Roderick believes the house has crushed his spirits, that it has taken control of him and his health. The fact that the house is repeatedly compared to a living, thinking being in the story reinforces this reading. Poe describes the house as having not only a “physique,” a body, but also as having “sentience” and “vacant eye-like windows” (*TP*, 235, 239, 231). The House of Usher embodies, as Joan Dayan writes, the “law’s power to create new, paradoxical, and often unnatural entities.”⁵⁵ In this case, the house is a living, thinking being, yet it remains characterized as property rather than as person. Roderick’s paranoia seems to suggest he is suffering from a psychological disorder, yet if we take him seriously, we can see

his obsession with his home's influence over his health expresses popular fears about slave uprising, about living property suddenly seizing control.

In "Usher," as Poe imagines the U.S. South as the backdrop of racial apocalypse, he refigures resurrection as the return of the repressed other. In the wake of Madeline's presumed death, Roderick and the narrator place Madeline's body in a tomb in the lower level of the Usher mansion. Following this event, Roderick's anxiety increases, and one night comes to a climax as a horrible storm rages outside. The narrator reads aloud from a chivalric romance to calm Roderick, but as he reads, the noises described in the book are echoed in the house. Sounds of wood cracking, a dragon shrieking, and a shield falling upon the floor are all heard coming from somewhere in the house as they are read. The sounds grow louder and closer, culminating in Madeline's sudden reappearance:

As if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there had been found the potency of a spell, the huge antique panels to which the speaker pointed threw slowly back, upon the instant, their ponderous and ebony jaws. It was the work of the rushing gust—but then within those doors there *did* stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold—then,

with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated. (*TP*, 245)

Roderick falls “victim to the terrors he” has “anticipated,” his prophecy accomplished. Although Madeline is an Usher, a member of a privileged family and the mistress of the house, she is pointedly not the master. The woman of privilege, in particular the idealized Southern Lady remained under the control of her male family members. Proslavery rhetoric stressed the ideal woman as “elegant, white, and delicate.”⁵⁶ Dayan writes, this and other tales use the female body to “enact what it means legally to disable, kill off, or nullify the person in the slave body.”⁵⁷ Madeline’s return symbolically enacts a fantasy of slave uprising in two ways. First, it represents the contamination of the Southern lady, the “icon,” as Schueller writes, of “Southern white identity.”⁵⁸ John Boles writes, “No figure has held a more exalted position in the pantheon of southern historical stereotypes” than this Southern Lady, “she of slender waist, light complexion, pure virtue, and selfless, sacrificial devotion to husband, children, and slaves.”⁵⁹ The dirt and blood that stain Madeline’s white clothes suggest racial impurity. In her soiled garments Madeline appears “reduced from a woman of beauty to the frenziedly iterated ‘it’” as her brother Roderick calls her.⁶⁰ Second, Madeline’s resurrection represents the exchange of roles between master and servant. Madeline rebels against her brother’s attempts to control her body by locking her

in a coffin. Of course Roderick and Madeline are not master and slave but brother and sister, twins even, and the narrator mentions their striking resemblance. In their struggle, we see that the line between possessor and possessed, master and servant, person and property, cannot be maintained. Similarly, the house itself is frequently equated with the Ushers. In this story, self and property cannot be clearly distinguished. Mastery, it seems, is just an illusion. The story concludes with a final image of the Usher's submission, the Ushers and their House are swallowed up by the amorphous black presence on their estate, the "deep and dank tarn" (*TP*, 245).

Like the Holy Land of Stephens's *Arabia Petræa*, the House of Usher illustrates the accomplishment of prophecy and as such becomes a supplemental sacred text. As the house sinks into the tarn in the story's conclusion, it becomes clear not only that Roderick was a prophet, but also what his obscure words foretold: a resurrection that *ushers* in a racial apocalypse. This second coming echoes, as William Mentzel Forrest has pointed out, the words of Revelations 1:15.⁶¹ In this final biblical book that foretells the return of the messiah and the world's end, God's "voice" is described "as the sound of many waters."⁶² In "Usher," the narrator hears a "sound like the voice of a thousand waters" as the tarn closes "sullenly and silently over the fragments of the '*House of Usher*'" (*TP*, 245). In this final moment, we see that the House of Usher functions as its own evidentiary text, more convincing than Roderick's ramblings, paintings, or poetry. The skeptical narrator becomes an ideal reader, a reluctant prophet himself, who

is persuaded into belief not by the divinely-inspired Word, but by the Usher house and its environs. As Erkkila writes, this final “collapse of ‘the last of the ancient race of the Ushers’ into ‘a black and lurid tarn’” acts out an “apocalyptic vision of the blackness and blood of progressive history.”⁶³

Resurrection and Racial Apocalypse in “Ligeia”

Poe’s tale “Ligeia,” like “Usher,” culminates in a resurrection that ties a vision of racial apocalypse in the United States to the geography of the Holy Land. As the narrator of the tale recounts his first marriage, he describes his deceased wife Ligeia in terms that both racialize and orientalize her. Ligeia, whose body links racial and Near-Eastern discourses, functions as a site of both racial and religious difference in the story. In “Ligeia” Poe’s interest in biblical prophecy manifests in a particular vision of the Islamic Near East. The prophesied downfall of the Holy Land, realized in the modern Ottoman occupation of Palestine, is referenced in repeated images of Christian spaces invaded by Islamic forces. In place of “Usher’s” biblical imagery, Poe deploys modern Holy Land in “Ligeia” in order to convey the threat of impending racial apocalypse.

Dayan calls Ligeia “the site” of the story’s “crisis of racial identity.”⁶⁴ Poe’s focus on Ligeia’s skin color, dark features, and mysterious parentage evoke contemporary preoccupations with racial difference. Dayan writes, “That Ligeia would not tell her lover about her family, or ever reveal her ‘paternal name’

“makes this lady sound as if she might well be Poe’s rendition of the favorite fiction of white readers: the ‘tragic mulatta’ or ‘octoroon mistress.’”⁶⁵ The narrator describes Ligeia’s skin as “rivaling the purest ivory,” her hair “raven-black” with “naturally-curling tresses,” and her eyes “the most brilliant of black.”⁶⁶ Poe concentrates on Ligeia’s “hair, eyes, and skin,” the “same physiognomic traits” that “taxonomists of color in the Caribbean and South” identified as racially indicative.⁶⁷ In particular the narrator’s insistence on Ligeia’s ivory skin speaks to anxieties about racial purity. Ligeia’s presumed whiteness is thrown into question by her “strangeness,” a quality the narrator claims pervades her features (*TP*, 655). Similarly, Ligeia’s passion suggests some tension between outward appearance and inner nature. The narrator comments, “Of all the women whom I have ever known, she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion” (*TP*, 657). The narrator expresses his own estimation of Ligeia’s appearance as a conflict of emotions. Ligeia’s eyes, “which at once so delighted and appalled,” resonate with the sexual desire and disgust projected onto the non-white female body.

As the narrator racializes Ligeia, referring to her as a “shadow,” he simultaneously orientalizes her (*TP*, 654). Ligeia’s racially unreadable face produces the “radiance of an opium-dream,” a common image of the Turkish Near East (*TP*, 655). Ligeia’s facial features speak to other Near-Eastern geographies as well. The “delicate outlines of” Ligeia’s “nose” resemble the “medallions of the Hebrews,” and her black eyes are compared to “the gazelle

eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad,” a reference to the Persian landscape inhabited by the title character of Frances Sheridan’s 1767 tale *The History of Nourjahad* (*TP*, 655).⁶⁸ Ligeia’s beauty appears to the narrator like “the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth—the beauty of the fabulous Houris of the Turk” (*TP*, 655). Comparing Ligeia to the Houris of Islamic tradition, the legendary beauty who waits for the devout Muslim in paradise, Poe strengthens the reader’s apprehension of her sexual availability. Scheuller notes that Ligeia’s extensive learning—she is “deeply proficient” in “the classical tongues” and “all the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science”—connects her to the culture of the Near East (*TP*, 657). Schueller writes, “Ligeia clearly represents an Oriental sexuality and knowledge, the control over which was a defining feature of EuroAmerican nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century.”⁶⁹

As Ligeia is identified with the Near East, she is importantly identified with religious otherness. Repeatedly, the narrator refers to his and Ligeia’s love for one another as a kind of “idolatry” (*TP*, 658). The narrator claims their marriage was “presided over” by “the wan and misty-winged *Ashtophet* of idolatrous Egypt” (*TP*, 654). Later, he claims Ligeia’s “passionate devotion” to himself “amounted to idolatry” (*TP*, 658). As in historical frontier novels, here the invocation of idolatry suggests that interracial marriage is a religious transgression. Revisiting the Near Eastern images Poe uses to describe Ligeia, we see that he focuses on Jewish and, predominantly, Muslim images. Ligeia is associated with racial otherness and with religious otherness simultaneously. If the House of Usher associates the

U.S. South with the decaying Holy Land, Ligeia connects blackness to the Islamic Near East.

In contrast to Ligeia's embodiment of religious and racial otherness, the "Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine," who becomes the narrator's second wife, exemplifies the ideal of the Southern lady (*TP*, 660). Rowena "fair-haired and blue-eyed" exhibits none of the racial ambiguity that marks Ligeia (*TP*, 660). The Southern lady, "beautiful, innocent, submissive," and "pure" could not show signs of any racial uncertainty, because, as Schueller writes, she "literally represented Southern white identity."⁷⁰ Pointedly, Rowena, "a maiden and a daughter so beloved," boasts an identifiable and aristocratic parentage (*TP*, 660). The narrator often refers to his second wife by her title "Lady," in contrast to his more familiar references to Ligeia. The Southern lady Rowena represents was necessarily Christian. While Ligeia is associated with Islamic images and Near Eastern learning, Rowena is housed within a former Christian abbey, a place some critics have suggested calls to mind the "convent."⁷¹

The narrator decorates the abbey that houses this female embodiment of whiteness with Near-Eastern furnishings. Like the modern Holy Land (at least in American perceptions), the abbey, a formerly Christian space, is colonized by Islamic objects. The bridal chamber, in particular, showcases an excess of Near Eastern ornamentation. From the ceiling hangs a censer made of gold chain, "Saracenic in pattern" (*TP*, 660). The room includes "ottomans and golden candelabra of Eastern figure," and in each corner of the five-sided room stands

“on end a giant sarcophagus of black granite, from the tombs of the kings over against Luxor” (*TP*, 661). Most remarkable, however, are the fabrics covered in Arabesque patterns that suffuse the entire bridal chamber:

But in the draping of the apartment lay, alas! The chief fantasy of all. The lofty walls, gigantic in height—even unproportionably so—were hung from summit to foot, in vast folds, with a heavy and massive-looking tapestry—tapestry of a material which was found alike as a carpet on the floor, as a covering for the ottomans and the ebony bed, as a canopy for the bed and as the gorgeous volutes of the curtains which partially shaded the window. The material was the richest cloth of gold. It was spotted all over, at regular intervals, with arabesque figures, about a foot in diameter, and wrought upon the cloth in patterns of the most jetty black. (*TP*, 661)

The room, completely enveloped in arabesque designs, reads as a kind of harem, as Schueller points out. The arabesque figures associate the room with western perceptions of the Near East, and as they recall Ligeia—the arabesque design is “jetty black” like Ligeia’s hair, eyes, and eye-lashes—they signify an additional female presence in the room. The narrator claims upon bringing his new bride into this room that Ligeia remains “unforgotten,” and indeed her presence can be felt increasingly within the bridal chamber (*TP*, 660). An “enclosed” space, “decorated in Eastern splendor,” the bridal chamber, Schueller

writes, "like the harem, houses not one woman but two—Ligeia and Rowena."⁷²

The Near Eastern décor that serves to transform the bridal chamber into a harem introduces further connections between the Holy Land and the U.S. South. The bridal chamber that houses Rowena, the apparent Southern lady, and Ligeia, the emblem of racial otherness and darkness, resembles the polygamous system of the plantation. Schueller writes, "The Southern lady, like the slave woman, was also . . . a part of the harem of the master."⁷³ U.S. writers, particularly abolitionist writers, often drew this kind of analogy between the plantation and the Near Eastern harem.

The story's final image of Ligeia's resurrection in Rowena's body, links racial degeneration with the degeneration of the Holy Land. One night in the bridal chamber the Narrator senses a mysterious presence in the room, spotting only a "shadow" in his opium haze (*TP*, 662). As Rowena, suffering from a mysterious disease, drinks a glass of wine prescribed for her ailment, the narrator believes he sees "three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid" fall into her glass (*TP*, 663). Person writes that this scene represents the "poisoning of the white female body with dark 'blood.'"⁷⁴ The narrator claims, "immediately subsequent to the fall of the ruby-drops, a rapid change for the worse took place in the disorder of my wife" (*TP*, 663). A few nights later, alone with the body of his dead wife, the narrator watches in horror as "the corpse" stirs; "the thing that was enshrouded advanced boldly and palpably into the middle of the apartment (*TP*, 665). Asking, "Could it, indeed be the *living* Rowena

who confronted me?" the narrator realizes the shrouded figure—taller and darker than Rowena—is in fact the “Lady Ligeia” (*TP*, 665, 666). As Schuller notes, the “aspect of the transformed Rowena/Ligeia that is emphasized the most is her blackness.”⁷⁵ The narrator describes her “huge masses of long and disheveled hair” as “*blacker than the raven wings at midnight!*” (*TP*, 665). Her eyes are “full,” “black,” and “wild” (*TP*, 666). As Person remarks, this resurrection “issues forth a nightmarish amalgamation . . . the exchange of light woman for dark, the total eclipse of whiteness by blackness.”⁷⁶

“Ligeia” like “Usher” climaxes in a millennial moment, a sudden reappearance of a once-dead figure that reveals the fragility of the white nation. As an embodiment of racial otherness, Ligeia takes possession of Rowena, symbolically reenacting the physical and legal possession of the Holy Land by Eastern forces. The racial apocalypse Ligeia initiates is figured as the occupation of white, Christian space by the Near-Eastern other. Ironically, this very act of degeneration, a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, reaffirms the notion of the United States as new Holy Land.

Pym and Prophecy

Poe’s single novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, contains by many scholars’ accounts, the author’s most provocative statement on race in the United States. Following Sidney Kaplan, many critics have been quick to see *Pym* as an

“allegory of race.”⁷⁷ J. Gerald Kennedy writes that for many critics, “the Tsalal episode has thus presented incontrovertible evidence of Poe’s specifically Southern racism.”⁷⁸ Likewise, the setting for the Tsalal massacre, an island engraved with languages associated with the biblical lands, appears to reinforce this conviction of Poe’s racism. Sidney Kaplan argues that the phrases inscribed on Tsalal suggest Poe accepted the common belief that the biblical curse of Ham was justification for U.S. slavery.⁷⁹ Presumably, if blackness is aligned with racial apocalypse in *Pym* as well as in Poe’s other writings, then it would seem whiteness must stand for restoration and salvation.

At the conclusion of the narrative, Pym and Dirk escape the island in a small canoe, abducting an islander named Nu-Nu as they flee. Paddling farther southward, the three men find themselves enveloped in a “white ashy shower” (*TP*, 882). In darkness, they approach the “white curtain” of a cataract and find themselves surrounded by “white birds” (*TP*, 882). In response to this strange scene, Nu-Nu shouts the Tsalal word for white “*Tekeli-li*,” stirs, and dies suddenly. In the last sentences of the narrative, Pym and Peters continue sailing through the blinding white haze toward the cataract, where they abruptly encounter a mysterious “shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men,” whose skin is the color of “the perfect whiteness of the snow” (*TP*, 882).

Although some critics have suggested that this indefinite conclusion to the narrative shows Pym saved by a nebulous vision of whiteness, it is not

entirely clear whether this white figure represents salvation or danger. Erkkila pointedly writes that this “flight away from history into fantasies of whiteness and purity” remains ambiguous: “Is it biblical apocalypse or metaphysical sign, utopian dream or perfect terror, pure race or pure hoax?”⁸⁰ What kind of racial apocalypse does Poe actually represent in *Pym*? As Kennedy notes, *Pym* is as concerned with the “terror of whiteness” as it is with “Southern anxiety about a general slave insurrection.”⁸¹ Even as Pym remains ignorant of its effects, Poe is clearly aware of how whiteness operates as a “source of terror.”⁸² The horrors of whiteness are represented throughout *Pym*. When confronted with any white object, the Tsalal natives scream and run. Though Pym interprets the natives’ actions as superstitious, whiteness does represent danger to the islanders. The explorers of the *Jane Guy* have every intention of exploiting and colonizing Tsalal. At another point in the text, Pym applies whiteface and is able to frighten his original ship’s mutineers. Led by a “Black Cook,” who “enacts a fantasy of slave insurrection,” these mutineers cower at the sight of Pym disguised as a white ghost.⁸³ In the chaos that follows Pym and his fellow counter-insurgents kill all but one of the ship’s mutinous crew, Pym illustrates that racial apocalypse may be initiated by white insurrection as well as black. Given this ambiguous portrait of whiteness, can we determine what Poe wants to say about race and the American New Israel?

On Tsalal, Pym remarks that the island brings to “mind the descriptions given by travelers of those dreary regions marking the site of degraded Babylon”

(*TP*, 876). Pym, perhaps unwittingly, compares Tsalal to the ancient kingdom of Babylonia, an empire that defeated the Israelites, exiling the chosen people from their Promised Land. Within Jewish and Christian traditions, this exile has been understood as a prophesied event, resulting from the Israelites' wayward behavior and disregard for religious law. Poe was certainly aware of Babylon's significance. He even mentions it. Less than fifteen years later, Frederick Douglass would reference the same prophesied biblical narrative when he admonished the United States for perpetuating the existence of slavery. In his speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" Douglass warns, "it is dangerous to copy the example of a nation whose crimes, towering up to heaven, were thrown down by the breath of the Almighty, burying that nation in irrecoverable ruin!"⁸⁴ Douglass reminds his audience that as a result of these crimes, the Israelites were exiled to "Babylon," left with mere memories of "Zion."⁸⁵ Although Douglass neglects to narrate exactly how the destruction of the American New Israel may be accomplished, allowing his audience to use its imagination, Poe does not. Babylonian exile is symbolically reenacted in the Tsalal massacre. Poe here draws attention to the vulnerability of the American New Israel even as he affirms the United States' new Holy Land standing. Poe's representation of the Tsalal massacre clearly suggests the inevitability of racial apocalypse in the United States. In *Pym*, the threat of racially-motivated violence virtually affirms the United States' standing as the American New Israel. Yet the very language that confers this new Holy Land status also articulates the nation's

vulnerability. Poe confirms the conception of the white, Christian nation promoted in the self-consciously national literature of the period, but as he does so he suggests that the racial logic embedded in U.S. national identity portends nothing short of national ruin. For all his interest in the unfolding of biblical prophecy in the Near East, Poe becomes in his own way a prophet of the American Israel, consolidating the identity of the new chosen nation and announcing its doom.

Notes

¹ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 32.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, in *Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 849. Further references to Poe's writings will be to this edition and will be parenthetically cited *TP*.

⁴ Sidney Kaplan, "Introduction," in Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), vii-xxv.

⁵ Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 37.

⁶ J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg, "Introduction: Poe, Race, and contemporary Criticism" in *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), xiii.

⁷ Betsy Erkkila, "The Poetics of Whiteness: Poe and the Racial Imaginary," in *Romancing the Shadow*, 43.

⁸ Joan Dayan, "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves," *American Literature* 66, no. 2 (June 1994): 241.

⁹ L. Cecil Moffitt, "Poe's 'Arabesque,'" *Comparative Literature* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1966): 57. In this 1966 essay, Moffitt first drew attention to the influence of Near Eastern culture on Poe's writing. Moffitt claimed Poe's persistent engagement with the arabesque, as both an image and category of storytelling, revealed the author's interest in the "Eastern

race and geographical area" (57). Subsequent studies, such as Patricia Smith's "Poe's Arabesque" and Jacob Rama Berman's "Domestic Terror and Poe's Arabesque Interior," have continued to investigate Poe's interest in Near Eastern culture. "Poe's Arabesque," *Poe Studies* 7, no. 2 (1974): 42-45; "Domestic Terror and Poe's Arabesque Interior," *ESC* 31, no. 1 (March 2005): 128-50.

¹⁰ Berman, "Domestic Terror," 132.

¹¹ Erkkila, "The Poetics of Whiteness," 45.

¹² *Ibid.*, 46, 49.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁴ Malini Johar Schueller, "Harems, Orientalist Subversions, and the Crisis of Nationalism: The Case of Edgar Allan Poe and 'Ligeia,'" *Criticism* 37, no. 4 (Fall 1995): 601.

¹⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, "Palæstine," *Southern Literary Messenger*, February 1836, 152.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Joan Dayan, "Poe, Persons, and Property," in *Romancing the Shadow*, 110.

¹⁸ Elise Lemire, "'The Murders in the Rue Morgue': Amalgamation Discourses and the Race Riots of 1838 in Poe's Philadelphia," in *Romancing the Shadow*, 177.

¹⁹ Dayan, "Poe, Persons, and Property," 119.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Erkkila, "The Poetics of Whiteness," 55.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, 234. Further references will be to this edition and will be parenthetically cited *TP*.

²⁵ See Dayan, "Poe, Persons, and Property," 119; Erkkila, "Poetics of Whiteness," 58-59.

²⁶ According to Meredith McGill, Poe's independence and in particular his "insistence on critical impartiality" made him attractive as an exemplary American author to the Young Americans, "an influential group of literary nationalists." "Poe, Literary Nationalism, and Authorial Identity," in *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): 271. For a brief period between 1843 and 1845, Poe was held up as the quintessential American

author by the Young Americans. Poe's most successful poem "The Raven" was published to great acclaim through a Young American sponsored press, the Library of American Books.

²⁷ David Faflik, "South of the 'Border,' Or, Poe's *Pym*: A Case Study in Region, Race, and American Literary History," *Mississippi Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2004): 272.

²⁸ Kennedy and Weissberg, "Introduction," xiv.

²⁹ James Russell Lowell quoted in McGill, "Poe, Literary Nationalism," 278.

³⁰ Poe, "Palæstine," 152.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² J.O. Bailey, "Poe's Palæstine," *American Literature* 13, no. 1 (1941): 44. The first American edition of Abraham Rees's, *The Cyclopædia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature* was published in 47 volumes between 1805 and 1825. Philadelphia: Samuel F. Bedford. It is worth noting that in the United States at this time, there were no copyright laws. Poe was a critic of plagiarism and a supporter of international copyright laws. For Poe's attitude towards issues of plagiarism and copyright, see McGill, "Poe, Literary Nationalism."

³³ Bailey, "Poe's Palæstine," 53.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Bailey writes that Poe was "less governed by the desire for accuracy . . . than by an attraction to the bizarre." "Poe's Palæstine," 57.

⁴⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of Stephens' 'Arabia Petræa,'" in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 549. Further references will be to this edition and will be parenthetically cited *TP*.

⁴¹ In the review, Poe goes to great lengths to prove that Stephens did not pass through Idumea. However, Poe then proceeds to demonstrate how Stephens could have in fact traversed Idumea without violating biblical prophecy.

⁴² Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 46.

⁴³ For Poe, the obscurity of the curse of Edom (and of all prophecies) is “part of” the “essence” of biblical prophecy (*TP* 554). Poe writes, “in *all* instances, the most strictly literal interpretation” of the prophets “will apply,” but this literal interpretation will always be obscured until the prophecy has been accomplished (*TP* 554).

⁴⁴ William Miller developed a form of biblical interpretation and numerical calculation that indicated the Second Coming would commence in 1843. His followers experienced their first disappointment in 1843 and recalculated the date of the impending Second Coming, settling on October 22, 1844. At their height, the number of Millerites is estimated to have been anywhere between 10,000 to one million. See Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, ed., *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁴⁵ There has been little critical interest in religious themes in Poe’s work. William Mentzel Forrest’s *Biblical Allusions in Poe* is perhaps the only extended study of Poe and religion. Forrest claims that there is little evidence Poe practiced Christianity as an adult, but that the author would have been familiar with Protestant Christian practice and teaching through his experiences at school in England, at West Point, and in the army. Forrest claims that the profuse scriptural references in Poe’s work suggests the author was not only knowledgeable of, but also deeply interested in religion. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1928).

⁴⁶ Leland S. Person, “Poe’s Philosophy of Amalgamation: Reading Racism in the Tales,” in *Romancing the Shadow*, 216.

⁴⁷ Louis D. Rubin, *The Edge of the Swamp: A Study in the Literature and Society of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 159-60.

⁴⁸ Faflik, ““South of the ‘Border,’” 277.

⁴⁹ See William Robert Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

⁵⁰ Poe, “Palæstine,” 153.

⁵¹ See Berman, “Domestic Terror.”

⁵² Erkkila, “The Poetics of Whiteness,” 58.

⁵³ E. Arthur Robinson, “Order and Sentience in ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’” *PMLA* 76, no. 1 (March 1961): 72.

⁵⁴ Erkkila, “The Poetics of Whiteness,” 58.

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- ⁵⁵ Dayan, "Poe, Persons, and Property," 110.
- ⁵⁶ Dayan, "Amorous Bondage," 241.
- ⁵⁷ Dayan, "Poe, Persons, and Property," 113.
- ⁵⁸ Schueller, "Harems, Oriental Subversions," 614.
- ⁵⁹ John B. Boles, *The South through Time: The History of an American Region*, vol. 1 (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 240.
- ⁶⁰ Dayan, "Amorous Bondage," 241.
- ⁶¹ Forrest, *Biblical Allusions in Poe*, 158.
- ⁶² Revelation 1:15 (Authorized [King James] Version).
- ⁶³ Erkkila, "The Poetics of Whiteness," 59.
- ⁶⁴ Dayan, "Amorous Bondage," 260.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Edgar Allan Poe, "Ligeia," in *Complete Tales and Poems*, 655. Further references will be to this edition and will be parenthetically cited *TP*.
- ⁶⁷ Dayan, "Amorous Bondage," 260.
- ⁶⁸ Frances Sheridan, *The History of the Nourjahad* (London: J. Dodsley, 1767).
- ⁶⁹ Schueller, "Harems, Oriental Subversions," 608.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 614.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 612.
- ⁷² Ibid.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 613.
- ⁷⁴ Person, "Poe's Philosophy of Amalgamation," 213.
- ⁷⁵ Schueller, "Harems, Oriental Subversions," 616.
- ⁷⁶ Person, "Poe's Philosophy of Amalgamation," 213.
- ⁷⁷ Sidney Kaplan, "Introduction," vii.
- ⁷⁸ J. Gerald Kennedy, "'Trust No Man': Poe, Douglass, and the Culture of Slavery," in *Romancing the Shadow*, 242.
- ⁷⁹ Sidney Kaplan, "Introduction," xxi-xxiii.
- ⁸⁰ Erkkila, "Poetics of Whiteness," 57, 58.
- ⁸¹ Kennedy, "Trust No Man," 243, 242.
- ⁸² Ibid., 243.

⁸³ John Carlos Rowe, "Edgar Allan Poe's Imperial Fantasy and the American Frontier," in *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 74.

⁸⁴ Douglass, "What to the Slave?" 116.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

The New (African) American Israel:

Holy Land Mania, Martin Delany, and the Black Nationalist Mission

As we saw in chapters one and two, images of the modern Holy Land proved useful in consolidating forms of nationalism in the early nineteenth century. This chapter will demonstrate how these images also proved useful in critiquing those forms of nationalism and their exclusions, particularly for the U.S. antislavery movement of the 1840s and 1850s. Rhetorically and typologically, the Holy Land served as a model for the U.S. nation, one that during the nineteenth century assumed racial as well as religious connotations. In the fiction of Cooper, Child, Sedgwick, and Poe, the Holy Land became a key site through which national belonging was imagined and national anxieties were displaced. In the Gothic fiction of Poe, the Holy Land became a key site from which to articulate national anxieties. As Americans encountered the physical territory of Palestine for the first time, their exploration and invention of the Holy Land provided the terms and tools for constructing the American frontier and the ideology of racial difference that developed in conjunction with it. In their invocations of the Holy Land, early-national writers bequeathed a legacy of religious and racial otherness tacitly aligned. I argue in this chapter that in the wake of these early-national

representations, Martin Delany, the author, activist, African explorer, soldier, and Freedmen's Bureau official, often referred to as the "Father of Black Nationalism," appropriated the discourse of the Holy Land in order to work through racial hierarchy's impact on the nation.¹ In his single work of fiction, the novel *Blake; or, The Huts of America* (1861-62), Delany invokes the Holy Land to illuminate the deeply problematic role of race in the ongoing construction of the American New Israel and to reveal the limitations of the antislavery movement's critique of the nation. Most importantly, Delany demonstrates how U.S. identification with the Holy Land can be used to forward black nationalism.

"Escaping or overthrowing slavery clearly required as much geography as theology," Stephanie LeMenager writes.² In *Blake*, Delany expresses the critical significance of the relationship between the two in an appeal that references Ethiopia, is uttered in Cuba, and yet has everything to do with the Holy Land:

How long, O Lord! Ere thou wilt speak
 In thy almighty thundering voice,
 To bid the oppressors fetters break,
 And Ethiopia's sons rejoice?³

The Cuban poet Placido recites these lines to the coalition of antislavery insurrectionists that Delany's title character Blake has assembled in Cuba. As Placido delivers these lines, he supplants U.S. covenantal culture—an imagined

community shaped by the belief of U.S. colonization as “divine errand”—with a new transnational black community.⁴ Placido replaces the tropes of Exodus, which in nationalist rhetoric positioned the United States as Israel’s inheritor, a new holy land for a new chosen people, with those of Ethiopia. In the African American religious tradition, Albert J. Raboteau explains, “Ethiopia,” an allusion to the biblical Psalm 68:31 — “Princes shall come out of Egypt and Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God”—has signified “the divinely appointed destiny of black people.”⁵ In *Blake*, Placido’s image of Ethiopia serves as the emblem of a new covenantal culture, a new chosen people united in their quest to overthrow the Spanish government in Cuba and liberate enslaved Africans across the Americas. Placido’s “Ethiopia” also highlights the contingency of place, suggesting that the “sacred” can shift. Ethiopia and Cuba provide alternative sacred geographies that help Delany destabilize prevailing ideological structures. In a sense, Cuba, *Blake*’s final setting, becomes more than an alternative space for the consolidation of black nationalism; it becomes a *newer* American Israel. By identifying spaces outside the United States with the Holy Land, Delany reveals the constructed character of sacred space and challenges the racial hierarchy of the United States. Delany uses religious identification, a new chosen people—Ethiopians—and a new Holy Land—Cuba—to posit a black nationalism not in the image of the United States, but rather in the image of an alternative sacred geography, showing how the “oppressors fetters” not only

physically bind the enslaved but also ideologically bind the oppressors themselves.

Although scholars have explored various places toward which Delany directed his “Zionist desire,” including Africa, the Caribbean, and South America, they have yet to consider the Holy Land implications of Delany’s black nationalism or the centrality of religious identity in *Blake*, a novel that largely assumes the form of a missionary narrative.⁶ Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* and Eric Sundquist’s *To Wake the Nations*, both published in 1993, direct attention to Delany’s then-neglected novel and its representation of slavery and racial domination as hemispheric phenomena that required “a view that embraced several cultures, several nations.”⁷ Although Gilroy’s and Sundquist’s seminal studies highlight the way religious identification is implicated in Delany’s transnational project—Gilroy writes that Delany “looks to Jewish experiences of dispersal as a model for comprehending the history of black Americans,” and “cites this history as a means to focus his own Zionist proposals”; Sundquist writes that in *Blake*, “Christ’s Second Coming” is united with “the potential terror of slave violence”—subsequent scholars have largely understood *Blake* as a repudiation of religion, analyzing instead Delany’s “faith” in global economics and emigration.⁸ Even as some scholars have explored Delany’s fascination with Egypt, in particular with Moses and freemasonry, they have emphasized Delany’s interest in black elevation over and against religion.⁹ In this chapter, I aim to show that *Blake*’s racial and religious themes are deeply intertwined, that not only do

African, Caribbean, and Latin American geographies structure Delany's analysis of hemispheric racism, but that religious geographies in particular structure Delany's black nationalist project.

As Blake, Delany's prophetic protagonist, travels through the southern United States, Black Atlantic, and Cuba, attempting to win converts with his "gospel of insurrection," the Holy Land becomes the site through which the novel's characters negotiate their autonomy, critique the United States, and eventually proclaim their sense of belonging in an emerging transnational African American community.¹⁰ In the novel's first part, Blake overlays U.S. landscape with narrative, making "Canaan" exist "here" as he lays the foundations for a nation-wide slave insurrection (*BL*, 35). In the novel's second part, Blake traverses Cuba, superimposing the defining features of the modern Holy Land—its occupation by a so-called tyrannical, immoral power and its extensive religious multiplicity—over the politically contested Caribbean island. The Holy Land not only connects these two discrete parts, which scholars have struggled to reconcile, but also sustains a dialogical relationship between them. Parts I and II respectively place traditional and radical models of Holy Land identification in conversation, exploring the possibilities and attendant dangers of an African American nationalism grounded in covenantal culture. Fellow abolitionist writers, including Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe, similarly reference the Holy Land in order to comment upon the state of racial inequality in the United States. But whereas these writers use the terminology of mission, conversion,

and familiar Exodus tropes to counter pro-slavery arguments and create space for African Americans within U.S. national culture, Delany uses Holy Land identification to transform the antislavery mission into a black-nationalist vision.¹¹ Ultimately, Delany's creation of Cuba as a newer Holy Land allows him to develop a vision of African American nationalism capable of nurturing pluralistic religious identity, and in doing so, challenges the very structures of U.S. racial hierarchy.

The Antislavery Mission and the African American Israel

"Judah continues to be the most interesting portion of the world," asserts the author of an 1841 article that appears in *The Colored American*, the pre-eminent African American periodical of its day.¹² The simple inclusion of the word "continues" in the article suggests African American literary reflections on sacred space extended beyond the images of Egypt and Exodus that have long been considered foundational to African American literature and religion.¹³ The antislavery movement was not immune to the Holy Land mania that gripped the United States in the nineteenth century. Looking to contemporary Palestine and Syria, black abolitionists participated in an increasingly popular cultural activity, and they saw revealing parallels between the plight of African Americans and modern Israelites as peoples continually oppressed. *The Colored American* describes the Holy Land as an "extraordinary land" devastated by a "striking

succession of great public calamities,” a land that still inspires “enthusiasm.” Clearly, *The Colored American’s* readership was invested in the modern as well as the biblical Holy Land. “Judah” becomes as meaningful as “Canaan” when the similarities between contemporary Palestine and the United States as places occupied by “the most desolating government[s] of the world” are exposed.¹⁴ In envisioning African Americans as Israelites, antislavery activists not only positioned U.S. slaveholders as Egyptians, they suggested they were Turks.

In *Blake*, published serially between 1861-62, Delany makes an analogous comparison. Our first introduction to the novel’s title character is as a passenger on a riverboat called the “Sultana” (*BL*, 14). The sudden appearance of the “Sultana” on the Mississippi, a boat whose name references the reviled Ottoman leader, suggests palpable similarities between the so-called tyrannical Muslim empire and the United States. An agent of Blake’s captivity, which returns him to his master Colonel Franks, Delany’s Sultana equates American slavery with the “unrighteous oppression” perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire in the Near East.¹⁵ For Delany, images of the Holy Land provide a way to intervene in covenantal culture and its insidious impact on the ideology of race in the United States.

The contemporary parallels drawn by *The Colored American* explain why Delany might write a Holy Land narrative rather than, for instance, an African one, even as he was preparing for his famous expedition to the Niger Valley.¹⁶ In many ways, it is not surprising that during the same period Delany entertained the idea of African colonization as liberation, he would engage the Holy Land as

a model for nationalism. Robert Levine has shown that Delany was interested in religion from the earliest days of his writing career, devoting attention to Christianity as a meaningful component of African American culture and a factor in liberation in the newspapers *Mystery* and the *North Star*.¹⁷ The Holy Land was an especially charged space in the nineteenth century because it factored so centrally in the rhetorical construction of U.S. national identity and as such became an important battleground in the biblically-themed slavery debates of the 1840s and 1850s. Pro-slavery advocates often referenced the Hebrews' ownership of slaves in the biblical Canaan. Antislavery activists, such as Theodore Parker, in turn, invoked "Jerusalem" as they argued against the morality of slavery.¹⁸ The Holy Land provided a lens through which to view and measure other spaces, and it was used to rhetorical effect by pro- and antislavery activists alike. Ussama Makdisi writes, the most sacred of Holy Land sites "symbolized . . . not a pure Christian space in the midst of an imagined African or Indian barbarism but an enduring reference guide."¹⁹

Noting the presence of religious rhetoric in antislavery appeals is hardly a revelation, and yet scholars have been reticent to connect the Christian themes and biblical invocations of U.S. abolitionist and African American writings with growing U.S. interest in the Holy Land from the 1830s through the 1850s. A number of African American periodicals provide evidence that the Holy Land factored importantly and broadly in the antislavery movement. As early as 1838, a series called "Mr. Buckingham's Lectures" appeared in *The Colored American*,

providing the magazine's readership with information on the biblical and political history of the Near East.²⁰ Douglass's *The North Star* kept its audience eagerly apprised of the efforts of the "Dead Sea exploring party," led by Lieutenant Stephen F. Lynch in 1848.²¹ That same year, *The North Star* also published an extract from Lamartine's famous travel narrative *A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* that highlights the manner in which travel in the Holy Land erases class distinctions.²² During the 1840s and 1850s, *The National Era* commonly published reviews of significant Holy Land books, including the U.S. edition of Lamartine's *A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*, Horatius Bonas's *The Lands of Promise*, and William M. Thomson's *The Land and the Book*.²³ Holy Land-related poetry also filled the pages of *The National Era*. The speaker of 1848's anonymous "The Holy Land" imagines a detailed Holy Land landscape, as does Caroline Chesebro in the 1851 poem "A Soul's Pilgrimage Through Holy Land."²⁴ Both poems juxtapose the perpetuation of slavery to the attainment of salvation in the Holy Land. When Chesebro asks pointedly, "Doth peace lie in escape or in submission?" it is clear that images of the Holy Land as well as Egypt factor in abolitionist rhetoric.²⁵ From October of 1847 through March of 1848, *The National Era* printed an ongoing series titled "The Holy Land" written by none other than the famed British writer and abolitionist Harriet Martineau. Over eight installments, Miss Martineau's observations provided the *Era's* audience with first-hand knowledge of Palestine's landscape and inhabitants. Although African American and abolitionist interest in the Holy Land has been largely overlooked

by such scholars as Scott Trafton and John Davis, who maintain “Egypt, rather than Israel, was the locus of black interest in the Bible lands,” it is clear that African American literature participated in the complex conversation about race, religion, and sacred space that marked the early decades of Holy Land fascination.²⁶

Unmistakably at the center of that conversation were the U.S. Holy Land missionaries principally responsible for shaping American perceptions of Palestine and Syria in the antebellum period.²⁷ U.S. missionaries helped make the Near East the Holy Land through their biblical interpretations of the landscape, and perhaps nowhere was the association between nation, religion, and race more pronounced than in the writings of the U.S. Holy Land missionaries. In the nineteenth century, U.S. readers eagerly digested the impressions of missionaries in early memoirs such as those of Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons, and they kept abreast of missionary progress in the region through *The Missionary Herald*, the official publication of the ABCFM.²⁸ William Thomson’s bestseller *The Land and the Book*, a religious travelogue published two years before *Blake*, eventually became “a fixture in countless Sunday school libraries and one of the most popular books ever written by a missionary.”²⁹ Besides detailing the relative successes and failures of Protestant Christian conversion—their professed ambition—missionary narratives provided readers with impressions of Holy Land topography, sacred sites and ruins, and the character of the Holy Land’s current inhabitants. As Thomson states in *The Land*

and the Book, his “object” in the Holy Land, was not only to evangelize, but also “to study the land and its customs . . . to peruse the Word of God by the light which these shed upon it.”³⁰ Missionaries’ attempts to Protestantize the Holy Land, which they hoped would counter “the surrounding empire of darkness and delusion,” were complimented by their efforts to map and consecrate the Holy Land as a supplemental sacred text.³¹ Efforts toward converting the inhabitants of the Holy Land were justified by American chosenness; mapping sacred space in turn justified that sense of national chosenness.

Ultimately, as Holy Land missionaries confirmed biblical history (through geography and excavation) and enacted biblical prophecy (through proselytizing and conversion), they re-affirmed U.S. covenantal culture, demarcating a community founded on religious affinity and a shared national errand. The project of conversion in the Holy Land was presumably aimed toward building a transnational Protestant Christian community based on religious affinity, an ambition effected through proselytizing and education, but it also and sometimes contradictorily affirmed a national community forged through U.S. affiliation with ancient Palestine, an outcome effected through publication and readership. When the ABCFM launched its mission to the Near East in 1819, it sought to create a “city on a hill,” to reverse the Puritan errand, an errand imagined to be a recreation of the biblical Exodus.³² In a revealing anecdote published in the *Missionary Herald*, the missionary George Whiting shows how Americanism and Protestantism are equated in the Holy Land. Claiming that potential converts in

Palestine tell him they eagerly desire to “*become Americans* at once,” Whiting insists that the inhabitants of Palestine have made a comical mistake.³³ Yet, even as Whiting corrects the mistaken natives, and possibly his readers, saying he seeks only to make Christians, not Americans, he has already betrayed the nationalism inherent in his missionary endeavor and communicated the unattainability of “American” conversion for these Near Eastern residents. The exclusions of this nation are made transparent in the *Missionary Herald*. Expressing doubt that Near Eastern natives can ever be truly part of his American community, the missionary Eli Smith writes, “it requires constant exertion and effort to prevent an impression, that we are bound by brotherly love to those whom we admit to the communion, to place them on an equality with regard to support.”³⁴ Smith ironically uses religious language here—“brotherly love”—to express the impossibility of his familial compatibility with the Holy Land Christian. Smith, by insisting on his difference from the Holy Land native, even the converted Christian native, endorses a national covenant that requires religious as well as racial sameness.

Delany studied missionary writings in the years leading up to *Blake's* publication, and he reveals his particular fascination with missionaries' dissemination of racial ideology and their impact on nation building in the *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* (1861), a record of Delany's colonial venture in Africa.³⁵ In *Blake*, Delany presents the globe as a network of sacred spaces in which borders are constituted through religious belief and practice, and

he casts his protagonist in the role of missionary and eventual political leader. By crafting *Blake* as a missionary narrative, Delany engages with one current manifestation of U.S. covenantal culture, and he suggests that the very structure of contemporary U.S. Holy Land identification precludes African American inclusion in the nation. Additionally, *Blake's* missionary theme evokes the antislavery movement and its commonplace rhetoric of mission, enabling Delany to engage with U.S. abolitionism as he critiques the framework of Holy Land nationalism.³⁶ Ultimately, Delany uses missionary narrative tropes—the sacralization of landscape through biblical narrative, the excavation of “lost” sacred sites, and the invocation of millennialism—in an attempt to transform the antislavery mission into a black nationalist vision. As *Blake* begins, the novel bears much in common with other works of sentimental antislavery fiction. When Maggie, the wife of a Mississippi slave named Henry Holland, is sold away by her master Colonel Franks, drama ensues much like it does in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.³⁷ Subsequently, Henry, or Blake as he finally calls himself, declares his freedom and retreats into the wilderness, experiencing a personal conversion that occasions his mission, an event deeply similar to Douglass's own conversion. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845).³⁸ Traveling from plantation to plantation, Blake spreads a message of imminent revolt through the U.S. South. When this evangelical crusade seems complete, Blake departs the United States for Cuba, where his wife has been sold and where the distinctions between the antislavery movement and Delany's

nationalist mission become increasingly evident. Like his fellow abolitionist writers, Delany employs Holy Land imagery to comment upon the state of racial inequality in the United States. Unlike Stowe and Douglass, who reference the Holy Land in order to make space for African Americans within U.S. national culture, Delany uses Holy Land identification to craft an entirely new covenant that challenges the foundations of national identity in the United States. In Cuba, Blake reveals his true identity as Henricus Blacus, the lost son of a prominent, free, black Cuban family, and he reunites with Maggie. Continuing to spread his “gospel of insurrection” across Cuba, Blake forms a federation of revolutionaries who are united in their quest to overthrow the Spanish government and liberate enslaved Africans across the Americas. This “nation” self-consciously constructs its own covenant, making Cuba a new Ethiopia and thereby revealing the constructed nature of U.S. Holy Land identification.

In Part I, Henry Holland, as Blake is then known, recreates biblical narrative on U.S. ground, signaling his missionary status and introducing a new literary archetype of leadership in pursuit of African American liberation—the contemporary evangelist. Jo Ann Marx describes Blake as “a cultural hero, the awaited one, a leader who seeks to release the physical and psychological bonds of blacks,” a summary that speaks to many critical readings of the protagonist.³⁹ Levine argues that Blake is a Moses figure, a self-appointed, “quintessential black deliverer,” and a stand-in for Delany himself.⁴⁰ I argue instead that Blake’s Moses-like movements—his retreat into the wilderness, his crossing of the Red

River, and his professed desire to “climb where Moses stood,”—events with clear scriptural counterparts—reference contemporary American investments in inhabiting the spaces of (and therefore becoming like) Moses and other prophets (*BL*, 69). Following biblical footsteps was, as Obenzinger describes, one way of making oneself American. As Blake recreates Moses’s travels, presumably preparing the way for an Israelite-like pilgrimage that will emancipate enslaved Americans, he invokes a rather typical itinerary of U.S. Holy Land travel, and in doing so declares his participation in a traditional method of nation-building. As Levine illustrates, Douglass too was invested in emulating Moses, as becomes clear in the final paragraph of Douglass’s *Narrative* (1845), in which he expresses his wish that his book will hurry the “glad day of deliverance to the millions of my brethren in bonds.”⁴¹ Scholars have missed the way that the novel’s biblical references and Blake’s Moses-like movements relate to the travels of Americans and U.S. missionaries in the Near East, who frequently modeled their itineraries on Moses’s journey from Egypt to Palestine. When U.S. missionaries trekked through the Holy Land, they imagined themselves reliving the experiences of biblical figures in a historical moment that was both ancient and contemporary. One *Missionary Herald* report states, “All parts of” Syria and Palestine “have been trodden by the feet of the son of god, or by his prophets and apostles. Scarcely a hill or a valley, but has resounded with the songs of Moses, of David, and of Isaiah.”⁴² As Delany presents Blake’s mission in this light—as a journey over sacred ground and a journey that sacralizes that

ground—he places Blake in position to recreate foundational American New Israel mythology, to revisit and revise the national narrative of colonization as “divine errand.”

Essentially, Delany uses Blake’s missionary movements to construct a new African American Israel, in which specifically African American spaces are identified with the Holy Land. By contrast, when Douglass references ancient Israel’s destruction by Babylon in the famous speech “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” he warns against African American exclusion from the national covenant rather than for an African American foundation for covenantal culture.⁴³ Blake’s recreation of the Moses narrative biblicizes U.S. landscape in the same manner that Holy Land missionaries made Palestine a supplemental sacred text, and it allows Delany to reorient covenantal culture so that it includes—exclusively—African Americans. In a scene Levine has analyzed as reminiscent of Moses’s Red Sea crossing, Blake contemplates his “mission,” in “the wilderness” and clarifies the relationship between African America and the Holy Land (*BL*, 69). Poised to cross the Red River and leave the Egypt of Mississippi, the state where he has escaped the clutches of slave traders, Blake states,

Could I but climb where Moses stood
 And view the landscape o’er;
 Not Jordan’s streams, nor death’s cold floor,
 Could drive me from the shore. (*BL*, 69)

Blake's monologue here directly references the famous biblical scene in which Moses, perched atop Mount Nebo, views Canaan, the land promised to the Jews by God. Of course Moses, though given this glimpse, never makes it to Canaan himself, suggesting Blake may not see the realization of the revolution he seeks. Blake's musings and movements link the Red Sea with the Red River, which offers alligators, sharks, steamships, and depths, obstacles as treacherous as those posed to the Israelites fleeing Egypt, and they also link Canaan with the sight the Blake views from the "high bank" on which he stands (*BL*, 69). Although Blake's performance confuses Moses's narrative in some sense—the biblical Moses crosses the Red Sea, finds himself in the wilderness, and then, eventually years later, views Canaan from a mountain perch—his invocations of these important moments draws analogies between U.S. and Holy Land sites that effectively sacralize U.S. space.

Blake's biblical reenactments chart African America as a holy land, challenging the authority of white American chosenness. Poised above the Red River, Blake escapes from personal bondage, but not from the institution of slavery. Blake does not head to "Canaan," as the northern United States and Canada were often called, but rather to Louisiana, the slave state on the other side of the raging Red River waters. Positioning Louisiana as a New Canaan Blake suggests, first, that Canaan is already "here," not only in the United States, but in the U.S. South nonetheless, a sentiment the slaves on Colonel Franks's

plantation utter as they begin to plot their own liberation (*BL*, 35). Delany's U.S. South is a deteriorated holy land, as Palestine was perceived, not a location from which to escape, but one to infiltrate and restore. Second, it suggests that the means—mission—not the ends—insurrection—constitute liberation in the novel. When Delany claims that “beyond this river lie” Blake’s “hopes,” he alters readers’ preconceptions about Canaan and liberation. Because beyond the river lies a slave state and then another slave state and then another, “hope” is not directed toward escape, but conversion, the formation of community through religious identification. Delany has Blake find himself in “Alexandria” after crossing the Red River (*BL*, 70). Ironically, in this place named for an Egyptian city, Blake procures his first converts. With this inclusion, Delany suggests Blake’s “Canaan” may in fact be Egypt, a radical reversal of the Exodus trope that structures U.S. covenantal culture. In *Blake’s* U.S. South, Delany clearly maps the United States as the Holy Land, but as he does so he appropriates sacred geography for his own use, building a covenantal culture with a difference.

In *Blake*, other biblical references align African Americans and Israelites. During his travels, Blake meets Sampsons and Rachels, names that hint at the religious dimension of national identity. Blake likens his movements through Louisiana to those of the Passover Angel who brought death to the first-born of the families of Egypt (*BL*, 83). At other moments Blake witnesses scenes that pull from New Testament Revelation, such as the “procession in the wilderness,” of

Arkansas he sees “slowly and silently marching on, the cortege consistently principally of horsemen, there being but one vehicle, advanced by four men on horseback” (*BL*, 88). Apocalyptic imagery, as well as Exodus tropes help Delany chart an alternative American New Israel, a covenantal culture based in African American association with biblical narrative.

Perhaps most significantly, this African American Israel comes into focus as Blake uncovers the hidden sacred spaces of slave culture. In the case of Holy Land missionaries, the construction of community and covenantal culture was effected as much through the mapping and discovery of sacred sites as it was through proselytizing. The *Missionary Herald* in 1851 states, the “study of the Bible” in the Near East “acquires additional interest” because “we find in what we see around us continual illustrations of what we read in the inspired records.”⁴⁴ As missionaries perceived it, the landscape of the Holy Land offered vivid affirmation of Protestant Christian theology; its “[b]roken columns, and prostrate temples, and cities in ruin” attested to “the inspiration of prophecy.”⁴⁵ Delany intervenes in this conversation, exploiting excavation as a means of rediscovering African American sacred sites, the places associated with the “Afro-American evangelical tradition sharply at odds” with pro-slavery religion.⁴⁶ As Blake slips through the U.S. South virtually unseen, altering his name and disguising himself along the way, he escorts Delany’s readers to various religious spaces generally unavailable to white, Protestant view. On plantations, these are secret places of seclusion where religion is practiced in the slave’s own manner and liberation is

presumably plotted. The “huts” of the novel’s subtitle are often such places of religious ritual, their spiritual function unknown by the white power structure of the plantation just as it is undetectable in the novel’s title. As readers, we almost never witness what transpires in these sacred domestic spaces, but Blake later tells us these gatherings are “religious meetings,” and the reader can glean as much from the revealing reactions of Blake’s listeners. After Blake’s first secret meeting is held in Aunt Dolly’s hut, for instance, Aunt Dolly and Uncle Nathan offer prayers of celebration, indicating their certainty that they have met their deliverer (*BL*, 70). In one scene in New Orleans, Delany does depict the action that takes place in one such secret room. During Mardi Gras, Blake meets with other leaders to discuss preparations for rebellion. In the encounter between these revolutionaries, prayer, ritual, and plotting are intertwined. In this and in other scenes in which Delany reveals the content of Blake’s secret meetings, the conspirators are caught, emphasizing in Raboteau’s words, the separateness of “the black experience of evangelical Christianity from that of whites.”⁴⁷

In mapping this other American New Israel, Blake unearths further African American religious spaces. From slaves in Louisiana, Blake learns that baptisms are performed “[d]own in da bush meetin” by one Uncle Moses, a religious leader who operates outside the white, southern Protestant structure (*BL*, 79). Blake likewise introduces the Mississippi River as a space of African American spirituality. As he discusses the religious character of New Orleans, Blake describes the “apparently cheerful but in reality wailing lamentations” of the slave

boatmen on the levee and in the harbor (*BL*,100). Delany presents the “incessant” songs of these laborers as yet another distinctly African American religious ritual (*BL*,100).

Perhaps the most notable sacred space Blake uncovers is the Dismal Swamp of North Carolina, a space Sundquist calls a “sacred preserve” that Delany presents as a compelling, if ultimately ineffective, alternative to white Judeo-Christian national geographies.⁴⁸ A place associated with the religious practice of conjuring, the Dismal Swamp, William Tynes Cowan claims “signifies disorder, whether a chaos to be feared or marveled at.”⁴⁹ In many abolitionist works, such as Douglass’s *The Heroic Slave* (1853) and Stowe’s *Dred* (1856), the swamp signifies African American autonomy. The High Conjurers of the Dismal Swamp, many of them escaped slaves and admirers of Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, and General Gabriel, live in seclusion outside of the plantation system and practice what Delany calls “time-honored superstition” (*BL*, 114). Blake remains skeptical of the conjurers charms—“bits of woolen yarn, onionskins, oystershells, finger and toenails, eggshells, and scales,”—which do not seem to afford them any political power (*BL*, 112). Similarly, Blake scoffs at the reverence they grant to the particular places from which they extract their futile charms. Delany emphasizes the religious character of the swamp, even as he denigrates it. Blake’s repeated insistence on the inefficacy of conjuring as a religious and political system expresses Delany’s reservations about adapting a model of national belonging totally divorced from the United States’ rhetorical

religious foundations. The Dismal Swamp represents the rejection of Christian geographies, an option that appears to make Delany as uneasy as the prospect of African American inclusion in the American New Israel does. Instead, Delany returns to representations that are more translatable in the vernacular of U.S. nationalism—the Protestant Christian rhetoric of the American New Israel.

In addition to re-treading biblical narrative and excavating unseen sacred spaces, Blake aligns African America with the Holy Land through millennialist imagery. Millennialism, the widespread belief in the nineteenth century that the Second Coming of Jesus was imminent, generated cultural fascination with missions, metaphorical and otherwise.⁵⁰ As Ronald D. Graybill writes, many abolitionists believed the Bible “was genuinely predictive,” and apocalyptic expectation infused the abolitionist project.⁵¹ Millennial fervor suffuses *Blake*, constituting a vital part of the novel’s engagement with Holy Land culture. *Blake* redefines apocalypse as a transnational slave uprising followed by this-worldly liberation in the form of a pan-African state. The oft-repeated line “stand still and see the salvation,” uttered by a variety of characters, is first introduced to the reader as a command to wait passively for divine intervention. Daddy Joe begs Blake to remain at Colonel Franks’s plantation rather than risk escape, citing the Bible’s counsel: “De wud say ‘stan’ still an’ see de salbation” (*BL*, 21). When Blake subsequently announces, “Now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation,” he transforms the biblical phrase into a rallying cry for resistance, a call to initiate the immediate apocalypse of the peculiar institution (*BL*, 29).

Blake's pronouncement reveals the multiplicity of interpretations biblical images can yield, and in doing so opens the door for the re-appropriation of more than just this command.

One of the more dramatic manifestations of millennialism in the nineteenth century was the attempt to return the Holy Land "to its ancient splendor," because such restoration was believed to be a vital precondition of the Second Coming.⁵² Blake in a sense performs just such a restoration project as he lays the groundwork for a new covenantal culture that supplants the American New Israel. The rhetoric of millennialism allows Blake to transform himself into a prophet as he travels throughout the United States, and it allows Delany to lay the ground for a new covenantal culture at odds with the United States. This national community is united not by the "divine errand" of settlement, but rather by the "divine errand" of uprising, of "un-settling" the political and ideological structures of white Protestant America.

Delany fully realizes this new covenantal culture as Blake almost succeeds in inciting a slave insurrection aboard the *Vulture* slave ship. Although this near revolt takes place outside of the United States on the Atlantic Ocean, it represents the culmination of the African American New Israel Delany charts in Part I of the novel. As tension builds in *Blake* toward a promised slave uprising, Blake is hired as the sailing master for an illegal slaving voyage. After retrieving its human cargo in Africa, the *Vulture* sails for Cuba. On board, the atmosphere seems conducive to revolt. The newly stolen slaves and Blake appear unified and

ready to strike. The European crew senses danger in the ominous weather as the Africans sing a “merry sea song” of rebellion (*BL*, 207). Finally, an intense storm distracts the crew and seemingly provides the insurrectionists the ideal conditions for revolt. This appears to be the millennial moment the reader has been promised. Mendi, an athletic, defiant African, who becomes the de facto leader of the captives, frees the other slaves from their shackles and arms them with “billhooks” and “sugar knives” (*BL*, 234). Then, defying expectation, nothing happens. The European crew regains control, the storm abates, and Blake remains “strangely passive” at the very moment we believe he will erupt (*BL*, 236).

Scholars have debated the significance of this abruptly abandoned mutiny. Harvey claims that Blake's passivity represents Delany's own anxiety about his “agency in transforming race relations.”⁵³ Jeffery A. Clymer writes that the *Vulture* scene draws associations between slave traders and pirates that make “the notion of property ownership itself incoherent.”⁵⁴ Levine suggests, “Delany may be giving expression to his own fears” that “uncontrolled revolutionism” would do little to elevate African Americans.⁵⁵ Conversely, I suggest that this scene is not characterized by anxiety and confusion, but rather by the advent of a black nation in the novel as Delany re-imagines the Middle Passage through the Exodus narrative. Answering an earlier scene in the novel in which a Mississippi church is made into a makeshift slave market and religion structures and enables oppression, this scene shows the slave ship transformed into a church as the

slaves recapture religion and form their own national covenant. The *Vulture's* midshipman Spencer witnesses this manifestation of national identity as he fearfully watches Mendi:

Here he descried the master standing in an attitude of determined resistance, boldly and fearlessly peering at the frowning clouds, as though to invoke the fury of the skies. A dreadful peal of thunder with a fearful flame of lightning just then burst in the elements, causing a glare deep down into the portentous dungeon illuminating his face, who starting stepped back a pace with face upturned to Heaven, falling upon his knees with hands extended in supplication to Jehovah, with great piercing eyes sparkling from under the heavy black brow, presented a sight which struck terror to the heart of the young American. (*BL*, 234)

Significantly, as Mendi becomes a religious figure, he becomes a “master.” The meaningfulness of this designation in the context of slavery in the Americas suggests that the captives on the “Vulture” achieve a collective religious identification. Resistance is equated with prayer, freedom with shared feeling. Mendi’s mastery indicates that the terms of U.S. covenantal culture have been appropriated and reversed, granting enslaved Africans the status of Israelites. The implied referents of U.S. covenantal culture—whiteness and Protestantism—have been replaced. It seems perhaps that in this scene Delany retreats to the

sentiments he earlier maligns—reliance on divine intervention for liberation—and allows religion to become a pacifying influence on the oppressed. Instead, I argue, in this scene Delany plots the mythological underpinnings of an African American Israel, an Exodus in which the Israelites are not freed, but are brought into being as a national community.

The logical extension of Delany's consolidation of a covenantal national identity on board the *Vulture* is emancipation and inclusion in the American New Israel. Like the Holy Land discourse of early-national fiction that used religious spatial narratives to exclude racial difference from the nation, Delany's allusions to the Holy Land presuppose religious belonging and participation in the reenactment of biblical narrative as compulsory components of national belonging. As was common in antislavery texts, Delany suggests that African Americans are Israelites and as such deserving of inclusion in the U.S. nation. In her address "The Lord Has Made Me a Sign," Sojourner Truth makes the familiar comparison between the "house of bondage" and "Egypt."⁵⁶ Like Truth, Delany appropriates Holy Land identification as a radical critique of U.S. racism. Yet, even with the founding of this African American Israel in the novel, nothing structurally changes. The slaves onboard *The Vulture* remain in place below deck. In Part II, Delany abandons these familiar antislavery rhetorical tactics and repudiates white, Protestant claims to the American New Israel, transforming the antislavery movement into a black nationalist mission.

Israel, Cuba, Ethiopia

In 1861, the same year that *Blake* began to be issued serially in *The Weekly Anglo-African*, Delany published the *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*, an account of his recent West African venture that discussed not only the importance of Christianity in nation-building, but also the specific role that missionaries played in undermining and perpetuating structures of subjection in Africa. As Delany surveyed West Africa, he recommended that all present missionary efforts cease. It seems Delany found that as western missionaries preached Christian universalism, they introduced the idea of racial difference and inferiority to the African. The African, Delany writes,

. . . sees and knows that the white man, who first carried him the Gospel, which he has learned to a great extent to believe a reality, is of an entirely different race to himself; and has learned to look upon everything which he has, knows, and does, which has not yet been imparted to him (especially when he is told by the missionaries, which frequently must be the case, to relieve themselves of the endless teasing enquiries which persons in their position are subject to concerning all and every temporal and secular matter, law, government, commerce, military, and other matters foreign to the teachings of the gospel; that these things he is not sent to teach, but simply the gospel) as peculiarly adapted and belonging to the white man.⁵⁷

Delany explains how missionaries, by evangelizing their African charges, promote their own nationalisms rather than their converts'. The missionaries' religious knowledge and authority implicitly and explicitly communicate the superiority of their government, their technology, their race. As Delany looked for his "Black Israel in Africa," he found that the relationship between space, nation, religion, and race put forward by the missionaries often reduced the African "to menialism and bondage."⁵⁸

Delany's comments about U.S. missionaries in Africa could apply equally to the antislavery mission as Delany represents it in *Blake*. By appropriating covenantal culture, the African Americans in *Blake* achieve something like national belonging, and yet the structures of racial hierarchy persist. At the very moment the *Vulture's* captives experience an internal transformation, they quite literally remain in place, below the ship's deck. This picture suggests that the traditional models of Holy Land identification abolitionists and African American writers often relied upon were not entirely sufficient to guarantee liberation.

Part II of *Blake*, in which the *Vulture* episode takes place, continues *Blake's* discussion of Holy Land identification. Even as Blake traces the biblical Holy Land over the United States, mimicking the efforts of U.S. missionaries and travelers in the Near East, it maps the Americas in the image of the modern, theologically-diverse Holy Land. In Part II of *Blake*, the model of America as a biblically-textualized landscape with a clear millennial meaning is supplanted by a

second Holy Land model. This model is articulated in the desolate, chaotic landscape of Cuba, a place of overwhelming religious and racial diversity, which mirrors the Holy Land and its characteristic conflicts of possession, belonging, and diversity. While these perceived characteristics prompted American anxiety, they pointedly form the basis of the covenantal culture Delany redefines in Part II of the novel. This covenantal culture eschews typological re-imaginings of America and U.S. slavery that respectively position Puritans and American slaves as "Israelites." Instead, Delany's refurbished covenantal culture is based on perceptions of American and Protestant vulnerability in contemporary Palestine, in which national community constituted through religion coexists tenuously with other, more powerful religious communities. Blake resumes his mission in Cuba, only now his audience of potential converts is more diverse, and the goal of liberation becomes even more ambiguous. As Delany traces the contours of the nineteenth-century Holy Land onto a highly-charged Caribbean colony, he in effect consecrates Cuba as an even newer American Israel, a new Ethiopia. Delany's portrait of Cuba as holy land and of African Americans as a covenant people who exist within Cuba's diverse space upsets the presuppositions of U.S. Holy Land identification entirely.

As U.S. politicians and citizens in the 1850s debated the merits of annexing Cuba, a context Delany references in *Blake*, they implicitly drew Cuba into the mythology of the American New Israel. When Judge Ballard exclaims in Part I of the novel, "Cuba must cease to be a Spanish colony, and become

American territory,” he represents an attitude shared equally by those in the U.S. North and South, who sought Cuba’s natural resources and feared the development of a free black state in the Caribbean should Spain choose to liberate the colony’s slaves. John L. O’Sullivan, the New York editor who coined the American New Israel-centric phrase “Manifest Destiny,” supported U.S. filibustering attempts in Cuba.⁵⁹ Lucy Holcombe Pickens, the future “uncrowned Queen of the Southern Confederate States” would write that the American endeavor to wrest Cuba from Spanish control was a “glorious, a holy mission!”⁶⁰ Holcombe Pickens’s language makes Cuba’s Holy Land potential evident. Scholars have perceived historical U.S. interest in Cuba as predominantly economic, and yet American interference in Cuba borrowed from the language of covenantal culture that fueled U.S. Holy Land invasion. The parallels between the Holy Land and Cuba, especially as Delany depicts the Caribbean colony, exceed shared rhetoric. In the 1850s, the attention directed toward both highly-charged spaces bore at least one striking similarity; Americans desperately sought the means of reforming the Holy Land and Cuba in the image of the United States. In pursuit of this goal, eager Americans began to make their presence known in both spaces. Bouyed by this shared history of American interest and infestation, Cuba and the Holy Land serve Delany as complementary geographies that expose the structures undergirding U.S. covenantal culture.

In Part II of *Blake*, Delany relates Cuba to the Holy Land first by presenting it as a spiritual homeland. Cuba is identified as a sacred space as God

“manifest[s] Himself” there in extraordinary events and the fulfillment of prophecy (*BL*, 191). Thomson explains in *The Land and the Book*, those who have “seen and *felt*” Palestine are able to cultivate “communion and intimate correspondence with” the “divine teacher” and the “Book of God.”⁶¹ Similarly, entering Cuba stirs Blake’s emotions. “If Heaven decreed my advent here,” Blake says, “and I believe it did—it was to have my spirits renewed and soul inspired” (*BL*, 196). Seemingly miraculous events transpire, reaffirming the reader’s sense of Blake’s divine purpose, and in turn sacralizing Cuba as an important theater in the unfolding of religious prophecy. The most obvious example is the reunion between Blake and his wife Maggie, now called Lottie, for whom Blake is finally able to secure freedom. Blake’s arrival in Cuba itself seems scripted by God. “Heaven certainly designed it,” states Blake’s cousin, the celebrated poet Placido (*BL*, 195). On Cuban soil, all signs point to the fulfillment of Blake’s millennial mission, his ambition to “free my race,” as he puts it (*BL*, 195).

However, the Cuba that is Blake’s spiritual homeland is also a place of dispossession and diversity that echoes U.S. anxieties about the Holy Land. Though Palestine reputedly replenished the spirits of many U.S. missionaries, providing unmatched intimacy with the world of the Bible, it also presented ideological problems. As missionaries sought to sacralize space through biblical reenactment, excavation, and millennial typology, they were faced with the challenges posed by powerlessness and multiplicity. The missionary Thomson writes emblematically in *The Land and the Book*, the Holy Land, a “land of

promises” was not only given to the biblical patriarch Abraham, but “is given to me also, and I mean to make it mine from Dan to Beersheba before I leave it.”⁶² Yet undeniably, Thomson does not possess the Holy Land, nor does any other American Christian. The Holy Land is occupied by the Ottoman Empire, a Muslim state nonetheless, and it is populated by countless other exclusivist religious communities. In order to uphold his territorial claims to “Zion and Moriah, Olivet and Siloah, Gethsemane and Calvary,” Thomson refigures the Holy Land as a place where possession and belonging are not mutually constitutive.⁶³ *The Land and the Book*, intriguingly addressed in the second person to an unnamed traveler who Thomson guides through Palestine, shapes its readership into a community of displaced Holy Land inheritors, Protestant Americans to whom the Holy Land *belongs* despite its political and popular makeup. This notion was prevalent among other missionaries as well. Calling Beirut his “home,” Eli Smith claims, “I gladly recognized the familiar features of the mountains . . . like old acquaintances rising up to meet me.”⁶⁴ U.S. missionaries and the travelers who followed in their wake believed they were, in a sense, natives of the Holy Land, rightful heirs to the birthplace of Christianity, though they certainly were not indigenous. The idea of dispossession as incidental, even indicative, of spiritual citizenship was certainly convenient for Americans struggling to affirm their own national and religious superiority. Ironically, it also proves helpful for Delany as he imagines African American national identity in *Blake*; it suggests a model for nationalism in the face of dispossession and enslavement across the Americas.

Correspondingly, U.S. missionaries found their vision of the Holy Land challenged by the state of overwhelming religious diversity in the Near East and its accompanying tensions. In *The Land and the Book*, Thomson explains to his readers, "Syria has always been cursed with a multiplicity of tribes and religions, which split up the country into small principalities and conflicting classes—the fruitful parent of civil war, anarchy, and all confusion."⁶⁵ Thomson's view of religious diversity as the root of Holy Land conflict and degeneracy was shared with other Americans, who found themselves disturbed by the lack of a "homogenous community" in the Holy Land.⁶⁶ Although this degeneracy had been perceived as a confirmation of the Bible's accuracy (it exemplified the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Holy Land's degradation) and an invitation to restore the Holy Land to its original glory, it proved increasingly frustrating for those who experienced it. Among the "endless number of dislocated fragments," U.S. missionaries found themselves religious and political minorities.⁶⁷ Thomson and others were confronted with communities of Muslims, Christians, and Jews, as well as specific Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian, Shi'it, Sunni, Maronite, and Druze sects. The missionary Daniel Bliss positively reflected that "perfect religious freedom" exists in the Holy Land, stressing the possibilities of peaceful, if segregated, coexistence among various religious groups.⁶⁸ Yet, equally often, missionaries only anxiously endured the realities of religious diversity as it proved an obstacle to universal conversion. By the late 1850s, when *Blake* was written and published, missionaries had perceived the

intensification of “feelings of alarm and deep-hatred” between religious groups in the Holy Land.⁶⁹ Rumors circulated about conspiracies and possible outbreaks of violence. It was apparent that religious diversity in the Holy Land was frequently tenuous and occasionally tense.⁷⁰ In the midst of this so-called confusion in the Holy Land, U.S. covenantal culture is shown to be only one among many cultures claiming entitlement and privilege.

Delany appropriates Thomson’s and other missionaries’ sentiments in his portrait of Cuba. By emphasizing the unsettling features of Palestine as perceived by white, Protestant Americans, Delany identifies Cuba as a new—decidedly modern—Canaan that disturbs the foundations of the American New Israel. In Cuba’s New African American Israel, as we might expect, dispossession ironically indicates belonging. As Blake travels across the United States we discover little about his origins, informed only that he was “educated in the West Indies and decoyed away when young” (*BL*, 17). After he reaches Cuba, however, we soon learn that Cuba is Blake’s forgotten homeland, that he is the “lost boy of Cuba,” an apprentice on a Spanish man-of-war who was seized and sold to Colonel Franks in Key West (*BL*, 193). Blake’s return to his homeland, in such a messianic capacity nonetheless, literalizes what is often a more figurative depiction of belonging in Holy Land texts. As “the son of a wealthy black tobacco, cigar, and snuff manufacturer,” Carolus Henrico Blacus, who now calls himself Henry Blake, is a rightful heir of Cuba (*BL*, 193). Levine even claims Blake is “the embodiment of Cuba.”⁷¹ Although Blake’s elite

upbringing seemingly challenges his legitimacy as the leader of black revolution, it in fact reinforces his role. His privilege in Cuba and persecution in the United States recall and reverse the experience of many Americans who found themselves dispossessed and relatively powerless in the Holy Land, their reputed “home.” By portraying Blake as an entitled, though dispossessed, inheritor, Delany draws Cuba and the Holy Land together in ways that suggest both African American entitlement and white American un-exceptionality.

Delany likewise designates Cuba as a modern holy land by highlighting its foreign occupation and the diversity and contentiousness that characterize it. In *Blake*, to some extent, diversity in Spain’s remotely-governed colony is the “fruitful parent” of disorder and hostility just as it is in Ottoman Palestine. Against the backdrop of the celebration of Isabella’s nativity, a state-sponsored event that emphasizes the fusion of politics and Roman Catholicism in the Spanish colonial government, we glimpse the disarray typical of Cuban society. In the crowds, there are “masses” of “Negroes, mulattoes and quadroons, Indians and even Chinamen” as well as the colony’s privileged, white residents, some of whom are U.S. expatriates (*BL*, 245). In this scene, the tension between Cuba’s many collectivities is apparent. The groups manifest various emotions—joy, anger, hope, despair, restlessness—that communicate their different positions within the social power structure. Society, Delany explains, is divided into four major categories, “white, black, free and slave; and these were again subdivided into many other classes, as rich, poor, and such like” (*BL*, 276). As Delany delineates

them, the major social divisions are predominantly racial and economic, but *Blake* reveals that national origin, language, and religion figure into these divisions as well.

Delany embraces what appear to be the rather troubling features of the contemporary Holy Land—diffuse government, dispossession, diversity—claiming a space for black nationalist identity within the disorder they produce. For instance, Delany shows that degenerate colonial governments sometimes prove more equitable than democratic nation states. Just as the so-called despotic Ottoman Empire declared all of its subjects “equal before the law regardless of their religion” through a series of reforms in 1939 referred to as the *Tanzimat*,⁷² Delany’s Cuban government proves an ironic protector of Cuba’s slaves. Major Armsted, a U.S. expatriate, tells Colonel Franks that in Cuba, “blacks enter largely into the social system,” (*BL*, 62). Cuban law allows slaves to buy their freedom for four hundred and fifty dollars upon request. As one plantation owner explains to his wife, the “law gives the slave the right, whenever desirous to leave his master, to make him a tender in Spanish coin, which if he don’t accept, on proof of the tender the slave may apply to the parish priest or bishop of the district, who has the right immediately to declare such slave free” (*BL*, 183). The fact that the Catholic Church in Cuba enforces this policy, suggests Delany may be asking whether tensions existing between different religious and racial communities can be used to generate greater freedoms.

Another scene suggests that the tensions created by diversity may be indeed productive for communities that are excluded from national mythology and structures of power. On the day of Isabella's nativity, the colony's white community, usually joined together by privilege and power, disperses as black, native, and Chinese Cubans begin to congregate. Delany writes, there "was a greater tendency to segregation instead of a seeming desire to mingle as formerly among the whites," as the oppressed groups gather together, "to all appearance absorbed in conversation on matters disconnected entirely from the occasion of the day" (*BL*, 245). Clearly indifferent to the day's apparent religious-political rites, Blake and his fellow revolutionaries show how hostility can generate greater freedom.

In the space of this modern Canaan rife with antagonistic diversity, Blake establishes a new African American Israel that deconstructs the functioning U.S.-Holy Land paradigm by incorporating diversity into covenant. With his cousin Placido and other black Cubans, Blake forms a Grand Council, a revolutionary body united by their commitment to hemispheric African liberation. Blake's insistence in Part I that African Americans "must make" their "religion subserve" their "interests" comes to fruition here (*BL*, 41). The Council embodies the contingency of "chosenness," exposing the constructed nature of U.S. covenantal culture. The national covenantal culture Delany depicts is paradoxically pluralist and ironically deconstructive. Blake articulates the terms of belonging in this newest American Israel in response to questions posed by Madame Cordora, a

wealthy, educated Cuban woman of mixed race ancestry central to the liberation movement. Uncomfortable with the religious form Blake's political activism often takes, because she has been "bred" to "believe in the doctrines of the Romish Church," Cordora asks if it is appropriate to participate in the revolutionaries' "prayers and other formalities." (*BL*, 257). Blake answers:

I first a Catholic, and my wife bred as such, are both Baptists; Abyssa Soudan, once a pagan, was in her own native land converted to the Methodist or Wesleyan belief; Madame Sebastina and family are Episcopalians; Camina, from long residence out of the colony, a Presbyterian, and Placido is a believer in the Swedenborgian doctrines. We have all agreed to know no sects, no denomination, and but one religion for the sake of our redemption from bondage and degradation, a faith in a common Savior as an intercessor for our sins; but one God, who is and must be our common Father. No religion but that which brings us liberty will we know; no God but he who owns us as his children will we serve. (*BL*, 258)

Blake recites the varied religious backgrounds of the Council's revolutionaries only to dispel differences and redefine the meaning of religious identification. Although the revolutionaries identify with dissimilar faiths and practices, Blake claims they ultimately share one unifying religious belief, the belief in a single,

liberating (Christian) God. “Our ceremonies,” Blake says, “are borrowed from no denomination, creed, nor church: no existing organization, secret, secular, nor religious; but originated by ourselves, adopted to our own condition, circumstances, and wants” (*BL*, 258). This description of ecumenicalism is truly a proclamation of a new kind of religious identification—blackness. The new, distinctly African American religion Blake fashions elides sectarian and inter-denominational tensions because it is a religion of race.

What appears paradoxical in terms of religious identification—unity in difference and “race” as religion—is clarified as Blake elaborates the Council’s political theology. Blake and his fellow revolutionaries harness “Ethiopia” as the emblem of their covenant, fusing religious prophecy with racial destiny. Placido rouses the emotions of the Council with the spiritually-themed poem from which this chapter’s opening epigraph is extracted. Calling upon God to intervene in black oppression and enslavement, Placido claims the injustices committed against “Ethiopia’s sons” are sins against God:

Oh Great Jehovah, God of Love!
 Thou monarch of the earth and sky,
 Canst thou from thy great throne above
 Look down with an unpitying eye!
 See Africa’s sons and daughters toll,
 Day after day, year after year,

Upon this blood bemoistened soil,
 And to their cries turn a deaf ear?
 Canst thou the white oppressor bless,
 With verdant hills and fruitful plains,
 Regardless of the slave's distress—
 Undmindful of the blackman's chains?
 How long, O Lord! Ere thou wilt speak
 In thy Almighty thundering voice,
 To bid the oppressors fetters break,
 And Ethiopia's sons rejoice? (*BL*, 259-60)

The poem appears to—respectfully—challenge God's justice and authority. In actuality, it reveals the arbitrariness of sacred space; what is "blessed" landscape to some is "blood bemoistened" to others. In Part I, Blake says, "we must now begin to understand the Bible so as to make it interest us," and here we see how this pursuit is accomplished (*BL*, 41). Placido's poem shifts the basic narrative of divine national inheritance from Exodus to Psalm 68.31, making Ethiopians—not Israelites—the new chosen people. The princes of Ethiopia and Egypt—the subjects of Psalm 68—may have fallen from God's favor, but Placido and Blake, invoking this biblical reference, suggest the certainty their descendents in the Americas are destined to "restore" the "rightful dignity" of the African race "among the nations."⁷³ This move at once upsets the framework of mainstream U.S and

abolitionist Holy Land identification. Yet, as Cordora points out, “we are not all Ethiopians” (*BL*, 260). This racially-specific covenant appears to replicate the very structures of exclusion their coalition seeks to destroy. Blake’s explanation, that elevating “the pure-blooded descendants of Africa” forwards equality for all “persons having African blood,” acknowledges and embraces religious and racial constructionism. The constructed character of “race” serves as the coalition’s critique of the American New Israel and the foundation of the new African American covenant. By transferring attention to Cuba and Ethiopia, new holy lands, Delany provides the narrative basis for an African American transnational identity. The African American covenant, as Delany redefines it, is shaped by the errand of making a religion that competes with the political uses of the American New Israel.

This pluralistic African American Israel that Delany and Blake theorize is interestingly affirmed by the diversity of Cuba, particularly by its religious diversity. The greater the number of faiths proclaiming religious righteousness, the greater the challenge they pose to exclusivist U.S. claims of Holy Land affinity. Not only does Blake assure his collaborators that their own religious differences will not effect their mission, Blake affirms their political covenant by surveying and embracing the Holy Land-like religious multiplicity of Cuba. Soon after his arrival in Cuba, Blake encounters the Obas, a “family of a superior order, proved to be native African, having learned English on the coast, French Creole at New Orleans, and Spanish at Cuba” (*BL*, 172). The members of this

transnational family prove to be practitioners of an African religion, reminiscent of the conjuring religion of the Dismal Swamp. Levine has pointed out, while Blake earlier mocks “the use of conjure by the ‘African’ revolutionaries of the Dismal Swamp, he now embraces the African religious practices of the Obas.”⁷⁴ In particular, Blake seeks to learn their secrets of dog charming, as the bloodhounds of Cuba “never could be made to attack or even bay after one of them” (*BL*, 173). As Blake expresses respect and admiration for his new acquaintances, Delany re-writes the religious exclusionism that characterizes American invocations of the Holy Land.

Delany further endorses religious diversity by portraying an interracial, interfaith double wedding in Cuba that embodies the covenantal culture Blake forwards. Although Delany has shown little patience for Roman Catholicism thus far in the novel, he presents an idyllic if also convoluted image of interfaith relations as the revolutionaries Montego, Madame Cordora, Gofer Gondolier, and Abyssa are married at the Roman Catholic Church of the Ascension. Delany continues to critique Roman Catholicism, claiming the church’s “silly looking” priests appear more like “specters than men” and overcharge the couples for their services, but he grants legitimacy to the marriage rites which unite these Protestant and Roman Catholic representatives (*BL*, 280, 279). Delany defines the altar of the church, the place these revolutionaries are united, as a “sacred spot” (*BL*, 280). Overwhelmed, Abyssa falls to her knees during the service, exclaiming “Glory to God!” (*BL*, 280). Her act of religious feeling expresses not

simply an embracing of Catholicism, but rather the inconsequence of Catholicism in Delany's new covenantal culture. Abyssa herself is a former Muslim who converted to Protestantism in Africa. Just as "Ethiopians" includes all people of African ancestry, it embraces all religions. Like Delany's depictions of the Oba family, this double marriage scene rewrites an earlier episode in *Blake*, in which three couples, escaped slaves from the Franks plantation, are married in the *old* new Canaan, Canada. Blake witnesses the event as Charles and Polly, Andy and Clara, and Eli and Ailcey are gathered together in a semicircle and pronounced "man and wife" by a "fatherly" clergyman (*BL*, 156). These marriages signal the new African American Israel coming into being, much as marriage in the frontier romance represents the birth of national identity. Importantly, only in Cuba, where the terms of religious identification shift, can a pluralist and truly national covenantal culture take shape.

Blake's encounters with religious diversity reveal the inextricability of religious and racial communities in Cuba, in the Holy Land, and in the United States and challenge the basis of American chosenness. Religion surfaces as a mode of identification that both reifies and complicates racial and class-based social categories. As Delany demonstrates in one scene from Part I of the novel, it is impossible to exclude African Americans from the nation by equating religious and racial difference. After Judge Ballard complains of particular liberties taken by slaves in Cuba, namely the sharing of cigars with white men, Major Armsted explains:

You Northerners are a great deal more fastidious about Negroes than we of the South, and you'll pardon me if I add, 'more nice than wise,' to use a homily. Did it ever occur to you that black fingers made that cigar, before it entered your white lips!—all tobacco preparations being worked by Negro hands in Cuba—and very frequently in closing up the wrapper, they draw it through their lips to give it tenacity. (*BL*, 62-63)

In Armsted's description, the elaborate choreography of movement between black and white hands and mouths suggests a kind of multicultural communion. The individuals involved cannot be extricated from the common body produced by the performance. The religious resonance of the image is strengthened as Armsted continues, telling Ballard that the bread he eats is "kneaded and made by black hands, and the sugar and molasses you use, all pass through black hands, or rather the hands of Negroes pass through them" (*BL*, 63). By describing and admitting this inextricability, Delany destabilizes the racial hierarchy that has been tacitly supported by U.S. Holy Land identification.

Conclusion

Blake ends without a resolution. The extant version of the novel lacks the final six chapters of the original serialized novel, leaving Blake's "mission . . . unfulfilled"

in Levine's words.⁷⁵ As it now stands, scholars have considered *Blake's* non-ending as perhaps appropriate. Though Blake himself disappears from the action of the final remaining chapters, we see rising tensions that seem to strengthen the commitment of the revolutionaries. As each day brings "to the ears of the unhappy blacks fresh news of some new outrage," the revolutionaries seem only to increase their resolve (*BL*, 307). An act of violence against Madame Cordora's daughter—she is stripped of her clothes and whipped publicly—fuels the anger of the insurrectionary community, who show themselves poised to fight. Scholars have debated whether Blake's revolution does transpire in the missing chapters, whether such a conclusion is even necessary once Delany's African American community has developed a national identity of which Cuba's white power structure has become conscious, or whether Delany actually meant to subdue the revolutionary rhetoric of the novel at the end, exhibiting anxiety about the prospect of revolution without organization and elevation, without control.⁷⁶ I argue that thinking about the Holy Land opens up conversation between the novel's two sections and reframes the very terms of the revolutionary debate. Recognizing the influence of the American New Israel, Delany shows how the deeply intertwined discourses of space, race, and religion that structure national belonging can be used to articulate a politics of African American national identity. In *Blake*, Delany conceptualizes revolution within and beyond national spaces as conversion—not merely religious awakening, but awakening to the power of religious identification. In this model, physical uprising becomes

inconsequential. The violence has already been done to the ideological structures undergirding the nation.

In Cuba, Delany uses the Holy Land to establish a model, not of a racialized covenantal culture, but of pluralist, religiously charged sacred geography. Delany's novel does not move toward war, but toward even greater confusion and diversity that forcefully undermines the construction of the American New Israel. At the time the last chapter of *Blake* was issued in the *Weekly Anglo-African*, the Holy Land was fraught with increasing sectarian tension. The "approaching storm" that Delany's characters sense in Cuba was palpable in the Holy Land as well (*BL*, 257). These twin atmospheres of anxiety suggest that the foundations of the New American Israel are insecure. In one of *Blake's* final, existing chapters, a white Cuban woman of privilege dreams that she is suddenly immersed in an African tribal world, surrounded by Africans. In this image, Delany not only indicates that the insurrectionists have already triumphed through unity and the suggestion of violence, but also that the no longer deniable presence of black national identity has the power to alter how space is conceived. The woman's nightmare is a literally-realized alternative sacred geography, a forced refiguring of the white American Israel that is no longer tenable in the tumult of Cuba.

Notes

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- ¹ Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 2.
- ² Stephanie LeMenager, "Marginal Landscapes: Revolutionary Abolitionists and Environmental Imagination," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 7, (Fall 2005): 55.
- ³ Martin R. Delany, *Blake; or, The Huts of America*, ed. Floyd J. Miller (1860-61; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 259-60. Further references will be parenthetically cited *BL*.
- ⁴ Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, x.
- ⁵ Albert J. Raboteau, "Exodus, Ethiopia, and Racial Messianism: Texts and Contexts of African American Chosenness," in *Many Are Chosen: Divine Election and Western Nationalism*, ed. William R. Hutchison and Hartmut Lehmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 182.
- ⁶ LeMenager, "Marginal Landscapes," 54.
- ⁷ Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1993), 136; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- ⁸ Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 23; Sundquist, *Wake the Nations*, 194; For analysis of Delany's international colonial endeavors see LeMenager, "Marginal Landscapes," and James T. Campbell's "Redeeming the Race: Martin Delany and the Niger Valley Exploring Party, 1859-60," *New Formations* 45 (Winter 2001): 125-149.
- ⁹ Levine, *Delany, Douglass*; Maurice Wallace, "'Are We Men?': Prince Hall, Martin Delany, and the Masculine Ideal in Black Freemasonry, 1775-1865," *American Literary History* 9, no.3 (1997): 396-424.
- ¹⁰ Roger W. Hite, "'Stand Still and See the Salvation': The Rhetorical Design of Martin Delany's *Blake*," *Journal of Black Studies* 5, no. 2 (1974): 199.
- ¹¹ See, for instance, Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856; reprint, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1888).
- ¹² "Jerusalem," *The Colored American*, September 11, 1841.
- ¹³ Raboteau writes, "In the nineteenth century, the Exodus story took on the dimensions of an archetypal myth for African Americans. Just as God had delivered Israel from

slavery in Egypt, so would he deliver them from slavery in America." "Exodus, Ethiopia, and Racial Messianism," 176-77.

¹⁴ "Jerusalem," *The Colored American*, September 11, 1841.

¹⁵ "Syria and the Holy Land," in *Missionary Herald*, 3: 30.

¹⁶ In 1861, the same year that *Blake* was issued serially in *The Weekly Anglo-African*, Delany published the *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*, an account of his 1859-60 exploration of Africa. Delany toured Africa in the hopes of establishing a settlement for African American emigrants. He did in fact sign a treaty with the Alake and chiefs of Abeokuta. For selections from this document, see *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*, in Robert S. Levine, ed., *Martin Delany: A Documentary Reader* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 336-357.

¹⁷ Robert S. Levine, "Introduction," in *Delany Documentary Reader*, 13. Delany was the editor of *Mystery* from 1843 to 1847 and co-editor with Douglass of the *North Star* from 1847 to 1849.

¹⁸ Parker uses Jerusalem to suggest that even such a holy, historically important site can perpetuate senseless and immoral customs. Theodore Parker, "The Function of Conscience," in *"God Ordained this War": Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865*, ed. David B. Chesebrough (1850; reprint, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 36.

¹⁹ Ussama Makdisi, "Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (1997): 687.

²⁰ "Mr. Buckingham's Lectures," *The Colored American*, February 3, 1838.

²¹ "The Dead Sea Expedition," *The North Star*, September 15, 1848.

²² "Lady Hester Stanhope's Prediction," *The North Star*, April 21, 1848.

²³ "Literary Notices," *The National Era*, September 7, 1848; "The Review," *The National Era*, April 15, 1858; "The Review," *The National Era*, January 20, 1859.

²⁴ "The Holy Land," *The National Era*, April 6, 1848, 54; Caroline Chesebro, "A Soul's Pilgrimage through Holy Land," *The National Era*, February 6, 1851, 21.

²⁵ Chesebro, "A Soul's Pilgrimage," 21.

²⁶ Trafton, *Egypt Land*, 19.

²⁷ Davis, *Landscape of Belief*, 28.

²⁸ Bond, *Memoir of the Rev. Pliny Fisk*; Daniel O. Morton, *Memoir or Rev. Levi Parsons, Late Missionary to Palestine* (1824; facsimile, Arno Press, 1977).

²⁹ Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 4.

³⁰ Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1: 64.

³¹ "Objects of the Missions to the Oriental Churches, and the Means of Prosecuting Them," (1839) in *Missionary Herald*, 3: 161.

³² "Objects of the Missions to the Oriental Churches, and the Means of Prosecuting Them," (1839) in *Missionary Herald*, 3: 161.

³³ George B. Whiting, "Journal of Mr. Whiting at Jerusalem," (1836) in *Missionary Herald*, 3: 42.

³⁴ Eli Smith, "Communication from Mr. Smith, Dated at Beyroot," (1836) in, *Missionary Herald*, 3: 4.

³⁵ According to Campbell, two books written by white missionaries, both published in 1857, David Livingstone's *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (London: J. Murray, 1857) and T. J. Bowen's *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labors in the Interior of Africa* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, 1857), inspired Delany's renewed interest in Africa in the late 1850s. Campbell, "Redeeming the Race," 133.

³⁶ The very titles of twentieth and twenty-first-century scholarly works about abolitionism—*Holy Warriors*, *The Crusade Against Slavery*, and *Bound for Canaan*—demonstrate the manner in which antebellum reformers as well as subsequent scholars have understood the antislavery movement as a modern mission fueled by Christian precepts and prophecies. In the introduction to Frederick Douglass's 1855 narrative *My Bondage and My Freedom*, the famous radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison refers to Douglass's antislavery work as his "special mission" three times in the span of five sentences. Garrison, "Introduction" to Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, in Andrews, *Oxford Douglass Reader*, 168.

According to scholars this religious rhetoric developed from the evangelical revivalism of the early nineteenth century. The "massive spiritual awakenings" of the 1830s inspired "white evangelicals," according to James Brewer Stewart, to envision "a glorious era of national reform; emancipated from liquor, prostitution, atheism, pauperism, and popular politics." Because "God was depicted as insisting that the saved perform acts of benevolence, expand the boundaries of Christ's kingdom, and take on a

personal responsibility to improve society," those influenced by revivalist spirit sought to better if not necessarily revolutionize society. *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 37. See also Louis Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms, 1820-1866* (1960; reprint, Algonac, MI: Reference Publications, 1986); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery; The Crusade for Freedom in America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961); Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Epic Story of the Underground Railroad, America's First Integrated Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Amistad, 2005).

³⁷ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life among the Lowly* (1852; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1981).

³⁸ In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass contributes perhaps the quintessential antislavery conversion moment. As young Douglass repels the violence of his master Mr. Covey, he claims to be resurrected: "My long-crushed spirit rose . . . and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact." *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, in Andrews, *Oxford Douglass Reader*, 69. Douglass pointedly uses the language of religious awakening here to express his rebirth as a free man, dedicated to universal emancipation and, of course, also to articulate his membership in a religious community with which many Americans identified. William Tynes Cowan writes that this conversion experience showed readers "the process by which a chattel was metamorphosed into a man." *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 112. In Douglass's *Narrative*, emphasis is placed on Douglass's individual internal transformation, which offers evidence of his potential for inclusion in the national body politic. Typically, moments like these are meticulously described in antislavery texts. Instead of a conversion moment in *Blake*, we get a moment of divine "calling." In the wilderness, Blake "determining to renew his faith and dependence upon Divine Aid," falls upon his knees and shouts, "Arm of the Lord, awake! Renew my faith, confirm my hope, perfect me in love. Give strength, give courage, guide and protect my pathway, and direct me in my course!" (*BL* 69).

³⁹ Jo Ann Marx, "Myth and Meaning in Martin R. Delany's *Blake; Or The Huts of America*," *College Language Association* 38, no.2 (1994): 184.

⁴⁰ Levine, *Delany, Douglass*, 205.

⁴¹ Levine, *Delany, Douglass*, 13; Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, 97.

⁴² "Syria and the Holy Land," (1836) in *Missionary Herald*, 3: 30.

⁴³ Douglass, "What to the Slave?" 116.

⁴⁴ "Report of the Abeih Station," (1851) in *Missionary Herald*, 4: 139.

⁴⁵ Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1: vii.

⁴⁶ David W. Wills, "The Central Themes of American Religious History: Pluralism, Puritanism, and the Encounter of Black and White," in *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York: Routledge, 1997), 17.

⁴⁷ Albert J. Raboteau, "The Black Experience in American Evangelicalism: The Meaning of Slavery," in *African-American Religion*, 91.

⁴⁸ Sunquist, *Wake the Nations*, 194.

⁴⁹ Cowan, *The Slave in the Swamp*, 13.

⁵⁰ As many scholars have noted, the Great Revival of the early nineteenth century fueled and was in turn fueled by millennialism, the belief that Second Coming, or end of the world, would happen sometime in the foreseeable future. Although millennialism has been perceived as a fringe movement of the nineteenth century, Whitney Cross suggests it was actually quite pervasive. Americans perceived biblical prophecy was coming to fruition as they saw society becoming "homogenously Christian" through revivalism and greatly improved through the creation of "benevolent movements." *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), 200. Angelina Grimké-Weld, embodying the continuum between antislavery and evangelical activism, was both a prominent abolitionist and a follower of William Miller. Sojourner Truth, another prominent abolitionist, likewise became involved with and resided in a number of utopian and millennium-centered religious communities. See Marcia Y. Riggs, ed., *Can I Get a Witness? Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women, An Anthology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 20-21.

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- ⁵¹ Ronald D. Graybill, "The Abolitionist-Millerite Connection," in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 145.
- ⁵² Silberman, "Desolation and Restoration, 77.
- ⁵³ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 233.
- ⁵⁴ Jeffery A. Clymer, "Martin Delany's *Blake* and the Transnational Politics of Property," *American Literary History* 15, no. 4 (2003): 724.
- ⁵⁵ Levine, *Delany, Douglass*, 208.
- ⁵⁶ Sojourner Truth, "The Lord Has Made Me a Sign," in *Can I Get a Witness?* 21.
- ⁵⁷ Delany, *Official Report*, 348.
- ⁵⁸ Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 215; Delany, *Official Report*, 349.
- ⁵⁹ Orville Vernon Burton and Georganne B. Burton, "Introduction," in *The Free Flag of Cuba: The Lost Novel of Lucy Holcombe Pickens* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 8.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2, 9.
- ⁶¹ Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1: vi, vii.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 1: 17.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2: 468.
- ⁶⁴ Smith, "Communication from Mr. Smith," in *Missionary Herald*, 3: 3.
- ⁶⁵ Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1: 246.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1: 247.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1: 248.
- ⁶⁸ Daniel Bliss, "Letter From Mr. Bliss," (1857) in *Missionary Herald*, 4: 294.
- ⁶⁹ Moshe Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840-1861: The Impact of the Tanzimat on Politics and Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 228.
- ⁷⁰ Such fragile equilibrium could be forcefully upset, as it was in the 1850s when episodes of sectarian violence broke out in the Holy Land. In 1858, Maronite peasants revolted in Kisrawan in reaction to the Tanzimat, and in 1860 Druzes and Maronites clashed in the mountains of Lebanon, killing mostly Maronite villagers. Stability gave way later that same year when Muslims in Damascus rioted, massacring thousands of

Christians in response to the violence in Lebanon. Despite the deep political and local particularities of these conflicts, Americans overwhelmingly understood them as unwarranted Muslim massacres of Christians.

⁷¹ Levine, *Delany, Douglass*, 204.

⁷² Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 3.

⁷³ Raboteau, "Exodus, Ethiopia, and Racial Messianism," 184.

⁷⁴ Levine, *Delany, Douglass*, 206.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁷⁶ Marx claims that the final scenes of *Blake* "strongly suggest that a revolution is imminent." "Myth and Meaning," 191; Roger Whitlow calls it an "unendable plot," in which the "necessity of plausibility" dictates the "certain failure" of revolution. "The Revolutionary Black Novels of Martin R. Delany and Sutton Griggs," *MELUS* 5, no.3 (1978): 31; Levine suggests it may have been the case that Delany "ended the novel with a series of nonviolent scenes that enabled Blake to emerge at the helm of a regenerated society," leaving the reader with "an image not of black homicidal fury but of responsible black leadership." *Delany, Douglass*, 216

CHAPTER FOUR

Homes Divided:**Domesticity, Distress, and the Islamic Other**

In *Blake*, Delany depicts racial and religious tensions in the United States and Cuba as they teeter on the brink of eruption. Maria Susanna Cummins, Delany's contemporary, actually depicts the eruption itself in her 1860 novel *El Fureidîs*. Published during a period of sectarian violence in the Holy Land that preceded the U.S. Civil War, *El Fureidîs* depicts civil unrest in Mount Lebanon in ways that resonate with current U.S. racial and regional hostilities. During a climactic scene in *El Fureidîs*, floodwaters surge upon the title village, an idyllic town nestled in the valley of Mount Lebanon. Havilah, a woman enveloped in a halo of moonlight, averts the town's absolute destruction by directing the raging torrent toward the silk factory owned by her American father only moments before an earthquake shakes the village's foundations:

Like a wild beast loosened from long confinement, the unchained waters were dashing over the fall and hurrying down the channel, while upright, amid the rush, the roar, and the spray, stood one clothed all in white, who might have been deemed a vaporous water-spirit, sent thither to allay the

flood. Her garments were fluttering over the verge of the fall, her foot seemed to rest on the gliding torrent, her form was showered by the foam. The golden moonlight glorified her, imagination lent her wings,—yet she was a mortal thing, endued with immortal powers only as matter yields to mind when the spirit is in the ascendant. . . . God and a great motive gave her strength, and she had done the work of a man and a deliverer.¹

In this scene of supernatural disaster, Cummins rewrites the biblical narrative of the Flood as a modern imperial fable and significantly recasts it. As Havilah stands amid gushing waters that threaten to destroy village church or village factory, she becomes a conciliator of religious and U.S. nationalist-imperialist tensions as they converge on sacred ground. In Cummins's hands, the El Fureid's flood becomes a cautionary tale that charges Trefoil's negligence and his paternalistic attitude toward his worker "children" with provoking and exacerbating catastrophe. Havilah, herself an embodiment of the landscape, manages not only the initial flood and earthquake, but their "aftershocks" as well. Disaster devastates the economic and religious structures of the community. Once liberated from their factory work, the native inhabitants of El Fureid's, almost all Christian converts, abandon the village's Protestant missionary church and embrace their former Maronite, Druze, Armenian, and Greek traditions. From this fractured, diverse, and increasingly dangerous group, Havilah re-builds a model multicultural community. In 1860, as growing sectional hostilities stir

questions about the future of racial diversity in the United States, Cummins presents Havilah to her readers as one who does “the work of a man and a deliverer,” a redeemer who restores social order as it is destabilized by violent forces of diversity.

As we saw in *Blake*, images of the modern Holy Land as a place of religious diversity and Christian dispossession could serve to counter prevailing nationalist models that relied on images of the biblical Holy Land to support an exclusively white, Protestant U.S. covenantal culture. In Delany’s new Cuban holy land, the revolutionaries’ allegiance to the principles of racial equality and African American emancipation invoke an idealized vision of the contemporary Holy Land as a place where, in one missionary’s words, “the conviction of the right of religious liberty, has struck its roots too deeply . . . ever to be eradicated from the land.”² Of course, Delany’s diverse New Canaan remains a tense space, as escalating acts of repression and animosity suggest the imminence of overwhelming violence. In the United States, this antagonism would finally erupt in 1861, when sectional tensions gave rise to the U.S. Civil War. In the Holy Land, just one year before the United States engaged in a war provoked by questions about racial inequality, interfaith hostilities ripened into sectarian massacre, alarming Americans at home and abroad. The late 1850s saw increasing hostilities between factions in both the United States and Holy Land. Angry diatribes on the floor of the U.S. Congress ensued while a series of violent episodes unfolded in Palestine and Syria. In 1860, when the conflict between

U.S. northerners and southerners was reaching its breaking point, sectarian animosity in the Holy Land erupted in bloodbath. In early summer, war broke out between Maronites and Druzes in Mount Lebanon, decimating hundreds of rural villages, and later, in July, Muslims in the city of Damascus rioted, killing thousands of Christians.³ Only months before Abraham Lincoln claimed the United States had become a “house divided against itself” in a senatorial campaign speech, the missionary William Eddy assigned the same biblical analogy to religious friction in Syria.⁴ To Americans, the advent of violence in the Holy Land intimated the United States’ own sectional tensions could not be bloodlessly assuaged nor racial divisions quietly redressed. Because images of the ancient and modern Holy Land were central to the consolidation of U.S. national identities, Holy Land conflict provided an alternately troubling and useful site for thinking about the nation in the face of fundamental crisis.

In Cummins’s *El Fureidís*, sectarian tensions in the Holy Land provide a particularly trenchant language for discussing race and imagining the aftermath of emancipation in the United States. As Cummins depicts alternately harmonious and antagonistic relations between religious groups—Christians and Muslims especially—she critiques U.S. slavery and simultaneously expresses reservations about the prospects of racial diversity in the United States. In this use of the Holy Land, *El Fureidís* marks but one example of a persistent theme found in mid-century domestic literature. As Amy Kaplan tells us, the “cult of domesticity,” which asserted that women wielded “the sentimental power of moral

influence” from the home, her “hallowed place,” united the concerns of the household and nation.⁵ Addressing an implicitly female audience, writers of domesticity sought to exert influence over the questions of slavery and sectional friction that troubled the United States, and they did so, at least in a select subset of narratives, by invoking the Holy Land. These authors script domesticity in the Holy Land and write the Holy Land into the U.S. domestic sphere as they attempt to intervene in and moderate the sectional debates and racial hostilities that had come to typify the mid-century United States. I argue in this chapter that the Holy Land allowed such writers to assuage anxieties produced by sectarian violence and national discord by locating the source of antagonism in the Muslim-Arab and to imagine the reunion of a racially and regionally divided nation through the exclusion of religious difference.

“Our Happy Home”

Upon approaching Jerusalem, Sarah Barclay Johnson writes enthusiastically, “An hour more and our longing eyes will be greeted with the sight of the holy city; a little while, and our feet shall stand within the gates of ‘Jerusalem, our happy home!’”⁶ At this moment, Johnson claims Jerusalem as home not only because it will house her family during their missionary service, but also because she already considers it her ‘true’ spiritual home. The Barclays imagine themselves inheritors of Israel, a modern holy family for which Sarah earnestly receives the

divine call to service.⁷ This vision of the Holy Land as home is a central theme in Johnson's narrative *Hadji in Syria* (1858) and in other domestic-oriented writings. Echoing Thomson, Cummins opens *El Fureidîs* by declaring the Holy Land "the paradise of our earthly parents," a land given to God's "chosen people," an entitled community including Cummins and her readers (*F*, 1). Other writers neglect to lay such forceful claims, but do illuminate the home-like familiarity of the Holy Land. Following her arrival in 1886, Sarah Barnwell Elliot comments on the similarities between the Syrian landscape on which she meditates and the "hills we knew, far away in the valley of the Tennessee."⁸ Conversely, writers such as Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe show how the average American home may be converted into a sacred space of its own. Their 1869 book *The American Woman's Home* details how the American woman can make her house into a makeshift chapel, transforming the parlor into a nave with the help of a movable screen and converting the chimney into a steeple with some lumber and labor.⁹ As some writers made the U.S. home a holy space, others made the Holy Land into a comfortable home for the American family.

Despite Ann Douglas's decades-old lamentation of the feminization of American religion in the nineteenth century and subsequent (less derogatory) affirmations of her claim, studies of U.S.-Holy Land culture have consistently overlooked the contributions of domestic literature.¹⁰ Even the recent work of Timothy Marr, who draws attention to the complexities of religion and race in "Out of this World: Islamic Irruptions in the Literary Americas," disregards the manner

in which “Islamism” appears to be exclusively male.¹¹ Marr’s contribution compliments an ongoing masculinist tradition of U.S.-Holy Land study. This body of scholarship recovers a history of U.S. national identification with Palestine, a relationship constructed by Puritan patriarchs and founding fathers who claim the United States as the new promised land. Even more astounding, scholars of U.S. women’s writing have similarly neglected women’s Holy Land literature. The charge to internationalize studies of domesticity, lead by Kaplan’s “Manifest Domesticity” (1998), has yielded important work on gender, nationalism, and imperialism by scholars such as Schueller and Taketani,¹² but in such studies, the underlying religiosity of nineteenth-century femininity has been forgotten and the possibility of religiously defined geographies disregarded. The cultural studies that have triangulated the relationships between domesticity, Christianity, and U.S. slavery have remained predominantly national in scope. By directing attention to U.S. women’s Holy Land writings, I argue we recover contributions of non-domestic religious domesticity that have the potential to shape analysis of gender and empire.

In domestic literature, the Holy Land becomes a space that throws U.S. diversity into sharp relief and amplifies the American woman’s ability to assuage the tensions generated by religious and racial difference. Evidenced by titles such as *Tent and Harem* (1859), *A Woman’s Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* (1871), and *Three Vassar Girls in the Holy Land* (1892), the travel narratives and novels that comprise Holy Land domestic literature presume to present a gendered

perspective made authoritative by its very femininity. Because the Holy Land symbolically provided both a pre-national home for Americans—a point of origin for a nation rhetorically founded as a New Zion—and a spiritual home—a sacred center in the history and fulfillment of Judeo-Christian prophecy—it proved well-suited to the needs and desires of domestic fiction and nonfiction writers.

Conversely, domestic literature's focus on "home" provided an apt platform for managing various Holy Land discourses. In the nineteenth century, U.S. women were widely perceived as spiritual guardians, and religion itself was increasingly "feminized," making the Holy Land an ideal, extra-national home that fell within the scope of women's domestic domain and empowered writers of domesticity to reconcile "difference" and national belonging. Religious responsibility appears to construct the Holy Land as a specifically gendered cultural homeland—not a feminized "Orient" from which the masculine West can be differentiated, but rather a spiritual domestic space that infuses women with supernatural abilities and responsibilities.

As if to emphasize their particular claim on this "home," U.S. writers script an American woman infused with extraordinary power when on sacred ground. Embodying both sacred and secular aspects of the Holy Land, the American woman manages religious and national tensions within her own person. Cummins's Havilah, the "Lebanon rose," is capable of negotiating disaster in El Fureidîs *because* she has appropriated Muslim, Turkish, Maronite, and Bedouin traits. The Holy Land presents obstacles, but it also infuses the American woman

with elements of the diverse cultures of the Near East. These foreign features, which she contains within her pious, virtuous, and white body, are no longer feared as impediments to spiritual gain, but instead considered primary to the experience of sacred space. Havilah, an energetic, gazelle-like woman, often appears in a hodge-podge of Near-Eastern and European fashion. Born to an American father and Greek Mother, she seems culturally unreadable. However, Havilah's "Americanness" is defined by her modesty, athleticism, demureness, and absolute competence, qualities associated with U.S. femininity ripened by immersion in the Holy Land and its cultures.

Havilah's capacity to absorb Holy Land multiculturalism is echoed in other portraits of American women suffused with extraordinary spiritual and physical abilities in the Holy Land. In E.E. Hale and Susan Hale's *A Family Flight Over Egypt and Syria*, Bessie Horner performs some amazing physical feats. At one moment accidentally bucked off an irritable camel, Bessie floats safely to the ground after her long, billowing skirts form a convenient parachute. Her sister Mary Horner meanwhile discovers that painting landscapes of the Holy Land precipitates her own transformation into "a grown-up young lady."¹³ Champney's similarly impressive Bird Orchard, of *Three Vassar Girl's in the Holy Land* (1892), single-handedly traverses Palestine and rescues her lover's family from unquestionable danger, using only the "guidebook" of the New Testament.¹⁴ It is Bird's emersion in the Jewish culture of Palestine that ironically leads to successful Protestant marriage. Bird wins her husband only after reassuming her

original, markedly Jewish name Zipporah and learning to organize “difference” in her own person, identifying herself as religiously Christian and racially Jewish.

In describing their home in the Holy Land, domestic writers intersperse excited expressions of spiritual fulfillment with those of disgust, disappointment, and skepticism. Many writers believed American women were intimately connected to sacred space through the world of the Bible and their vigorous Christian faith. Johnson claims as she reaches Jerusalem, “a sudden view of swelling domes and towering minarets rising dimly in the distance,” induces her to “fall down in the dust,” breathing in the “fullness” of her “joy” (*HS*, 53-4). Johnson exclaims, “how fully do we now realize the truths of the Holy Book” (*HS*, 57). Johnson articulates an experience of sacred space that exemplifies Eliade’s classic paradigm; an encounter with the sacred city of Jerusalem affirms the Christian religious worldview.¹⁵ Perhaps more importantly, Johnson’s description reaffirms the Holy Land as a feminine domain.

Others write themselves not only into the landscape of the Holy Land, but also into the biblical narratives to which Palestine was a presumed supplement, an act that confers not only religious authority but also political clout in a nation that is repeatedly construed as a New Israel. Sarah Rogers Haight, one of the first women to publish a travel narrative of Palestine (1840), describes “seeing” the Bible in action. She recounts watching “Father Abraham” pass “by on his mule” as “Rebecca” gives “him a drink.”¹⁶ Frequently, writers envision their own participation in these events, using the present tense as Haight does, to stress

the ongoing relevance and accessibility of Judeo-Christian narratives. For instance, Caroline Paine reports traveling “on the track of the Israelites” in 1859’s *Tent and Harem*, and Clorinda Minor laments lodging in a “comfortable ‘inn’” while her “blessed master was laid in a manger” in 1851’s *Meshullam!*¹⁷

For all the acclamations domestic literature heaps on the Holy Land, it also documents the disappointments of the Holy Land, predominantly its perceived degeneracy. Despite the fact that physical proximity to biblical narrative produces “intense feeling,” as Elizabeth Champney notes in *Three Vassar Girls in the Holy Land*, sacred space remains, in religious theorist Gregory Schopen’s words, “stubbornly material” and as such, troubling.¹⁸ The modern Holy Land frequently provided obstacles to spiritual fulfillment and encouraged skepticism. An 1855 *Godey’s Lady’s Book* article states, by the mid-nineteenth century, most “enlight[ed]” Christian travelers were aware that many established Biblical localities were created rather than discovered.¹⁹ The emerging fields of biblical geography and biblical archaeology had indisputably exposed the erroneousness of many long-venerated places such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Edward Robinson methodically researched ancient history, contemporary topography, and the Bible to reveal that in fact the crucifixion was highly unlikely to have taken place at the site where the Church’s had been erected. These quandaries of historical inaccuracy in addition to the widely perceived degeneracy of the Holy Land confronted domestic writers as they attempted to

write U.S. domesticity in the Holy Land and write the Holy Land into the U.S. domestic realm.

As early as 1843, this Holy Land home referenced by writers of domesticity begins to speak toward the regional and ideological tensions mounting in the United States. In her story "Slavery's Pleasant Homes," which appeared in the abolitionist gift book *The Liberty Bell*, Lydia Maria Child argues that slavery turns the home into a Near-Eastern harem. Child's description of southern U.S. gender norms implies that if the United States is indeed an inheritor of Israel, then the U.S. South inhabits the role of the Muslim tyrants currently occupying the Promised Land. According Carolyn Karcher, Child had in fact been reading about the similarities between southern chivalry and the Near-Eastern harem when she scripted this tale of two women "grown up from infancy together," one a white planter's daughter, the other her slave Rosa, who have been "nurtured in seclusion, almost as deep as that of the oriental harem."²⁰ After the planter's daughter is married, she brings Rosa with her to her home. There, Rosa, "beautiful as a dark velvet carnation," is married to her new master's slave George.²¹ Jealously admiring Rosa, who is often adorned with jewels in the manner for which eastern women were known, her master feels an "unholy fire" kindled within him, a description that identifies the master's lustfulness as not only immoral, but specifically un-Christian.²² The conclusion of Child's sketch, in which Rosa's master sexually assaults her, Rosa dies in anguish, and George

murders his master, conceives of southern depravity as a distinctly Near-Eastern and Muslim kind of villainy.

This type of analogy between U.S. southern and oriental practices gained momentum in the late 1850s and 1860s as contentious atmospheres in the United States and Syria reinforced American Holy Land identification. An increasing association of slavery with the Near East is apparent in first-hand accounts of the Holy Land read by domestic writers, such as those in the *Missionary Herald*. In the preface to *El Fureidís*, Cummins acknowledges her debt to William M. Thomson, a frequent *Missionary Herald* contributor.²³ In an 1858 article, one slave's story serves as a basis for critiquing not only Islam and non-Protestant Christianities, but also the U.S. institution of slavery, a surprising occurrence considering the ABCFM's famous neutrality concerning the slavery debate.²⁴ Yusef, a "man black as ebony," is at once the slave of an Arab master, the Muslim religion, and "Romish priests."²⁵ Curiously, Yusef embodies American traits as well as Near-Eastern; he has "the peculiar regular features of the Abyssinian race, and . . . some of the African features so familiar in America."²⁶ "Trained" as a Moslem and constrained by his slave status, Yusef independently studies the Koran and learns Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and French. Notably in Yusef's tale, education leads to escape, a simultaneous liberation from physical and spiritual bondage, as it does in many U.S.-centered slave narratives. When Yusef experiences Protestant revelation, he abandons his owner. The *Missionary Herald* article obviously aligns Islam with the institution of slavery, which

becomes shorthand for condemning at once the tyrannical structures of “other” religions and the tyrannical American slaveholder.

U.S. women’s writings of the late 1850s, like the *Missionary Herald*, mobilize religious otherness in the Holy Land to critique slavery. The Holy Land provided a new set of terms and tropes for antislavery domestic literature. In *Hadji in Syria*, Johnson equates the institution of slavery with the practice of Muslim marriage, a state that makes women “maltreated creatures” of “cruel masters” (HS, 221). Johnson explains that fathers, husbands, and brothers “tyrannize over the degraded women of the East,” and explicitly compares them to slaveholders when she describes the selling of women to “heartless husbands, or . . . the master who will give most for them” (HS, 220). According to Johnson, this method of enslavement insidiously relies on religion for its power. The Muslim husband, “odious as he must too often be” is the only “God” his wife serves (HS, 225). These analogies dually condemn Islam for perpetrating slavery and slavery for perpetrating idolatry. The result is an emotional appeal to U.S. women to intervene in structures of racial oppression that relies upon revulsion and fear of Muslim culture. As domestic writers use Islam to dismiss slavery and slaveholders, they ironically implicate the Muslim in the U.S. quarrel over abolition.

At the same time the Holy Land provided domestic writers with a critique of slavery in the image of the Muslim, it also offered a model of tolerance that in itself critiques the injustices and inequality of the United States. The 1839

Tanzimat, a series of reforms decreed by the sultan that established the legal freedom of religion for all Ottoman subjects, served to protect Americans as well as natives in the Holy Land.²⁷ Although the religious multiplicity facilitated by the *Tanzimat* hindered U.S. Protestants' pursuit of ideological and material possession of the Holy Land, it also exemplified an ideal of religious freedom and social equality that many domestic writers found attractive. In her 1872 narrative, *A Woman's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*, a chronicle of the same 1866 *Quaker City* tour that yielded Twain's *The Innocents Abroad*, Harriet Griswold embraces what she understands is a manifestly Christian and American state of equality, writing that the Holy Land embodies, "a beautiful thought, that whatever our differences may be, we can all meet."²⁸ In Johnson's *Hadji in Syria*, the female-centered harem provides a specific archetype for multicultural society. Although the harem was alternately described as a delightful "home" and an awful "prison," it provided a setting for representing the American woman's capacity to observe and absorb religious and cultural difference.²⁹ In contrast to the harem's representation in much male-oriented literature, such as Taylor's *The Lands of the Saracen* or Johnson's own father, James T. Barclay's *The City of the Great King*, as an erotic and illicit space, the harem in domestic literature is a space of intercultural contact between women where interfaith dialogue takes place. Within the harem, food, clothes, and knowledge are exchanged, and peaceful, if segregated, coexistence becomes a reality.

Like Griswold, Cummins embraces the prospect of religious diversity, even forming an alternative vision of national covenant through it. In *El Fureid's*, she imagines a fictional church that exemplifies the "perfect religious freedom" characteristic of Mount Lebanon, a region that would ironically soon be the setting of sectarian violence.³⁰ Cummins's portrait of the El Fureid's church provides an explicit example of a diverse community organized by American female presence. Inside the model church, a peaceful congregation in "motley attire," displaying "numerous shades of complexion and varied cast of features," cooperatively worship (*F*, 16). Here members of different sects, "the Greek and Armenian, the Turk and the native Syrian" offer a harmonious picture of cooperative spiritual fulfillment, "each head bowed and each knee bent in the same reverent posture" (*F*, 16). These rituals are not simply performed by nationally and ethnically different participants; "difference" is central to worship. The church encourages the congregants to maintain distinct cultural identities and practices. Lapierre leads prayers "first spoken in English, and then repeated in both Turkish and Arabic," complemented by Havilah's organ music (*F*, 16). Even more than Lapierre's words, Havilah's music signals God's "presence" and affects the congregation physiologically, producing "solemn silence" (*F*, 18). Havilah replicates the church's diversity in her own hybrid dress, a "Grecian bodice of white Damascus silk" with "material thrown over black hair after the fashion of the Syrian maidens" (*F*, 17). Lapierre officiates, but Havilah is "their leader" (*F*, 17). Diversity appears desirable, and it is importantly made possible

by Havilah's piety, which serves as an example and a quieting presence that prevents diversity from amounting to hostility.

American Protestant women observed that in some instances, the Holy Land presented the opportunity for greater social equality than did the United States, whose propagation of slavery excluded many from the protections of the law. With the 1858 Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court had unequivocally declared slaves property without claim to citizenship and subject to the complete authority of their masters. For domestic writers, representing religious tolerance in the Holy Land did more than illustrate the protection and perturbation of vulnerable Americans. It provided a tacit critique of the kinds of legalized intolerances rampant in the United States, intolerances carefully inventoried in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred* and its appendices.³¹

Yet as domestic writers articulate their denunciation of slavery through images of the Holy Land, they also project reservations about the possibilities of a post-emancipation U.S. society onto the Holy Land. Writers responded to the prospect of religious freedom ambivalently—sometimes embracing what appeared to be an answer to the deep-seated racial inequities of the United States, and at other times repudiating the seemingly unpleasant consequences of such equality. Amid various religious communities claiming entitlement and inheritance, including Muslims, Christians, and Jews, as well as specific Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian, Shi'it, Sunni, Maronite, and Druze sects, Protestant-Americans formed a fairly insignificant population. Writers of

domesticity express with some anxiety that fact that despite their special spiritual claims, white American women are religious and political minorities in the nineteenth-century Holy Land. Domestic writings depict religious diversity as an experience that frequently produces unwelcome sensations. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, divided among conflicting Roman Catholic, Armenian, and Greek Christian sects, is one popular site for representing women struggling to endure religious pluralism. Segregated and contentious, a Holy Land in microcosm, the church is represented as too crowded and chaotic to promote spirituality. Susan Brewer Thomas notes in her 1860 *Travels* that she can barely navigate the “mass of human beings,” of “all nations” in the Church.³² Nine years later, Kate Kraft describes a similarly “unpleasant” visit to the church, where jostling and discordant noise confront visitors.³³

Other writers, such as Johnson, relate the Holy Land’s presumed degeneracy explicitly to this multiplicity of communities. After describing an initially joyful entrance into Jerusalem, Johnson depicts a less inspiring exploration of the city that leaves the impression that Jerusalem is “an immense cemetery . . . a mass of ruins” (*HS*, 111). “Loathsome lepers,” “ferocious-looking” Bedouins, and “droves of dogs” populate Johnson’s Jerusalem (*HS*, 63, 75, 77). The presence of such undesirable entities seemingly justifies American eschatological aims in that writers imagine a Christian-governed Holy Land will no longer exemplify such depravity, but these various characters at home in the Holy Land also indicate Johnson’s uncertainty about the contemporary state of

U.S. sectional and racial tensions. As Johnson anxiously catalogs religious and cultural others, difference and diversity appear dangerous, and the prospect of controlling sacred space populated by countless irreconcilable communities seems impractical at best. While such lamentation about the Holy Land's deterioration was rather standard in U.S. travel narratives, Johnson's association between decay and diversity betrays uneasiness about the future of her American home.

As the intensifying slavery debate aggravated sectional hostilities, depictions of religious tolerance in the Holy Land provided a platform for thinking through the management of racial diversity in the United States. As works of domestic literature oscillate between affirmation and condemnation of religious diversity, they communicate their uncertainty about interracial society. By the late 1850s, a shift occurs in such representations. As violence looms in the Holy Land and United States, religion and race, previously topics in an ongoing conversation, no longer merely speak to each other, but begin to speak for each other. In domestic literature, the increasingly fierce friction between communities in the Holy Land fuses with discord in the United States, producing a conflation of religion and race as indelibly united problems. Ultimately, women's writings participate in a literary practice of essentializing, that is racializing, religion. Bearing the responsibility for the nation's religious and domestic well being, the figure of the American woman is summoned by U.S. writers to alleviate the threats posed by religious and racial others.

Homes Divided

The mood of “nervousness and irritation” that characterized Palestine in the mid to late 1850s lent itself to association with the atmosphere of apprehension that typified the United States at the time, intensifying the stakes of U.S-Holy Land identification.³⁴ In the United States in 1854, outbreaks of violence in Lawrence, Kansas and the U.S. Congress, where Senator Charles Sumner was beaten by Congressman Preston Brooks, suggested sectional tensions fueled by the question of slavery were approaching a brutal culmination, a sentiment John Brown’s attempt to incite slave revolt at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia in 1859 only confirmed. During the same period, according to Moshe Ma’oz, “feelings of alarm and deep-hatred” were increasing between religious groups in the Near East.³⁵ Incidents of protest and violence in Syria, such as the 1858 Maronite peasant revolt in Kisrawan, portended further aggression that echoed the United States’ own impending contest. In May of 1860, tensions in the Holy Land finally came to head, only a year before their eruption in the United States. Druzes and Maronites clashed in the mountains of Lebanon, resulting in the destruction of 200 villages and the loss of thousands of mostly Maronite lives. Only a month later, Muslim craftsmen and shopkeepers rioted in Damascus, pillaging homes and murdering thousands of Christians in the Bab Tuma quarter. Despite the political, economic, and religious particularities of such sectarian

battles in the Near East, westerners interpreted them as unwarranted Muslim massacres of Christians. In fact, the Maronites were only loosely affiliated with the Catholic Church, and the Druzes were not Muslim, but even their conflict was understood as proof of Islam's incompatibility with the West. Bloodshed in Lebanon and Damascus indicated to American Protestants that they were "in a state of war," a "brutal campaign" that broadly pitted Muslim against Christian.³⁶ In a sense, the Ottoman Empire affirmed this view, executing over 300 alleged conspirators—Sunni Muslims—in the autumn of 1860. This perception of a war between Islam and the West seems especially ironic considering how domestic fiction writers such as Child had already subtly framed the U.S. sectional conflict in such terms.

In the late 1850s, the Holy Land "home" molded by domestic writers registers these inter-religious tensions and uses them to articulate American insecurity. Writers depict the American woman struggling with the place of the United States amidst religious affirmation and disappointment, envisioned "chosenness" and unassailable diversity in the Holy Land. In *Hadji in Syria*, Johnson repeatedly disguises herself in Turkish Muslim fashions to gain access to significant biblical sites. Although her cultural crossdressing serves to convince others she is Muslim, Johnson's trespasses into Islamic territory, such as the exclusive Dome of the Rock, leave her Christian convictions in tact.³⁷ Johnson's use of the term "Hadji" in her title mirrors these illicit adventures; she playfully employs Arabic to conceal her identity as a Christian pilgrim rather than to

indicate her completion of an Islamic pilgrimage. Yet as Johnson delves deeper into the “land of the book,” she struggles to articulate a conviction of American belonging. She cannot easily reconcile her American identity with her Muslim adventures, suggesting “Americanness” itself is uncertain. In one scene, Johnson dubiously attempts to rally American patriotism in a Jerusalem harem after exchanging clothes with hired dancing girls:

My European dress caused them as much amusement as their curious apparel afforded me, and they were not satisfied until we had exchanged costumes. A mirror was brought into requisition, in which they wonderingly surveyed the change wrought by the sport. A large number had assembled to see the lady from the “new world,” and they were very curious to know something about the manners and customs of my country. Great was their surprise on hearing of the liberty enjoyed by their Western sisters, which, strange to say, although I used all the terms of enthusiasm my knowledge of Arabic could command, they did not seem at all to covet. (HS, 217-18)

As the women experiment with each other's clothing, a mirror allows each to see not only her other as herself, but to see herself as other. The mirror mediates not only a personal doubling of the American and Near-Eastern women in question, but also a geographical, spatial doubling of the United States and the Holy Land

that illuminates points of contact and dissimilarity.³⁸ Perhaps most importantly, this mirroring reveals that Johnson is less the observer she imagines herself to be than she is another performer for the evening, a lady of the new world who presents her strange dress and customs to a curious audience. As a spectacle and a diversion, like the dancing girls who wear her clothes, Johnson boldly declares her "liberty," but she hardly convinces her Muslim audience of American superiority. Johnson's patriotism seems a half-hearted cry, dressed as she is in Near Eastern attire and speaking in the Arabic language she has adopted. She may attempt to police the boundaries of the nation, but her performance becomes parody. Mirrored, literally in this case, in the Holy Land, the United States is vulnerable, troubled by a multiplicity of communities without allegiance or clear investment in the nation.

In a considerably later work, Hale and Hale's 1882 novel *Family Flight*, we see that the Holy Land's fractured diversity continues to have this power to symbolize the nation's fallibility. In an episode from *Family Flight*, the seemingly indelible association between Christianity and Americanness becomes impossible to sustain as the meaning of Christian and American emblems collapse in the Holy Land. The Horner family celebrates a peculiar "Christmas on the Nile" en route to Palestine, placing on their table, "an edifice of sugar, meant to represent the Capitol at Washington, over which the Stars and Stripes waved in tiny flags."³⁹ As the family and their multinational guests eat turkey, "beloved of our nation," they appear to assert a totalizing boundary between themselves and

their non-U.S. setting.⁴⁰ Despite the occasion's resolute nationalism, it discloses the vulnerability of "Americanness." The celebration is itself the creation of Antonio, the Horners' Italian-speaking Maltese steward, who arranges a day the Hales describe as "unlike" any U.S. Christmas.⁴¹ Though Christmas rituals endure, their material makeup alters; the children find stockings stuffed with a curious mixture of familiar and foreign elements—"apples, nuts, cheap [Egyptian] relics of modern manufacture" and one mummified cat in "faded yellow wrappings."⁴² Almost twenty-five years after the publication of *Hadji in Syria*, representations of Holy Land domesticity continue to suggest the susceptibility of the U.S. nation to penetration by diverse communities.

In the wake of U.S. hostilities and insecurities, writers of domesticity script these Holy Land conflicts as rehearsals for national rupture. Outbreaks of violence in the Holy Land and United States brought contemporary concerns regarding race and religion into intimate association. Such aggression spoke negatively about the possibilities of diversity at a time when the United States teetered on the brink of war. Though references to Islam in domestic literature have operated as a critique of slavery in the U.S. South, they begin to serve as signifiers of racial difference. The Muslim ceases to be a metaphor for the slaveholder and becomes a more ambiguous symbol of unassailable difference; the Muslim-Arab becomes the prototypical religious-racial other. Depictions of sectarian tensions in the Holy Land not only echo civil unrest in the United States, but also provide a lens and a language for discussing race and imagining

the consequences attendant upon an emancipated nation. Domestic writers register growing sectarian animosity in the Holy Land as a natural alienation between Muslims and Christians, implying the inevitability of their confrontation as fundamentally different peoples and also implying the uncertainty of peaceful, equal, coexistence between these religious groups even in the future. Through illustrations of relationships between Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land, domestic writers act out the increasingly blatant tensions between U.S. northerners and southerners as well as the more opaque tensions between white and non-white Americans, asking if and through what terms the national covenant can be restored.

This shift toward the racializing of Islam is visible within the text of Johnson's *Hadji in Syria*. Johnson invokes Islam to critique slavery and also, we might add, to subtly argue on behalf of women's rights. Yet, she also indicates that Islam is more than a chosen faith or set of ritual performances. Muslimness has a particular, essential character. Johnson writes, "should" the Muslim, "in his dealings with a Jew, cheat him of his last para, spit upon him and curse him, he imagines it is all quite proper" (*HS*, 235). This notion of the aggressive, intolerant Muslim signals his indisputable difference from the Christian and the freedom-loving American. In a sense the figure of the Muslim reaffirms the equation of these religious and national identities. Islam's presumed brutality and perpetration of inequity make the Muslim incompatible with a diversified society, enabling the domestic writer to hold onto ideals of egalitarianism while also

insisting upon the exclusion of some from the nation. Johnson likewise portrays the Druzes of Lebanon as unstable, and she contrasts their destructive proclivities with the peaceful, “hospitable” predispositions of the Maronites (*HS*, 22). By beginning to suggest that aggression itself is innate, Johnson initiates a conversation that conflates religious and racial identity and hints at ways the U.S. national covenant might be reconstituted by reestablishing racial otherness as religious otherness.

Reservations about diversity in general and Muslimness in particular are expressed in Cummins’s *El Furiédîs* as well. Cummins’s *El Furiédîs* village church presents an exemplary model of multiculturalism, and yet Cummins shows her readers that hostility is seething just beneath the surface of seeming unity. Comparing Cummins’s portrait to a description of another Mount Lebanon church, found in a letter from Rufus Anderson, the Secretary of the ABCFM, reveals the extent to which Muslimness has become racialized as an essentially different and essentially dangerous identity. Anderson describes, “an audience of seven hundred people, all seated upon matting on the ground floor,” whose “dress was entirely oriental.”⁴³ Despite appearances, Anderson claims the congregation’s “aspect” is “eminently Christian,” stressing the possibility of a universal, yet varied, spiritual community with underlying commonalities.⁴⁴ Anderson emphasizes the racial compatibility of Near-Eastern Christians, explaining that recently-converted women have “complexions . . . equal to those of our own countrywomen.”⁴⁵ His statements convey that Arabs, Turks,

Armenians, and Greeks—desired converts—are not so inherently different from white Protestant America as to prohibit salvation. Like Anderson, Cummins articulates an image of diversity in which cultural difference is overcome through shared religious experience. Unlike Anderson, Cummins presents a portrait of an idyllic village church ironically disturbed by the barely-visible presence of a Muslim Arab, a Bedouin prince named Abdoul. That Abdoul's treachery will eventually precipitate the novel's most dramatic action is insinuated in Cummins's description of him lurking in the shadows of the church, scowling with deep-seated hatred at his rival, the Englishman Meredith. The El Fureidîs church at once announces the possibility of an emancipated and racially inclusive community and discounts it, communicating the perils attendant upon such an inclusive covenant. Other differences become apparent at the church, manifesting latent belligerence. The disparity between "the athletic Maronite," with his "fair and comely wife," "the self-absorbed and dignified Turk," and the "stern Druse" of "bronzed visage," his "hand on his heavy scimitar" is unassailable and possibly threatening, even as they worship together (*F*, 18, 19). Only the presence of the American woman Havilah seems capable of mediating and mollifying this potentially explosive community.

In the 1860s, the description "Muslim" assumes a broader and more sinister connotation in women's writings. Caroline Paine expresses widespread sentiment in *Tent and Harem* when she describes the threat these religious-racial others pose with their "restless . . . cunning" eyes and propensity for theft, rape,

and murder.⁴⁶ Writers continue to carefully categorize myriad Holy Land sects, but the inherent nature or character, the limitation rather than the potential of non-Protestants becomes ever more relevant. Ultimately, domestic writings secure a conception of the Muslim Arab as violent, antagonistic, and duplicitous, traits that prevent real pluralism from taking hold in the Holy Land and suggest limits to U.S. ideals of national equality and inclusion. Amidst feelings of instability, writers of domesticity sought to maintain order in their national and spiritual homelands and to educate readers in the ways in which threatening religious and racial others could be transformed into safe, willing servants of U.S. national culture. By transforming the Muslim Arab into a consenting servant, writers are able to exclude the racialized religious other from U.S. covenantal culture and remain committed to ideals of abolition and diversity. As the spiritual guardian of America's Holy Land home, the figure of the American woman is granted the responsibility and furthermore the power in domestic literature to produce these consensual hierarchies and thereby reconstitute the nation.

Cummins's *El Fureidîs* offers perhaps the richest example of Holy Land domesticity, and it provides one particularly incisive illustration of how domestic literature uses Holy Land sectarianism to alleviate apprehensions about national rupture and diversity. That Cummins's third novel was published the same year that violence exploded in Syria contributes to the appeal of its vision; it ostensibly offers an alternative to the brutality that unfolded in the Near East and later consumed the United States, a resolution in which American women mediate and

diffuse conflict. In *El Furiidīs*, a small multicultural village in the valley of Lebanon is managed by an American capitalist Augustus Trefoil and a French Protestant minister Father Lapierre. Although the two men embrace differing ideals, they collectively control the town populace through economic dependency and religious instruction. In an act of seeming divine providence, a flood and earthquake frees the villagers from the plantation-like structures that bind them, and they find themselves in the midst of sectarian chaos and increasing antagonism. Eventually, Cummins locates the source of religious and racial hostilities in El Fureidīs in the body of Abdoul, a native Muslim Arab prince. Havilah, Cummins's hybrid American heroine, detects Abdoul's inherent dangerousness and mollifies it. She domesticates him, transforming the oppressor into a docile subject committed to serving the nation newly reconstituted by his exclusion. By examining the manner in which Cummins equates religious and racial otherness in Abdoul, we see most clearly the work of domestic writers toward the eradication of national tensions. As Cummins describes Abdoul and the process of his domestication, she reconstructs national racial identity, providing a path for the reunion of the nation through the exclusion of racial difference as religious difference.

Consenting Domestics in *El Furiidīs*

In *El Fureidís*, Havilah and Abdoul, playmates since childhood and “adopted” siblings, cannot convert one another. Although Cummins’s novel ostensibly presents an exotic romance that tracks one British gentleman’s adventures, spiritual awakening, and successful courtship in the Holy Land, it also tells the story of Abdoul’s unsuccessful conversion and courtship of Havilah, the very woman won by the Englishman Meredith. Surprisingly, Abdoul at first appears an acceptable suitor for Havilah, even displaying the brotherly intimacy characteristic of proper beaux in domestic fiction. At least one reviewer expressed disappointment with Havilah’s choice of Meredith over Abdoul.⁴⁷ Yet the progress of Abdoul and Havilah’s romance is halted not by Meredith, but Abdoul’s religious and racial otherness, which the narrative eventually equates. Early in the novel, Abdoul exhibits “patient endurance and self-sacrifice,” qualities that befit “a Christian” and suggest his potential (*F*, 162). Yet when Abdoul’s “whole nature” is “illuminated,” the selfish and intensely violent attributes of “his race” are shown to be incompatible with Christianity (*F*, 165). Abdoul’s “un-Christian” proclivity for violence is understood as racially determined and unalterable. Ultimately, the impossibility of Abdoul’s Christian conversion produces the impenetrable gulf between Muslim and Protestant, Arab and white, and identifies the Muslim-Arab, the religious and racial other, as the cause of the tenuous state of religious and racial diversity in the Holy Land and United States. As the novel discloses these threatening revelations, it likewise narrates Havilah’s developing ability to manage the equivalent “problems” of religion and race that Abdoul embodies.

Contemporary critics of Cummins's work, particularly her bestselling novel *The Lamplighter*, suggest that although Cummins did not explicitly tackle themes of racial inequality, her audience and critics understood her work to speak to those themes clearly. If *The Lamplighter* presents the injustice of slavery, drawing "analogies between Gerty's story and the horrors of slavery," as one illustrated children's book suggests, her third novel *El Fureidîs* implicitly anticipates the aftermath of a possible emancipation.⁴⁸ For such an experiment, Mount Lebanon offered a perfect setting, a place in which religious diversity was protected by legal reform and practiced as an ideal, at least as some American Protestants imagined. Cummins describes the El Fureidîs village as a "mountain-seat of religious freedom," but the strident anti-slavery advocate readers perceived in the author of *The Lamplighter* is missing (F, 192). Although Cummins depicts slavery and its horrors directly, she hesitates to endorse liberation or equality. Meredith expresses "disgust" when touring the Damascus slave market, a sight that leaves him "burn[ing] to break the rivets that bound the swarthy limbs of iron-built men" (F, 307). And yet, Meredith's ire cools when he discovers that the wealthy Turkish slaveowner Mustapha only buys old and infirm slaves to provide them with comfortable housing. Suddenly the peculiar institution is seen as a particular form of kindness. Cummins exhibits similar ambivalence when she depicts what resembles a post-slavery society in El Fureidîs. The town is populated with satisfied field and factory workers who appear to enjoy their

work and appreciate the strict guidance of the benevolent, white Westerners who control their religious and economic institutions.

El Fureidîs's Holy Land setting does more than provide an extra-national platform for ambivalent abolitionism; it communicates the vital stakes of religious diversity in the Holy Land for Americans. The tenuousness of religious diversity feeds concerns about slavery, which visibly haunt the novel. As religious and racial anxieties converge, the "immoral" religious other meets the "incontrovertible" racial other. Through the trope of conversion, Cummins links religious and racial otherness and identifies their presence. As Abdoul's proclivity for violence prohibits his conversion to Christianity, the distinction between religious and racial otherness evaporates, and it becomes clear that diversity indicates danger. One scene, which unfolds in Havilah's home, intimates Abdoul's murderous potential and reveals that Abdoul's body and mind, his nature and religion, are one, united in animosity:

His eyes flashed vividly; his voice took an exultant tone. Nor was the effect merely outward and momentary. His excitable mind was fixed, and the new turn given to his thoughts immediately betrayed itself in his conversations and gestures. Flattering reminiscences of his own prowess and power were superseded by the stronger passions of his race, and, either forgetful or unappreciative of the character of his listener, he now launched upon tales of war and blood, the provocation of the enemy, the

pursuit, the combat, the revenge. . . . His accent became deep, guttural, and harsh, as, with rapid words and highly-wrought figures of speech, he dwelt on these fierce topics (*F*, 165).

As Abdoul narrates past exploits, his entire being is infused with excitement and power. His eyes and voice embody the fierceness of his tales, transforming storytelling into an act of aggression. Abdoul even clutches “the hilt of his dagger” as he speaks (*F*, 166). The identical hostility of form and mind defines Abdoul’s Muslim-Arab nature. Such determinedly un-Christian qualities distance Abdoul from Havilah, whose own religiosity is defined against such violent appetites and actions.

The impossibility of Abdoul’s conversion to Havilah’s Christianity is made apparent through allusions to the pair’s shared childhood. Nursed “fondly” as “the son of her adoption” by Ianthe and befriended by Havilah, who calls him brother, Abdoul receives Protestant protection and instruction at an impressionable age, but never converts to Christianity (*F*, 67). References to this idyllic, early period of contact signal the innateness of Abdoul’s Muslimness, revealing the inability of Protestant socialization to prevail against Muslim birth. Education cannot inculcate proper Protestant feeling. A glimpse of Abdoul’s interiority as he witnesses a church service proves his incapacity for Christian feeling. As the spiritually indifferent Meredith notices “an unwonted awe” creep “over” his “heart” in side the El Furiédîs church, Abdoul can, at best, “assum[e] an air of respectful

attention" (*F*, 16). Later, when Meredith experiences spiritual awakening, he will feel called "home" like a lost child (*F*, 299). The implication of course is that Meredith has been Christian all along, that religious practice is only the outward manifestation of something innate. As this invocation of childhood implies Meredith's Christian potential, it exposes Abdoul's limitation. Cummins makes it increasingly apparent that Abdoul's Muslimness is central if not equivalent to his "nature."

Cummins likewise uses episodes of successful conversion to mark Abdoul indisputably as a religious-racial other. Abdoul's inability to convert articulates a racializing of Muslimness; other characters' capacity to join a universalizing Protestant project demonstrates the fundamental whiteness of Christianity in the novel. Havilah's religious fervor affects two spiritual awakenings, those of her Turkish friend Maysunah and the spiritually apathetic Meredith, whose "baptisms" occur in the culmination of a harem scene that unfolds in Maysunah's Damascus mansion. Meredith watches a reunion that takes place between Havilah and Maysunah, an intimate display of stroking, blushing, and kissing. This decidedly homoerotic and seemingly secular moment has spiritual consequences. Maysunah exclaims, "I *have* wandered in the desert. . . . Thou has within thee the well-spring for which my spirit pants. Bathe me in its flood, my beautiful one" (*F*, 293, 298). Havilah encourages Maysunah's impulse to sexualize salvation, implying that physical contact with herself and the land of the Bible will arouse an innate yearning for Protestant belief and practice. For the Turkish Maysunah, in

contrast to Abdoul, Muslimness is merely a “veil” that she can “fling” to “the winds” (*F*, 294). Spirituality cannot be separated from sexuality in this scene. Cummins creates a radical vision here of the American woman’s power of suasion that makes the feminized world of religion as eroticized as the Near East was perceived to be.

This scene evangelizes Meredith as well as Maysunah, allowing him to experience his own physical and spiritual climax. As Meredith views the scene, his “throb of homage [for Havilah] soon gave place to a resolute calm; a beam of holy light shone upon the night of his spirit” (*F*, 293). Arousal awakens in Meredith the recognition of an inherent but dormant Christianity. Here, sexual ecstasy provides the structure for conversion, and the sexual subtext of the scene underscores the corporeality of religion. In *El Fureidîs*, particular bodies belong to particular religions. With religion not a matter of self-identification, of community, or of belief, but a matter of race, its erotic overtones evoke an unspoken assumption, that the threat Abdoul poses is also sexual. By illustrating how sexuality figures in revelation, Cummins implicitly likens the conversion of Abdoul to an act of miscegenation. As such, physical and spiritual arousal in the novel remains contained within and determine the borders of the white Christian community. Taketani claims that Meredith and Havilah’s eventual marriage constructs an Anglo-American diaspora.⁴⁹ I argue that this imagined white diaspora is defined against Muslimness specifically and not just coincidentally.

In a covenantal culture fraught with perilous sectional and racial tensions, if religious-racial others cannot be converted, they must be managed. U.S. women writers employ a consenting domestic model in an attempt to imaginatively deflate the dangers of diversity. In this model, the feminine and feminizing powers of the American woman mystically compel religious-racial others to embrace a social order in which they are subordinate to a white, Protestant hierarchy. Cummins's Havilah transforms the ferocious Bedouin prince Abdoul from suitor into willing servant. *El Fureid's* suggests that Havilah's presence and her piety, the example she provides of Christian belief and behavior, naturally pacify Abdoul's inherent hostility, which is incidentally inflamed by white, male proximity. In Havilah's company, Abdoul softens, transforming from a "wild and untamed" warrior prince into a "humble vassal" (*F*, 119, 65). Not only Abdoul's status, but also his gender appears to change when near Havilah. He becomes a distinctly feminine object of beauty; "as he lifted his piercing eyes to her soft and liquid orbs, his face became suffused with an expression of dove-like sweetness, which imparted to it a strange and picturesque beauty" (*F*, 20). In turn, Havilah is granted masculine strength and authority. Her simple bearing rebukes Abdoul's violent inclinations. Her "countenance and manner no less than her sudden words" quiet Abdoul's speech and actions: "the scowl melted from the forehead of the boy, his hand was slowly withdrawn from his weapon, and his eyes shone with a milder light as he meekly bowed himself" (*F*, 166). Aggression may be an innate characteristic of the

Muslim-Arab as Cummins constructs him, but ironically, so is deference for American domesticity. Abdoul attends Havilah with “meek patience . . . his eyes fastened upon her face like one under the influence of a spell” (*F*, 166).

Havilah’s sexuality facilitates conversion and likewise marks Abdoul as a sexual threat, but her sexuality also controls and placates that threat. Abdoul’s desire for Havilah contributes to her absolute mastery over his impulses.

Ironically, Abdoul’s sexuality endangers Meredith not Havilah. The white male body, not the female, lies vulnerable to the uncontrollable lust of the non-white man. Abdoul attempts to murder his sexual rival as the Englishman sleeps in the Bedouin encampment of Abdoul’s father. Seemingly invincible, Havilah wrenches the knife from Abdoul’s hands, his “thin muscular arm” unable to prevent her triumph. An emblem of physical power, Havilah waves the “wand of steel,” and as she “suddenly gained in height,” Abdoul’s “whole form relapsed into insignificance” (*F*, 353, 354, 354). Havilah’s performance articulates feminine power and control, invigorated by physical, social, and spiritual closeness to the Holy Land. While Meredith remains asleep and defenseless, Havilah acts to domesticate and organize the religious and racial others who populate national and sacred space. Meredith’s unconsciousness is figurative as well as literal; throughout the novel, he remains unaware of underlying Holy Land tensions and the stakes of religious diversity. Exiled after this moment of symbolic castration, Abdoul accepts his role as servant, cultivating in place of aggression a “natural” Arab propensity for hospitality. In a final illustration of acquiescence, Abdoul

appears before Havilah, bowing and expressing his unworthiness to “touch” even “the hem of her robes” (*F*, 377). In a gesture that pronounces Abdoul finally harmless, his domestication complete, Havilah returns his dagger.

As looming sectarian and sectional hostilities encourage the representation of the Muslim-Arab as a locus of danger, the consenting domestic appears, revealing the conditions for tolerating diversity in the United States and Holy Land. Religious and racial freedoms are premised on a model of segregation and consent, in which others submit “willingly” to a clearly hierarchized social order. Cummins illustrates this process not only through Abdoul’s submission, but also through El Fureidîs’s return to order after the flood and earthquake. As she scripts Havilah’s rebuilding of the village and its religious, educational, and economic institutions, Cummins portrays the villagers as happily-indentured laborers, comparable to the servants of Paine’s “well-regulated” household in *Tent and Harem* who need “no orders” because their work occurs naturally.⁵⁰ Ultimately Havilah, with Meredith’s help, rehabilitates the small Lebanon valley village into a cooperative, diverse society, consensually governed by a white, Protestant power structure. As Havilah manages Abdoul and the villagers, she suggests ways in which religious and racial difference can be incorporated safely into the vulnerable, white, Protestant-American covenantal culture even as it faces conflicts at home and abroad.

In subsequent decades, the consenting domestic figure remains a fixture in U.S. women’s writings. Accompanied by an enduring conflation of religious and

racial otherness, the consenting domestic continues to alleviate anxieties about diversity. In 1881, Marie Straiton and Emma Straiton describe their peaceful Holy Land encampment in *Two Lady Tramps Abroad*, where native servants “are moving here and there, whistling a tune, or chattering merrily over their light work.”⁵¹ The narrators dismiss the toil of these workers and emphasize their contentment. 1882’s *Family Flight* depicts the fictional Horner family’s adoption of the “brown and smiling” Hasan.⁵² The Horners lovingly dub their dragoman, or guide, “Hasan Horner” but insist on their superiority, desiring “to import him and have him in New York to keep house.”⁵³ In Champney’s 1892 novel *Three Vassar Girls in the Holy Land*, the heroine Bird uses American femininity to domesticate her own Jewish father, placing him in the service of the white, Protestant Remington family as they tour the Holy Land during the burgeoning days of Zionism. These examples point to the power writers ascribe to American domesticity in the space of the Holy Land. The femininity of religion, the “strength” given by “God,” that enables the American woman to re-configure class in the Holy Land and make diversity safe, in turn reinforces and rationalizes religion as a feminine domain (*F*, 220).

In *El Fureidîs*’s preface, Cummins expresses a desire for her readers to “come to feel at last” as she does, “at home in El Fureidîs” (*F*, iv). The concept of the Holy Land as home was familiar to nineteenth-century women readers, especially those who accepted a Protestant vision of Holy Land entitlement and understood the home and the sacred as particularly feminine. Yet, Cummins’s

addition “at last” implies that the process of belonging in the Holy Land takes time. A sense of comfort arrives only when material tensions—anxieties produced by violence in Syria and regional antagonism and racial inequality in the United States—and immaterial tensions—paradoxical ideals of abolition and national racial unity—are reconciled in representations of the Holy Land. This reconciliation, at least as it occurs in U.S. domestic Holy land literature, is highly problematic. Coinciding histories of contention encouraged writers to racialize religion, allowing them to understand religious-racial others as fundamentally—unalterably—immoral and dangerous. In this equation, white supremacy tautologically underpins Protestant superiority. Women writers understood that this situation permitted, even demanded, feminine intervention. Attempting to assuage tensions incited by religious and regional conflicts that informed and merged conceptions of religious and racial otherness, U.S. women writers such as Cummins promote feminine strength at the expense of true pluralism. The social reconfigurations depicted in Holy Land texts reveal no real structural change, only a fantasy of diversity contentedly constrained.

Notes

¹ Maria Susanna Cummins, *El Fureidís* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 220, 220. Further references will be to this edition and will be parenthetically cited *F*.

² Station Reports, May 1858, in *The Missionary Herald*, 4: 307.

³ Lebanon was a regional rather than a political designation prior to the 1861 establishment of the Lebanese Mutesarrifate, an autonomous province separate from Syria under Ottoman rule. By the eighteenth century, “Mount Lebanon” indicated roughly

the territory that is now the republic of Lebanon, the area between the Anti-Lebanon mountain range and the Mediterranean Sea. See K.S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), xi-xiii. In *The Culture of Sectarianism* Makdisi has shown how the outbreak of violence in Lebanon and Damascus in the late 1850s and in 1860 were in fact complicated manifestations of sociopolitical tensions between and within Maronite, Druze, Christian, and Muslim communities, arising in a period of intense modernization and industrialization.

⁴ Abraham Lincoln, *A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand* (Chicago: The Black Cat Press, 1936); William W. Eddy, "Letter from Mr. Eddy," July 1858, in *The Missionary Herald* 4: 315.

⁵ Amy Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 24.

⁶ Sarah Barclay Johnson, *Hadji in Syria* (Philadelphia: J. Challen, 1858), 53. Further references will be to this edition and will be parenthetically cited *HS*.

⁷ Margaret Thomson, "The First Missionary Impulse in the Minds of the Barclay Family," in *The Jerusalem Mission under the Direction of the American Christian Missionary Society*, ed. D.S. Burnet (1853; facsimile, New York: Arno Press, 1977), 27-33.

⁸ Allison R. Ensor, "A Tennessee Woman Abroad: The Travel Letters of Sarah Barnwell Elliot, 1886-1887," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 52 (Fall 1993): 186.

⁹ Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home: Or The Principles of Domestic Science* (New York: J. B. Ford, 1869), 456-457. Colleen McDannell draws attention to this interesting architectural plan in *The Christian Home*, 37.

¹⁰ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Avon Books, 1978); For subsequent studies of domesticity, see Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Shirley Samuels, ed. *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender,*

and *Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹¹ Timothy Marr, "'Out of this World': Islamic Irruptions in the Literary Americas," in "Hemispheric American Literary History," ed. Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, special issue, *American Literary History* 18, no. 3 (2006): 521-549.

¹² Amy Kaplan "Manifest Domesticity," in *Anarchy of Empire*; See also James A. Ross-Nazzal, "Traveling with the Ladies: American Women's Travel Accounts of Palestine in the Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., Washington State University, 2001).

¹³ Rev. E. E. Hale and Susan Hale, *A Family Flight over Egypt and Syria* (Boston: D. Lothrop, 1882), 385.

¹⁴ Champney, *Three Vassar Girls in the Holy Land*, 232.

¹⁵ Eliade describes the religious experience of sacred space as "a primordial experience, homologizable to a founding of the world," an act that "precedes all reflection on the world." Sacred space is a focal center for orienting and ordering a worldview. *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20-21.

¹⁶ Sarah Rogers Haight, *Letters from the Old World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1840), 2:175.

¹⁷ Paine, *Tent and Harem*, 254; Clorinda Minor, *Meshullam! Or, Tidings From Jerusalem* (Published by the Author, 1851), 50.

¹⁸ Champney, *Three Vassar Girls*, 110; Gregory Schopen, "Relic" in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 259. Schopen's analysis of the tensions between immanent objects and their transcendent statuses within religious communities applies usefully to the problems women encounter writing the Holy Land.

¹⁹ "The Holy Land and its Holy Places," *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1855, 395.

²⁰ Lydia Maria Child, "Slavery's Pleasant Homes: A Faithful Sketch," in *Women in the Trees: U.S. Women's Short Stories About Battering and Resistance, 1839-1994*, ed. Susan Koppleman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 6. The story was first published in an abolitionist gift book, *The Liberty Bell*, 4 (1843): 147-60. According to Karcher, an article describing the system of southern "chivalry" as "Mahommedan" appeared in the *Portsmouth Journal* and was later printed in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* for which Child served as editor. "Peculiar Traits of Southern Life—Condition of Woman—Her

Strange Seclusion—True and False Civilization—Southern Chivalry,” *Portsmouth Journal*, reprinted in *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Dec. 8, 1841, 108. Karcher, *First Woman in the Republic*, 338.

²¹ Child, “Slavery’s Pleasant Homes,” 6.

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

²³ In the preface of *El Fureidîs*, Cummins lists a number of scholars whose work influenced her novel. Included is a “Thompson” who has described “the details of Syrian life” (iv). Despite the difference in spelling, I believe Cummins here means William M. Thomson, the famous missionary who published the bestseller *The Land and the Book*, an account of Syria based on his 25 year residence, in 1859.

²⁴ Antislavery activists alleged this neutrality was the result of the contributions wealthy southerners made to the ABCFM’s missions.

²⁵ Henry Harris Jessup, “Letter from Mr. Jessup,” Sept. 1858, in *The Missionary Herald* 4: 319, 316.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 319.

²⁷ Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 3.

²⁸ Harriet Griswold, *A Woman’s Pilgrimage to the Holy Land; or Pleasant Days Abroad* (Hartford, CN: J.B. Burr & Hyde, 1872), 244.

²⁹ Paine, *Tent and Harem*, 184.

³⁰ Daniel Bliss, “Letter From Mr. Bliss,” Dec. 1857, in *The Missionary Herald*, 4: 294.

³¹ Stowe consciously quoted judicial opinions in her fictional portrait of Dred, the son of Denmark Vesey. She annotates these in the appendices of *Dred*.

³² Mrs. S.B. Thomas, *Travels in Europe, Egypt, and Palestine* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1860), 319.

³³ Kate Kraft, *The Nilometer and Sacred Soil: A Diary of a Tour Through Egypt, Palestine, and Syria* (New York: Carleton, 1869), 213.

³⁴ Alexander Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation, 1856-1882*, trans. William C. Young and Michael C. Gerrity (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993), 274.

³⁵ Moshe Ma’oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840-1861: The Impact of the Tanzimat on Politics and Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 228.

³⁶ William M. Thomson, “Letters from Mr. Thomson,” Aug. 1860, in *The Missionary Herald* 4: 382; Makdisi, “Reclaiming the Land,” 702.

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- ³⁷ Nazzari claims Johnson was the first Westerner to publish a description of the mosque's interior. "Traveling with the Ladies," 32.
- ³⁸ Mary Suzanne Schriber writes that "difference" and "doubling" are the twin lenses through which American women view their foreign female counterparts. *Writing Home: U.S. Women Abroad 1830-1920* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 81.
- ³⁹ Hale and Hale, *Family Flight*, 157.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ Rufus Anderson, "Letter from Dr. Anderson," Feb., 1856, in *The Missionary Herald*, 4: 240, 240, 240, 241.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 240.
- ⁴⁶ Paine, *Tent and Harem*, 99-100.
- ⁴⁷ Taketani, "'Diasporic' Whiteness and the Middle East in Maria Cummins's *El Fureidís*," in *U.S. Women Writers and the Discourses of Colonialism*, 179-180.
- ⁴⁸ *The Lamplighter Picture Book, or the Story of Uncle True and Little Gerty, Written for the Little Folks* is discussed in Susan S. Williams, "'Promoting an Extensive Sale': The Production and Reception of the Lamplighter," *The New England Quarterly* 69, no.2 (1996): 187.
- ⁴⁹ Taketani, "'Diasporic' Whiteness and the Middle East," 178.
- ⁵⁰ Paine, *Tent and Harem*, 98.
- ⁵¹ Marie Straiton and Emma Straiton, *Two Lady Tramps Abroad: A Compilation of Letters Descriptive of Nearly a Year's Travel in India, Asia Minor, Egypt, the Holy Land, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, France, England, Ireland and Scotland* (Flushing, NY: Evening Journal Press, 1881), 121.
- ⁵² Hale and Hale, *Family Flight*, 83.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 383, 83.

And so, by these providences of God—
 the phrase is the Government's, not mine—
 we are a World Power
 —Mark Twain

CHAPTER FIVE

Evangelical Empire:

The Sacred Geographies of Mark Twain's *Following the Equator*

In 1895 Mark Twain approached Hawaii, the first stop in the global lecture tour that would form the basis for his travel narrative *Following the Equator* (1897). Unable to disembark due to an outbreak of cholera, Twain relied on his memories of the islands, accumulated during a six-month stint in 1866 as a reporter for the *Sacramento Union*, in crafting the Hawaii chapters of *Following the Equator*. Twain's nostalgic description reveals how Hawaii functioned as a personal and professional sacred space for the author, an idyllic "Paradise," which, as Amy Kaplan asserts, "Americanized" Twain.¹ Charged with promoting U.S. investment in Hawaii's burgeoning sugar and tourism industries for the *Union's* readers,

Twain forged his “national identity,” Kaplan writes, “in an international context of imperial expansion.”² As Twain promoted U.S. commercial interests in Hawaii, he found himself confronting “memories of the prewar past.”³ The flagrant exploitation of the native population that Twain witnessed evoked “both the nostalgia for and the nightmare of slavery.”⁴ Hawaii, the source of Twain’s first national literary success and the site through which he developed his distinctly (divided) American persona, illustrates, as Kaplan shows, the interdependence of American national identity and U.S. imperialism.

Twain’s Hawaiian recollections, however, reveal not only how U.S. national identity is inextricable from U.S. imperialism, but also how religion and images of the Holy Land are fundamental to the development of U.S. Empire. “In my time,” Twain reminisces, Honolulu “was a beautiful little town, made up of snow-white wooden cottages deliciously smothered in tropical vines and flowers and trees and shrubs” (*FE*, 60). This “modest and comfortable prosperity” is exemplified in Honolulu’s homes, the interiors of which are adorned with a curious assortment of political and religious pictures (*FE*, 60). Lithographs of “Kamahameha IV, Louis Kossuth,” and “Jenny Lind,” Twain writes, are displayed beside engravings of “Rebecca at the Well, Moses smiting the rock,” and “Joseph’s servants finding the cup in Benjamin’s sack” (*FE*, 60). Even as Twain attempts to draw attention to the pre-industrial lushness of Hawaii, his description of the Hawaiian home depicts an already colonized space in which political portraits mingle with scenes from the Hebrew Bible. The home’s other

decorations, “sea-shells with Bible texts carved on them in cameo style,” similarly undercut Twain’s nostalgia, showing that western Christian narratives have already begun to transform Hawaii’s landscape (*FE*, 61). In the pre-civilized paradise Twain presents, Holy Land scenes and biblical texts are literally inscribed on the islands. These biblical narratives and images of the Holy Land, Twain shows, have been superimposed on Hawaiian space by American missionaries and capitalists who have attempted to “civilize” Hawaii in the name of U.S. providential destiny. If we read the writing on the wall, Twain’s message is clear: in order to trace the routes of U.S. imperialism, we must travel to the Holy Land.

As previous chapters have shown, images of the Holy Land have been used to consolidate, challenge, and reconstruct the place of race in the United States during periods of national expansion, domestic tension, and war. In the late nineteenth century, American identification with the Holy Land became an important rhetorical tool in promoting and validating the U.S. government’s newly explicit imperial project. At the turn of the century, Twain summarized how religion had been harnessed in the promotion of overseas conquest, writing, “And so, by these providences of God—the phrase is the Government’s, not mine—we are a World Power.”⁵ This characteristically understated assertion calls attention to the manner in which political and economic incursions in Cuba, the Philippines, and other colonial territories in 1880s and 1890s were justified as part of a national mission carried out by God’s new chosen people. Such Christian

imperialist rhetoric had in fact become commonplace by the 1880s as the continued growth of national wealth became increasingly dependent on foreign markets. In 1870, for instance, Henry Ward Beecher entreated in a Thanksgiving Day sermon, "May God give us magnanimity and power and riches," expressing the commonplace perception that "American destiny under God" had become "inextricably intertwined with American wealth."⁶ Twenty-eight years later, President McKinley, addressing a Methodist delegation during the American annexation of the Philippines claimed, "there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died."⁷ As Beecher and McKinley's statements make evident, U.S. statesmen, ministers, and corporate leaders appealed to American New Israel ideology as they advocated the acquisition of foreign territories and markets. An ideology that identified the United States as the new Promised Land, a nearly perfect and constantly improving Christian society, the concept of the American New Israel enabled global conquest to be construed as Christian mission. The perception that the United States was Israel's inheritor justified expansion and colonization, and in turn, U.S. continental and overseas expansion reinforced notions of what Wai Chee Dimock calls America's "special dispensation."⁸

Amy Kaplan, John Carlos Rowe, and other practitioners of U.S. Empire Studies have largely dismissed religion's centrality to the logic of U.S. imperialism

and thus have overlooked how the Holy Land functions as a site through which American empire is constructed and contested. In their examinations of *Following the Equator*, both Kaplan and Rowe generally disregard Twain's discussions of religion as they analyze the author's complicity in and critique of U.S. imperialism. Kaplan reads the missionaries of *Following the Equator* as "major imperial agents," who Twain derides for their sociopolitical supremacy, but she neglects to see how these missionaries illuminate religion's essential function in the construction of U.S. empire.⁹ Rowe notes that Twain references Reginald Heber's 1829 "Missionary Hymn" in *Following the Equator*, but he overlooks the way in which this hymn demonstrates how Christianity is mobilized in the interests of colonization, a misuse of religion that Twain highlights when he contrasts "our high-civilization ways" with their "pagan ways."¹⁰ Though critics have long-recognized Twain's late-career anti-imperialist position, they have yet to fully explore the role religion plays in Twain's concept of empire. By calling himself "St. Mark, Missionary to the Sandwich Islands," in the lecture tour that followed his original Hawaiian venture, Twain (however cheekily) called attention to the efficacy of the religious language that suffused the rhetoric of U.S. political and economic expansion.¹¹ If we finally take Twain's joke seriously, it becomes clear that one method of "disinterring the buried history of imperialism" is to excavate the religious discourse that molded empires and colonial territories into sacred geographies.¹²

As Twain's description of Hawaii in *Following the Equator* suggests, the Holy Land was central to the author's conception of U.S. imperialism. The Holy Land, a space Twain first encountered as the "main feature" of the 1867 *Quaker City* steamship tour, proved formative not only in cementing Twain's status as a "littery man" and national celebrity, but also in shaping his anti-imperialist philosophy.¹³ In *Innocents Abroad* (1869), the travel narrative that documented Twain's *Quaker City* excursion, the Holy Land exposes the interdependence of geographical, religious, and imperial discourses. An idealized pre-national homeland, the Holy Land becomes a site where cultural memory surfaces, an ironic repository of the erasures and contradictions of the American New Israel. Palestine, a space in which Twain's nineteenth-century characters contemplate the holy trinity, ironically exposes the "historical trinity" of "war, slavery, and territorial expansion" that Andy Doolen claims has characterized U.S. imperialism from the republic's inception.¹⁴ Representations of the United States as an elect community, as a chosen nation molded in the image of Israel—exemplified by the self-righteous "pilgrims" of *Innocents Abroad*—were used to justify and conceal histories of exploitation, expansion, and violence. This U.S. identification with the Holy Land leads to the ironic revelation in *The Innocents Abroad* that the United States is, in fact, an un-exceptional empire. The diversity, tension, and violence of Twain's Holy Land mirror the realities of U.S. imperialism, a "vast network of power tied to the global economy, institutions of slavery, the U.S. Constitution, the forced dispossession of American Indians, and military power."¹⁵ Even as the

Holy Land is used to construct a national imperial logic, it fails to sustain it. In *Innocents Abroad*, the Holy Land occasions a confrontation with U.S. imperialism, both with the sources of its concealment and with the consequences it engenders.

The Holy Land's function in empire building, I suggest, continued to concern Twain as he wrote *Following the Equator*. In the year before he embarked on his cruise "around the equatorial black belt of the world," Twain published the novel *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, a tale that sees Tom invite Huck Finn and Jim to accompany him on a crusade to "recover the Holy Land."¹⁶ That same year, Twain composed the short story "1,002^d Arabian Night," a parody of *Arabian Nights*, the bestselling English translation of the Arabic classic *One Thousand and One Nights*.¹⁷ These literary excursions to the Near East saw Twain return, imaginatively if not physically, to the sacred ground he had traversed thirty years earlier. Though scholars have been reticent to view *Following the Equator's* rambling, anecdotal prose as a "sustained argument or coherent narrative," I argue the travelogue is coherent, and its logic becomes evident when we place it in context with *Innocents Abroad*.¹⁸ While Twain's earlier travel narrative exposes the fallacy of the American New Israel Empire, *Following the Equator* explores the global consequences of a national ethos of divine election, making the Holy Land a central, if implicit, subject. In effect, *Following the Equator* presents a survey of sacred spaces across the globe,

offering a lucid rumination on how American New Israel ideology sustains international racism and imperialism.

In *Following the Equator*, the Holy Land provides a resource for critiquing not only the perception of the United States as a new Israel, but also for contesting the evolution of Manifest Destiny into a conscious pursuit of global empire. Returning to the themes that consumed his original Holy Land “pilgrimage,” Twain transforms sacred space from a setting that reflects U.S. culture into a series of spaces—Hawaii, Australia, India, and South Africa—that expose the contingency of American claims to chosenness. Pointedly, Melbourne, Benares, and Johannesburg replace Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Damascus as places set apart “from the rest of the globe” and distinguished as “ineffably and unspeakably holy ground” (*FE*, 482-483). As though echoing Huck Finn when asked to accompany Tom Sawyer on his crusade, Twain poses the simple but revealing question, “Which Holy Land?”¹⁹ A profusion of “other” holy lands populates *Following the Equator*, refuting American claims to “teleological ascendancy.”²⁰ Liberating sacred space from the specific geography of Palestine and re-inscribing it in religiously-other settings, Twain throws U.S. claims of divine inheritance into question. Moreover, the alternative sacred spaces Twain depicts illuminate the unholy and un-Christian realities of western imperialism. In an era in which U.S. conquests in the Philippines, Cuba, and Hawaii were justified as expressions of an American Christian mission, Twain reconstitutes “holy land” as a means of disavowing the American New Israel Empire.

“A Veritable American Gospel”

In *Innocents Abroad*, the Holy Land brings Mark Twain face to face with the practice and products of U.S. imperialism. Unwilling to pronounce and unable to spell Arabic names, the “boys”—as Twain calls the men who travel with him on the *Quaker City* tour—rename countless towns throughout Palestine (*IA*, 2.179). The village “Temnin-el-Foka” becomes “Jacksonville” (*IA*, 2.179). Another “nasty Arab village” is called “Jonesborough” (*IA*, 2.215). Twain himself participates in this process even as he mocks it, writing, “Of course the real name of the place is El something or other” (*IA*, 2.215). As Obenzinger claims, this “‘system’ of discrepancy, reduction, equation, and appropriation of the Holy Land works principally toward inventing the frontier and only secondarily toward re-creating the Orient.”²¹ In this pre-national homeland, Twain’s compatriots reenact colonial processes of conquest and settlement by verbally and spiritually colonizing Palestine. As civilian tourists, the *Quaker City* “pilgrims” do not acquire territories on behalf of the United States, but they do act as imperial agents, as cultural and commercial forces that permeate borders and exert influence on Europe and the Near East. Rowe claims this kind of “free-trade imperialism,” entailing the “exportation of American culture, often in the form of democratic institutions and values,” is typical of U.S. imperialism.²² As Doolen writes, imperialism as it is now conceived in American Studies is “a process of power consolidation across

borders rather than derived from a single geographic place.”²³ The *Quaker City* pilgrims embody this de-centered imperial spirit in the Holy Land, where they imagine they have claims of possession stronger than even the Holy Land’s inhabitants. Conrad Cherry writes, in the nineteenth century, “laissez-faire” global capitalism had become “a veritable American gospel.”²⁴ That imperialist faith is explored in *Innocents Abroad*, which locates the Holy Land as both its source and object.

Ironically, Twain’s derisive travel narrative became a “veritable American gospel” in its own right, a supplement to the sacred text of Palestine. It sold over 70,000 copies when it was published in 1869, and countless Americans tourists, including General Ulysses S. Grant, toted *Innocents Abroad* along as a guidebook on their own Holy Land travels. *Innocents Abroad* has long been considered a work that, as Alfred Kazin writes, “wears the national mask in a way that would have embarrassed even Walt Whitman,” and yet in its subversive humor, the narrative prefigures the anti-imperialism that would come to define Twain’s later work. The “uninterruptible air of self-satisfaction” that characterizes *Innocents Abroad* and that “dates from a time when Americans thought themselves politically virtuous, the only true democrats and egalitarians in the world” is largely deconstructed within the narrative itself.²⁵ As Susan Gilman points out, Twain always “felt himself to be a man divided: he was a southerner living in the North; a frontier bohemian transplanted to urban life in genteel Hartford; and American who lived in Europe for at least ten years of his life; a

rebel who criticized, inhabited, and even named the world of the Gilded Age.²⁶

Given this dividedness, it seems no surprise that Twain's first book presents an ambivalent view of the United States' position in the global world. Amid countless other Holy Land narratives, *Innocents Abroad* distinguished itself by its irreverent tone and its self awareness, acknowledging not only that the Holy Land's sacred sites had been frequently fabricated (which was common enough in U.S. Holy Land travel narratives), but also, as Obenzinger writes, that they had become "sights" to be consumed, initiating the "transition of the American in the Holy Land from pilgrim, adventurer, or scholar to tourist."²⁷

Before the *Quaker City* pilgrims even reach the Holy Land, Twain's observations cause him to call into question the religious narratives that sustain travel to the Holy Land and, more generally, U.S. nationalism. The self-righteous piety of his fellow travelers leads Twain to identify with the group of designated "sinners." Calling the *Quaker City* saloon where the pilgrims pray the "Synagogue" (an interesting extension of the idea of Americans as new Israelites), Twain relies on contemporary anti-Semitism to imply that the travelers' notions of appropriate Christian behavior are archaic (*IA*, 1.68). By mistaking the "letter" of the "sacred law" for the "spirit" of the law, these pilgrims, Twain illustrates, commit not only acts of ignorance, but also acts of brutality (*IA*, 2.193). For instance, in Palestine, two of these travelers cruelly ride their hired horses to death in order to maintain the Sabbath as a day of rest. Similarly, Twain's observations of sacred sites and artifacts in Europe diminish the author's

religious reverence. After viewing crucifixion relics and saints' bones in almost every Christian church the excursionists visit in Europe, Twain declares, "isn't this relic matter a little overdone? We find a piece of the true cross in every old church we go into, and some of the nails that held it together. I would not like to be positive, but I think we have seen as much as a keg of nails" (*IA*, 1.218).

When the *Quaker City* tour finally arrives in Palestine, Twain engages in a mock performance of American New Israel ideology, identifying the United States as a new and improved Holy Land through a series of farcical comparisons. Absorbing the sacred geography of the Holy Land, Twain observes, "The state of Missouri could be split into three Palestines, and there would then be enough material left for part of another—possibly a whole one" (*IA*, 2.230). Accordingly, the Sea of Galilee appears "not so large a sea as Lake Tahoe by a good deal," and Jerusalem, "perched on its eternal hills," gleaming "in the sun," is "no larger than an American village of four thousand inhabitants" (*IA*, 2.264, 325). At times, Palestine and the United States appear more equivalent, as when Twain suggests similarities between Bunker Hill and the site of the crucifixion, or when Twain describes Manifest Destiny as a contemporary Exodus in which one Judge Oliver leads three would-be miners, their "throats parched always with thirst, lips bleeding from the alkali dust; hungry, perspiring, and very, very weary," through the "Great American Desert" to Humboldt County, Nevada (*IA*, 1.362, 363). Twain's constant comparisons highlight the relationship between old and new Holy Lands while overtly asserting with patriotic arrogance that the Holy Land can

be physically (if not also spiritually) contained by the United States. After all, Jesus himself, Twain informs his readers, “spent his life, preached his gospel, and performed his miracles within a compass no larger than an ordinary county in the United States” (*IA*, 2.258). In Twain’s rendering, the Holy Land appears to encourage appropriation, validating ideological possession of Palestine as a natural extension of Manifest Destiny.

Despite such controlled comparisons, the United States continually surfaces in Twain’s Holy Land in ways that reveal the imperial foundations of the American New Israel. In one scene, the Holy Land frontier abruptly becomes the American frontier as Bedouin Arabs surround the pilgrims’ camp. Face to face with these Near Eastern natives, Twain discovers they remind him “much of Indians”:

They sat in silence, and with tireless patience watched our every motion with that vile, uncomplaining impoliteness which is so truly Indian, and which makes a white man so nervous and uncomfortable and savage that he wants to exterminate the whole tribe. (*IA*, 2.222-3)

In this scene, the Holy Land reveals the racial hierarchies upon which the nation is structured as well as exposes their tenuousness. The Bedouin’s mere presence transforms Twain himself into a “savage.”²⁸ This is a moment in which the American frontier surfaces abruptly in the Holy Land and as it surfaces,

erodes the distinctions between “American” and “Indian” through which U.S. expansionism functions. Moreover, the scene equates the colonizing impulses of racial othering with processes of religious othering. The scene implies that Native Americans, like Muslims, are threatening interlopers on sacred ground.

Elsewhere in *Innocents Abroad*, the Holy Land becomes a site for what Leon Jackson calls “Indianation,” a process of exploiting indigenous American culture in the construction of U.S. nationalism.²⁹ Repeatedly identifying himself and the other *Quaker City* pilgrims with indigenous Americans, Twain connects U.S. histories of cultural conflict and dispossession to America’s “special dispensation” as the new Zion. Jackson writes, “Invoked in a variety of misleading cultural formations, the Native embodied traits that white Americans held in contempt and against which they defined themselves; at the same time, the Native offered a convenient emblem of indigeneity and antiquity that could be discarded and adopted at will.”³⁰ Twain calls the travelers a “tribe” repeatedly, explaining “somehow our pilgrims suggest that expression, because they march in a straggling procession through these foreign places with such an Indian-like air of complacency and independence about them” (*IA*, 1.104). An illustration of “Mark Twain on the War-Path,” complete with buckskins and tomahawk, even appeared on the prospectus used by salespeople peddling *Innocents Abroad* door-to-door.

American race relations irrupt in the Holy Land at other moments in *Innocents Abroad*, showing readers that the idea of American election has

obscured and helped to write racial oppression into the nation. As the pilgrims officially enter the Near East and receive their first glimpse of Islamic empire, they confront the very recent history of U.S. slavery. Although, the “great slave marts” of the past “no longer exist” in Turkey, Twain explains, the practice of slavery quietly continues (*IA*, 2.91). By calling attention to the institution of slavery, Twain encourages a different kind of comparison between the Near East and the United States; “America” is not a new Israel, but instead a new Muslim Empire.³¹ A comic “Slave Girl Market Report,” which Twain embeds in the narrative, serves to remind readers that the two empires—Ottoman and American—share a not-so-distant history of human exploitation and enslavement:

Best brands Circassians, crop of 1850, £200; 1852, £250; 1854, £300.

Best brands Georgian, none in market; second quality, 1851, £180.

Nineteen fair to middling Wallachian girls offered at £130 @ 150, but no takers; sixteen prime AI sold in small lots to close out—terms private. (*IA*, 2.92)

The report proceeds to describe the increased strength of the market due to the Sultan’s recent “large orders for his new harem,” and concludes with two final notes:

There is nothing new in Nubians. Slow sale.

Eunuchs—none offering; however, large cargoes are expected from Egypt to-day. (*IA*, 2.92)

The market report explicitly critiques Islamic culture, particularly the perceived mistreatment of women in Muslim households, but it also intimates that the story of slavery and its consequences is far from over in the United States. The introduction of “Nubians” into the market report brings the satiric inventory to an abrupt halt. Expressing a sharp decline in the desire for African slaves, the sentence evokes both the recent abolition of slavery in the United States (only one year before *The Quaker City* set sail) and the striking fact that in the wake of emancipation, African Americans continued to be largely excluded from membership in the U.S. nation. Given this context, the Near Eastern slave market report suddenly becomes an indictment of American rather than Muslim attitudes toward humanity.

The way that American New Israel ideology facilitates imperializing behavior becomes increasingly clear as Twain depicts the desecrating acts of conquest committed by his fellow travelers. Abruptly entering mosques without regard for those worshipping within, the *Quaker City* pilgrims break “specimens from the foundation walls” and stomp “upon the ‘praying carpets’” (*IA*, 2.308, 2.309). Twain remarks, “it was almost the same as breaking pieces from the hearts of those old Arabs” (*IA*, 2.309). As they visit the settings of various biblical

scenes, these “image-breakers and tomb-desecrators” stuff their “pockets full of specimens from the ruins” to keep as souvenirs (*IA*, 2.247, 2.220). A few of his fellow travelers even earn themselves a stoning when they annoy the inhabitants of one village, an episode that sees the pilgrims reenacting very different biblical scenes than they had anticipated. As Twain shows how Christian tourists use their presumed religious superiority as license to appropriate and desecrate others’ sacred spaces, he reveals the centrality of religion to the logic of U.S. imperialism.

Seeing the United States reflected in the eyes of the Holy Land’s inhabitants, Twain registers an increasingly critical vision of U.S. culture. Notions of election have concealed the United States’ actual global relevance (or irrelevance, in this case). Twain discovers how little the United States matters to the Near East when he learns that its residents believe the *Quaker City* tourists *are* America; “a notion got abroad in Syria and Egypt that the whole population of the Province of America (the Turks consider us a trifling little province in some unvisited corner of the world) were coming to the Holy Land” (*IA*, 2.172). Twain reports that throughout their travels “a good many foreigners” knew the United States “only as a barbarous province away off somewhere, that had lately been at war with somebody” (*IA*, 2.437). That the Civil War, which had so lately consumed the United States, appears a trivial matter in the Near East hardly affirms the United States’ self identification as the new Israel. Even as the Holy Land is used to construct a national imperial logic, it fails to sustain it. Ironically,

Holy Land encounter stirs not only religious disappointment, but also national disillusionment—the religious narrative of election does not justify the United States’ contentious history of slavery, dispossession, and violent conflict. The United States reflected in Twain’s Palestine is no Promised Land.

“Which Holy Land?”

After a brief nostalgic sojourn off the coast of Hawaii in *Following the Equator*, Twain sails across the Pacific Ocean toward Australia, where he muses on the seemingly inevitable colonization of the heavens. Gazing at the stars, Twain remarks, “In a little while, now—I cannot tell exactly how long it will be—the globe will belong to the English-speaking race; and of course the skies also. Then the constellations will be re-organized, and polished up, and re-named—the most of them “Victoria,” I reckon” (*FE*, 80). Among these future targets of conquest is the constellation of the Southern Cross. The image that accompanies this discussion in *Following the Equator* depicts an assortment of stars against a black sky upon which the outline of a cross has been drawn (*FE*, 80). Twain admits, “If you do not draw an imaginary line from star to star it does not suggest a cross—nor anything in particular” (*FE*, 79). The reader can see that the stars do not exactly imply a cross, that the stars might suggest any number of images or none at all. The desire to see the cross determines how the stars are perceived. Twain’s meditation on the sky illuminates both how sacred space is constructed—how

religious borders are superimposed—and how empire operates—how entities that appear to defy possession, containment, and partitioning are colonized. As he contemplates the appropriation of the sky, Twain suggests the appropriate emblem of insatiable empire is an imagined cross.

Following the Equator ostensibly traces the effects of British imperialism. Yet as Twain confronts the effects of conquest and colonialism across the globe, he cannot help “referring back to America’s own racial history” as many critics have noted.³² As he did in the Holy Land thirty years earlier, Twain meets with unexpected irruptions of U.S. imperialism during his travels, moments that suggest Twain has been grappling unconsciously with the past and potential consequences of U.S. empire all along. One such instance occurs in Bombay, India when Twain finds himself “carried” back to his “boyhood” and faced with the “forgotten fact” of U.S. slavery as he witnesses a “burly German” strike an Indian servant “without *explaining* what was wrong” (*FE*, 351). At this moment, the “historical trinity” of U.S. imperialism—war, slavery, and territorial expansion—are implicitly and explicitly tied to British imperialism. Twain writes, “All the territorial possessions of all the political establishments in the earth—including American, of course—consist in pilferings from other people’s wash. No tribe, howsoever insignificant, and no nation, howsoever mighty, occupies a foot of land that was not stolen” (*FE*, 623). Clearly, the British Empire presents one example of a popular process, a convenient target upon which Twain can project criticisms of and anxieties about the United States’ growing overseas empire.

Writing about the British Empire likewise allows Twain to expose the sacred geographical foundations of U.S. imperialism. This religious foundation is excavated and examined in *Following the Equator* as Twain draws attention to western constructions of the globe as an expansive Promised Land. Quoting the contemporary “prophet” the Reverend M. Russel of Edinburgh, Twain reveals how narratives of election drive the pursuit of global empire; “And now we see the race of Japhet setting forth to people the isles, and the seeds of another Europe and a second England sown in the regions of the sun. . . . To the Anglo-Saxon race is given the scepter of the globe” (*FE*, 89). Russel explains, the new chosen people are not to abuse their power through enslavement or execution, though “Canaan shall be his servant” (*FE*, 89). “Canaan,” the name of the land promised to the Israelites and the ancient people who inhabited it, now clearly denotes the entire world and its population. This Christian imperialist rhetoric to which Twain draws attention is illustrated on the cover of *Olney’s School Atlas* (1860), a popular U.S. children’s geography book, which depicts Queen Victoria standing over the globe, handing what appears to be flowers to a young Caucasian boy, most likely an embodiment of the United States.³³ Dangling pointedly from Britain’s neck is a large crucifix. Surrounding the two central individuals are seated figures symbolizing the “races of men,” the “European, African, Asiatic, American, and Malay,” who gaze up at the English and United States representatives.³⁴ The meaning of the illustration is fairly clear; the established Christian empire offers the globe to the young upstart Christian nation. In

Following the Equator, Twain predicts, "All the savage lands in the world are going to be brought under subjection to the Christian governments of Europe," a prophecy that conveys how simply and completely western imperialism depends upon religious constructions of space (*FE*, 625).

Given these sacred geographical foundations, Twain's critique of western imperialism in *Following the Equator* takes the form of a study of the various sacred spaces conceived of by those who populate British colonial territories. These portraits of religiously-constituted spaces are often scathing and at times deeply offensive, recalling the contempt Twain expressed for his fellow "pilgrims" in *Innocents Abroad*, and yet, by presenting the very idea of sacred spatiality as ludicrous, Twain casts doubt on the righteousness of the territorial ambitions justified and concealed by Christian universalism (the call to convert all humans to Christianity). In the Puddn'head Wilson epigraph that opens chapter seventeen, Twain underscores and mocks the power of such typological interpretations of empire. Writing, "The English are mentioned in the Bible: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," Twain comically draws attention to nationalistic uses of religious narratives even as he issues a stern warning to U.S. readers about obvious (and perhaps knowing) misuses of biblical text (*FE*, 170). As this brief Puddn'head Wilson maxim demonstrates, Twain's characteristic irreverence, which has been perceived by some scholars as an effective method of imperialist critique and by others as the slight of hand through which Twain reaffirms the racism that energizes imperialism, in fact performs a

rather serious critical function.³⁵ By repeatedly profaning the sacred, Twain essentially undermines the religious basis of U.S. empire.

Twain profanes the sacred using two basic methods; he derides religious others' constructions of sacred space and mocks Christian-nationalist invocations of the New Israel. By describing the holy lands of religious others, places such as Allahabad and Benares, India, Twain demonstrates the contingency of the American New Israel. The multiplicity and variety of holy lands that Twain presents contextualize the relativity of sacred space. Illustrating that sacred space is in the eye of the beholder, Twain implies that it is not "providence," but brute force which has made the United States a world power. In turn, Twain examines western Christian constructions of sacred space, showing how these too reveal the contingency of the American New Israel. The relocation and continual reproduction of the Holy Land in places such as Australia and South Africa calls into question the United States' "special dispensation," suggesting the nation is merely one of many New Israels. Moreover, Twain's representation of Christian sacred spaces across the globe exposes the imperial project as a process of de-sanctification and desecration, a process that does not create new holy lands but rather propagates brutality.

In *Following the Equator*, India represents incontrovertible otherness. Yet, through his descriptions of India, Twain examines the concepts of sacred space, religious righteousness, and election that help shape U.S. imperialism. Essentially, Twain's tour of India—the "jewel" of the British New Israel Empire—

takes the shape of a religious pilgrimage. Following an itinerary that recalls his *Quaker City* journey through Palestine, Twain proceeds from religious sight to religious sight, incredulous at the beliefs and rituals he encounters. To Twain, the American tourist, the religious practices of India appear absurd. Twain is confounded to learn that Muslims worship human deities, more so when he has the pleasure of meeting two such gods in person (one of whom attempts to debate the theology of *Huckleberry Finn* with him). Twain seems disgusted with Hindu purification rituals, which include bathing in the sacred waters of the Ganges River despite its frequent floating corpses. And, expectedly, Twain is tickled by the town of Allahabad, transliterated into English as “Godville,” to which large numbers of Hindu pilgrims flock (*FE*, 465). An illustration of religious practice in “Hindoostan” found in Woodbridge’s *Rudiments of Geography* reveals that Twain’s dismissive posture typified popular U.S. sentiment.³⁶ In the picture, Hindu purification rites are cast as rituals of human sacrifice. A female figure throws a baby into the water and toward the gaping mouth of a crocodile under the watchful eye of the god Vishnu. The representation clearly suggests that religious practice in India is cruel and senseless. The “Hindoo changed into an ass” in the next life, Twain writes, “wouldn’t lose anything, unless you count his religion” (*FE*, 494).

Twain’s derision of India’s religious practices culminates in his study of the “unspeakably sacred” city of Benares, a place that illuminates the construction of sacred space (*FE*, 480). Twain, the Christian pilgrim, views the city—a site of

Hindu purification—as a place of contamination. Benares, Twain writes, “is as unsanitary as it is sacred” (*FE*, 480). Aside from criticizing its general filthiness, Twain bemoans the city’s spiritual economy, calling religion “the *business* of Benares” (*FE*, 482). The city is a “big church” turned store, a “religious hive, whose every cell is a temple, a shrine, or a mosque, and whose every conceivable earthly and heavenly good is procurable under one roof” (*FE*, 484). In this “theologically stocked” city, pilgrims undergo a series of purification rites that involve drinking and bathing in the Ganges and the Well of the Earring, the Hindu “Holy of Holies” (*FE*, 489). Twain sees the “pure” waters of the Ganges as ironically polluted, defiled by the masses of dirty bodies that continuously submerge themselves. To Twain, the Hindu rituals represent a path to infection, but as Twain himself acknowledges, to the Hindu, they represent the path to salvation—immediate and everlasting forgiveness from sin—“an advantage which no religion in the world could give him but his own” (*FE*, 493). Twain’s performance of religious intolerance appears to falter as he seemingly claims that the Hindu pilgrim *can* achieve salvation. The ambiguous statement acknowledges that there are separate paths to salvation, rendering specific rituals essentially meaningless even as it appears to affirm them. While Twain’s depiction of India scorns the rituals that produce a sense of religious righteousness in the Hindu pilgrim, it also criticizes the concept of salvation itself, exposing it as a construction. Christians as well as Hindus participate in this tautological process, performing rituals that confirm their worldviews, which in

turn confirm the efficacy of their rituals. The calculation, commercialism, and glaring contradictions that appear to characterize Twain's Benares, in actuality, trouble all sacred spaces.

Twain's portrait of India's sacred spaces, however offensive, illuminates the absurdity and the monstrosity of white Christianity. As Twain well knows, Benares is not the only place that makes a business of religion. The "idolatry" Hindus pay to the Ganges is no different than the reverence Americans pay to the River Jordan or to countless other religious sites in Palestine (*FE*, 497). The very language with which Twain describes Benares to his western reader—using such phrases as the "holy of holies" for instance—invokes Twain's earlier Christian-centric pilgrimage through Palestine's own religious industry.

Such implied associations are complimented by explicit comparisons in *Following the Equator*, as when Twain imagines how ridiculous Christians would appear measured within the sacred space of a Jain Temple. To Twain, the Jains resemble "an exhibition of human fireworks, so to speak, in the matters of costume and comminglings of brilliant color" (*FE*, 380). This typical exoticism is modified by Twain's recommendation to place a "rival exhibition" of "Christian hats and clothes" alongside the Jain pageantry. Were one side of the temple filled "with Christians drawn from America, England, and the Colonies, dressed in the hats and habits of now, and of twenty and forty and fifty years ago," it would present a "hideous" and "thoroughly devilish spectacle" in this Indian context (*FE*, 381). Defying expectations of western Christian superiority, Twain claims the

“dark complexions” of the Jains would “make” the “whites look bleached-out, unwholesome, and sometimes frankly ghastly” (*FE*, 381). This contrast also evokes America’s unholy past, reminding Twain that a similar effect was often produced by racial contrast “down South in the slavery days before the war” (*FE*, 81). Religious differences between western Christians and Muslims, Hindus, and Jains do not illuminate Christian righteousness, but instead reveal the comparative lack of faith of “the cold whites” (*FE*, 469).

As he travels through India, Twain’s observations register increasing awareness not only of the contingency of sacred space, but also of the process of desecration that often accompanies imperial incursions. Approaching the end of his visit to India, Twain writes, “we despise all reverences and all objects of reverence which are outside the pale of our own list of sacred things. And yet, with strange inconsistency, we are shocked when other people despise and defile the things which are holy to us” (*FE*, 515). Noting the frolicking western tourists at the Taj Mahal, Twain muses on the public outrage that would result if a group of “British nobility” held a picnic “in the tomb of Washington,” or if a party of “American pork-millionaires” held “a picnic in Westminster Abbey” (*FE*, 515). Ironically, “picnic” is the word Twain uses to describe his 1866 *Quaker City* tour (*IA*, 1.45). Such “picnics” express religious contempt and facilitate the enterprise of empire. The Australian city of Ballarat, Twain writes, once presented a “sylvan solitude as quiet as Eden and as lovely” before a gold strike lured more than one hundred thousand colonists to the site (*FE*, 231). These interlopers, Twain writes,

“ripped open and lacerated and scarified and gutted” the former “paradise” (*FE*, 232). Colonization, in Twain’s view, is synonymous with desecration.

Like Twain’s portraits of religious others’ sacred spaces, his depictions of Christian holy lands ultimately challenge the perceived superiority of western sacred space. Twain’s representations of Australia and South Africa, New Israel nations resembling the United States, call into question the “hierarchy” that supposedly divides “Christian civilization” from “ancient savagery.”³⁷ Both Australia and South Africa highlight the inception of empire, a period of transition from colonial territory to colonizing power. Essentially, Twain shows the New Israel nation is not only a perpetual construction, making the United States’ “special dispensation” doubtful, but also a space of idolatry, contention, and violence, a “savage” Holy Land.

Twain insists on the familiarity of Australia to the U.S. traveler, observing for instance the “American trimmings” evident throughout Sydney and Melbourne (*FE*, 125). Australians do not seem “to differ noticeably from Americans,” Twain writes, particularly in their valuation of religious freedom, epitomized in Australia’s ubiquity of churches and abundance of religious denominations (*FE*, 129). Twain calculates, there are “about 64 roads to the other world” available in Australia’s “healthy . . . religious atmosphere” (*FE*, 183). A census table included in *Following the Equator* lists population figures for “Christadelphians,” “Christian Israelites,” “Cosmopolitans,” “Infidels,” and “Rationalists” among other so-called faiths (*FE*, 182). This New Israel is a place of religious disarray, in which

Christianity is contentious and volatile. Similarly, Twain's depiction of South Africa encourages comparison to the United States. In South Africa, Twain recounts, a "handful of farmers," a group of "deeply religious" individuals, "rose against the strongest empire in the world" (*FE*, 671, 688, 671). Aside from revolutionary history, the Boers of South Africa share with the Americans the notion that they are an elect nation; the Boer "values the Bible above every other thing" and is "proudest of all, of the direct and effusive personal interest which the deity has always taken in its affairs" (*FE*, 684, 688). Just as Australia suggests that ideals of religious freedom in the United States mask religious tension, South Africa suggests U.S. ideals of national providence encourage the development of a national subject who, like the Boer, is "profoundly ignorant, dull, obstinate" and "bigoted" (*FE*, 688).

These U.S. surrogates, as Twain reveals, are places of idolatry. In the commonwealth of New South Wales, Twain writes, "there is a church at every man's door, and a race-track over the way" (*FE*, 123). Australians reserve their reverence for secular object objects and rituals, such as horse racing. Calling Melbourne's "raceground" the "Mecca of Australia" and naming its communicants the "Horse-Racing Cult," Twain compares Australians to Muslims and pagans, implying that their worship of sport makes them un-Christian (*FE*, 161). On their "great annual day of sacrifice," the "Melbourne Cup," Twain writes, these decidedly idolatrous pilgrims gather from great distances (*FE*, 161, 162). In South Africa, religion likewise assumes a pagan aspect. Beneath the Boers' conception

of the Transvaal, or South African Republic, as a space of divine providence, exists a capitalist power structure that operates as the real object of worship. "Mr. Cecil Rhodes, Premier of the British Cape colony, millionaire, creator and managing director of the territorially-immense and financially unproductive South Africa Company" Twain writes, "is South Africa" to many people (*FE*, 660, 686). Rhodes may be a "lofty and worshipful patriot and statesmen," or he may be "Satan," Twain writes. Twain's words have the effect of equating "patriot" and "Satan," of highlighting how the seeming worship of the state is in actuality the worship of corporate profit. Global Christian empire here becomes indistinguishable from idolatry.

Moreover, the "old Holy customs" practiced in Twain's New Israel amount to ritualistic violence and murder (*FE*, 211). Twain writes about one Australian squatter in particular, who embodies the "right" Christian "spirit" by poisoning his indigenous neighbors with arsenic-laced pudding after inviting them to a Christmas feast (*FE*, 211). Obviously intended to shock his reader, Twain's endorsement of this murderous achievement points to a history of genocide and its sanctification by western imperial powers. Twain asserts, the squatter's "spirit was the spirit which the civilized white has always exhibited toward the savage" (*FE*, 211):

In more than one country we have hunted the savage and his little children and their mother with dogs and guns through the woods and swamps for

an afternoon's sport, and filled the region with happy laughter over their sprawling and stumbling flight, and their wild supplications for mercy. . . .

In many countries we have taken the savage's land from him, and made him our slave, and lashed him every day, and broken his pride, and made death his only friend, and overworked him till he dropped in his tracks.

(*FE*, 212)

These methods of “robbery, humiliation, and slow, slow murder” through which Christian civilization obtains its global purchase resonate with U.S. histories of dispossession, enslavement, and genocide (*FE*, 213). Twain's censure here constitutes one of those moments when the “subliminal subject” of “*American race relations*,” as Peter Messent states, comes to the surface.³⁸ Twain clearly denounces these practices and exposes the religious righteousness that allows “the superior” race to become quietly and completely inured to imperial aggression (*FE*, 213). Twain shows how the New Israel Empire uses religious language and rituals to conceal genocide.

In South Africa, the “old Holy Customs” of “robbery, humiliation, and slow, slow murder” persist, similarly concealed by Christian narrative. Native Africans are oppressed and exploited, legally compelled to work in the country's diamond mines. Immediate extermination is preferable, Twain writes, than “one of the Rhodesian twenty-year deaths, with its daily burden of insult, humiliation, and forced labor” (*FE*, 691). Describing a group of African women he sees one

Sunday in King William's town, Twain shows how Christianity literally clothes and obscures oppression in South Africa. Dressed for church, these African women whom Twain watches appear "in the last perfection of fashion, and newness, and expensiveness, and showy mixture of unrelated colors,—all just as I had seen it so often at home; and in their faces and their gait was that languishing, aristocratic, divine delight in their finery which was so familiar to me, and had always been such a satisfaction to my eye and my heart. I seemed among old friends" (*FE*, 693). Again, Twain's reaction highlights similarities between the United States and the South African Republic, showing how the "dowdy clothes of our Christian civilization," that is, western religious narratives, have "tamed" Africans and South Africa (*FE*, 692).

Ultimately, Twain demonstrates, imperialism operates by superimposing Christian narratives over colonial sites and subjects, replacing native sacred spaces with newly consecrated imperial sites and transforming the native into the unsaved, unalterable, religious other. In Twain's portrait of India, these consequences of evangelical empire are most visible. The "grounds" of the Residency in Lucknow, where British officers and families were besieged by hostile natives during the Great Mutiny of 1857, "are sacred now," Twain writes, "and will suffer no neglect nor be profaned by any sordid or commercial use while the British remain masters of India" (*FE*, 567). The British Empire ironically reaffirms its chosen status by cultivating narratives of its own suffering, perseverance, and providence. By imaging themselves the victims of unprovoked

violence (rather than colonial resistance), the British sanctify their territorial conquest. Twain takes this imperializing religious intolerance to its comical extremes when he hires an Indian manservant and renames him "Satan" (*FE*, 366). Twain's inability, or, more likely, pointed unwillingness, to pronounce his servant's name has received a great deal of scrutiny from critics, who interpret this instance as one which reveals Twain's ultimate complicity in a racist, colonial system. It seems more plausible however that Twain's interpolation of this colonial subject as antichrist is an over-the-top parody of the way that religious otherness is used to justify imperial desire and to separate colonial subjects from the elect in the New Israel empire.

Conclusion

In *Following the Equator*, Twain interrupts his own recollections of Hawaii to tell the story of an American diver. Growing up on a Hawaiian plantation owned by his American parents, the diver speaks the Kanaka language in his childhood, only to forget it after his family moves to the United States. In the diver's adulthood, a traumatic underwater incident restores the diver's knowledge of this seemingly lost language. Recovering remains from a sunken ship, the diver feels the hand of a dead body grasp his shoulder. In the shock of this encounter, the diver forgets English and finds himself able to speak only Kanaka. The return of this repressed language, as Kaplan writes, seems to represent Twain's own

confrontation with memories of the pre-war U.S. South and of his own complicity in the annexation of Hawaii. In Hawaii, “the remnants of imperial violence” could not “stay buried.”³⁹ Yet, the hemispheric history of exploitation, oppression, and genocide is not the only suppressed history that surfaces in Twain’s Hawaii; the diver’s sudden recollection of the not-forgotten Kanaka language points us toward a history of religious identification that likewise cannot “stay buried,” a history which has helped sustain and conceal “imperial violence.” As Twain describes Hawaii and various “other” sacred spaces, he reveals religion has been the repressed language of empire all along.

Using *Innocents Abroad* to illuminate the sacred geographies of *Following the Equator*, I bridge what have largely existed as separate conversations about Twain’s religious and (anti)imperial investments. Circling the globe, Twain exposes the hypocrisy of imperial Christianity and reveals the ubiquity (and perhaps universal absurdity) of the idea of election in diverse cultures. The final anecdote of Twain’s literary voyage, a story about the South African doctor James Barry, presents one final critique of U.S. imperial endeavors. Barry’s death produces the surprising revelation not only that the doctor was actually a woman, concealing her sexual identity and living as a man for decades, but also that she was a British aristocrat, a member of an established English family. Like this presumptive postcolonial subject who is actually a member of the imperial power structure all along, the American New Israel, as Twain demonstrates, is nothing more than the British Empire dressed up in new clothes.

Notes

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- ¹ Mark Twain, *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World* (1897; reprint, New York: Dover, 1989), 48. Further references are to this edition and will be parenthetically cited *FE*; Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 52.
- ² Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 52.
- ³ *Ibid*, 75.
- ⁴ *Ibid*.
- ⁵ Mark Twain, no. 358, Philippines, Mark Twain Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California. Quoted in Philip S. Foner, *Mark Twain Social Critic* (New York: International Publishers, 1958), 285.
- ⁶ Henry Ward Beecher quoted in Conrad Cherry, *God's New Israel*, 219.
- ⁷ Quoted in Foner, *Mark Twain Social Critic*, 249.
- ⁸ Wai Chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 13.
- ⁹ Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 62.
- ¹⁰ John Carlos Rowe, "Mark Twain's Critique of Globalization (Old and New) in *Following the Equator, A Journey Around the World*" *Arizona Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 116.
- ¹¹ Ironically, Twain had nothing but disdain for the actual Christian missionaries he encountered in the Sandwich Islands. See Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 62.
- ¹² Kaplan, "Violent Belongings," 6.
- ¹³ Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 1.52. Following references will be to this text and will be parenthetically cited *IA*; Richard S. Lowry, "Littery Man:" *Mark Twain and Modern Authorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- ¹⁴ Andy Doolen, *Fugitive Empire: Locating Early American Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xv.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁶ Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1894), 11.
- ¹⁷ James Cox, *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), 245-46n.

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- ¹⁸ Rowe, "Mark Twain's Critique," 109.
- ¹⁹ Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 252.
- ²⁰ Dimock, *Empire for Liberty*, 11.
- ²¹ Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 193.
- ²² Rowe, *Literary Culture*, xi.
- ²³ Andy Doolen, *Fugitive Empire*, xv.
- ²⁴ Cherry, *God's New Israel*, 219.
- ²⁵ Alfred Kazin, *God and the American Writer* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 178.
- ²⁶ Susan Gilman, *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 2.
- ²⁷ Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 165.
- ²⁸ By the time *Innocents Abroad* was written comparisons between American Indians and Bedouins were quite commonplace.
- ²⁹ Leon Jackson, "Behold Our Literary Mohawk, Poe': Literary Nationalism and the 'Indianation' of Antebellum American Culture" *ESQ* 48 (2002): 98.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Interestingly, comparisons between Islamic empire and the Southern United States were fairly common in antislavery rhetoric of the 1840s and 1850s. See, for instance, Lydia Maria Child's short story "Slavery's Pleasant Homes," in which the author compares the plantation household to a Turkish harem.
- ³² Peter Messent, "Racial and Colonial Discourse in Mark Twain's *Following the Equator*," *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 22 (1993): 67.
- ³³ Jesse Olney, *Olney's School Atlas* (92nd edition; New York: Pratt, Oakley and Co., 1860).
- ³⁴ William C. Woodbridge, *A System of Universal Geography* (Hartford, Conn.: Oliver D. Cooke, 1827), 165. Descriptions of these five races appear regularly in geography textbooks throughout the nineteenth century.
- ³⁵ Rowe claims that "there is political purpose to the digressive style of *Following the Equator* and a more coherent criticism of European imperialism" than has typically been recognized by scholars. Twain uses humor "to effect psychological changes in deep-seated social prejudices Twain does not believe can be changed by mere rational means." "Mark Twain's Critique," 111; Messent writes that despite Twain's lambasting of

the British empire, he “only argues very fitfully indeed for any concept of racial equality.” Ultimately, Messent claims, *Following the Equator* reinforces the binary between such terms as *savage* and *civilized*. “Racial and Colonial Discourse,” 73.

³⁶ William C. Woodbridge, *Rudiments of Geography*, fifth edition (Hartford, CN: Oliver D. Cooke and Sons, 1825), 51.

³⁷ Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 64. Kaplan here speaks about Twain’s description of the Sandwich Islands recorded during his 1866 visit, but I believe the passage also speaks to Twain’s approach throughout *Following the Equator*.

³⁸ Messent, “Racial and Colonial Discourse,” 68.

³⁹ Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 75.

CONCLUSION

The Holy Land Experience

In *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, published in 1876, Melville personifies the history and spirit of American self-identification with Israel in the character of Nathan, a literal descendant and figurative inheritor of colonial Puritan culture. Nathan, who sets the poem's crucial pilgrimage in motion, recreates his ancestors' "errand into the wilderness" on the frontier of Palestine. Nathan's family history illuminates the national tradition of imaging American as a new Israel. His Puritan forebears, the "worthy stock" from which Nathan is "sprung," represent only the first group of new Israelites to seek and take possession of the American Promised Land.¹ Subsequent generations continue to evoke images of Exodus as they move ever westward, eventually settling in "Illinois—a turf divine" (*CL*, 1.17.35). In this western, Eden-like landscape, the prairie is described in terms that suggest its resemblance to the biblical lands. "Three Indian mounds," for instance, appear to be "pyramids at distance" (*CL*, 1.17.56, 60). Nathan's Puritan and pioneer forebears equally interpret their experiences as reproductions of biblical narratives, as events therefore foretold in the Bible. This sort of typological interpretation likewise structures Melville's

portrait of Nathan. Nathan's feelings of religious doubt, which seem to isolate him from his community and disconnect him from his ancestry, reinforce his membership in the new chosen nation. Melville compares Nathan to Adam; "Alone, and at Doubt's freezing pole/ He wrestled with the pristine forms/ Like the first man" (*CL*, 1.17.193-95). Nathan searches for renewed faith, joining at one point a young religious sect that has emerged in the aftermath of the Second Great Awakening. However, it is only when Nathan falls in love with a Jewish woman named Agar that he finds religious fulfillment. Pointedly, Nathan's love for Agar is indistinguishable from a growing infatuation with the Holy Land. As Agar "dwelt on Zion's story/ He felt the glamour, caught the gleam" (*CL*, 1.17.219-20). After converting to Judaism, Nathan embraces Zionism, the movement that sought to return Jews to their ancient national homeland, and emigrates to Palestine:

The Hebrew seers announce in time

The return of Judah to her prime;

Some Christians deemed it then at hand.

Here was the object: Up and do!

With seed and tillage help renew—

Help reinstate the Holy Land. (*CL*, 1.17.259-264).

This Zionist errand, which the poem suggests is a natural extension of Manifest Destiny, provides Nathan the opportunity to reenact the colonial myth of religious dissent, exodus, and settlement in the Promised Land that his Puritan ancestors had themselves reenacted.²

As Melville transplants Nathan to Palestine, he transforms the Holy Land from the figurative site through which the U.S. nation is imagined into the physical site upon which U.S. imperial history is reenacted. Nathan literalizes his ancestors' self-identification as Israelites, but his Zionist project succeeds only in reproducing Palestine in the image of the United States. Nathan envisions contemporary Palestine as the "Pequod wilds" of colonial America, a space of conflict between Anglo settlers and natives (*CL*, 1.17.305). Nathan arms himself like a frontiersman, analogizing the local "Arabs" to "those Indians" his "fathers old" perceived as "slaves meriting the rod" (*CL*, 1.17.307-09). Recreating "America" in Palestine, Nathan exposes the violence and exclusion—of both indigenous Americans and enslaved Africans—involved in constituting the U.S. nation. Setting this frontier narrative in the supposed pre-national homeland of Palestine, Melville tells a story of U.S. imperial origins. Tensions mount between the immigrant American and his Arab neighbors, culminating in Nathan's murder. Instead of reinforcing the original American Israel myth, Nathan unravels it.

Melville frames *Clarel* with this story of Nathan and his family, a narrative that represents both the desire to contain the myth of the American New Israel and the impossibility of such containment. The Holy Land, as it becomes the

physical setting for the reenactment of U.S. imperial histories of indigenous dispossession and African enslavement, ceases to provide a foundation for national identity. The comparison between old and new Israel that has functioned again and again as a site for national consolidation cannot be sustained in *Clarel*. Both Nathan's wife Agar and his daughter Ruth find themselves ironically homesick for the "Gentile Land" of the United States (*CL*, 1.27.93). And Nathan's attempt to narrate the expulsion of Palestine's native inhabitants by equating them to "Pequods" and "slaves" fails. These natives kill Nathan, abruptly rejecting Nathan's territorial claims (and the United States' conceptual claims) to the Holy Land.

Nathan's murder not only represents a reversal of the American "errand into the wilderness," but also suggests that there remains a story left untold, a story about how the residents of the nineteenth-century Near East responded to and shaped American encounter with the Near East and U.S. representations of the Holy Land. This study attempts to examine the complex history of U.S. writers engaging in a sustained, supple comparison between the United States and the Holy Land. However, this research is suggestive rather than conclusive, and I hope it will provoke questions for further study. How did the Western invention of the Holy Land affect native populations in the Near East? How did native populations and the diverse cultures of the Near East influence this invention? How did U.S. authors contend with the fact that other nations such as Great Britain exhibited similar investments in the Holy Land as a site of national

construction? These questions represent just a few of the issues evoked by this project that remain outside its current scope.

The Zionist project in which Nathan participates gained momentum in the late nineteenth-century, coinciding with an increasing Western imperial presence in the Near East. In the 1880s, as Zionist settlements were first being established in the Near East, western European nations, in particular Britain, were becoming preoccupied with the "Eastern Question," an ongoing debate about the ideal role of Europe in the Near East. During the final decades of the nineteenth century, the British Empire kept busy in the Near East, accumulating territories in and around the biblical lands under the direction of Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. In 1875, the British attained virtual ownership of the Suez Canal by purchasing enough shares to gain a controlling interest. In 1878, the British Empire annexed Cyprus. By 1882, the British were occupying Egypt as well. As the Ottoman Empire progressively lost its hold in the region, European imperial powers competed for influence and territory in the Near East. In 1917 at the conclusion of the First World War, British troops invaded and occupied Palestine, pre-empting French conquest of this most symbolically-burdened of places. The British government officially assumed control of the region in 1920, at the bequest of the League of Nations.³ This British Mandate government, purportedly instituted to protect and administer Palestine until the territory could function independently, signified to many Americans the absorption of the Holy Land into the Christian West.⁴

Between the publication of Twain's *Following the Equator* in 1897 and the establishment of the British civil administration in Palestine in 1920, U.S. Holy Land culture presents an increasingly sanitized, controlled, and temporally frozen vision of the Near East. Throughout the nineteenth century, U.S. travelers, writers, and readers often expressed the desire to encounter the world of the Bible in the contemporary Holy Land as well as the conviction that this biblical world was in fact accessible in modern Palestine. Yet, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the desire to experience first-century Palestine reached new heights. Historical novels featuring biblical characters, such as *Ben-Hur* (1880), *Sign of the Cross* (1896), and *Quo Vadis* (1895), sold particularly well during this period. *Ben-Hur*, in fact, became the first book sold in the Sears-Roebuck catalog.⁵ For those who wished to experience this biblical Holy Land first hand, the Chautauqua Assembly in western New York had constructed a "Palestine Park" to be used as a spiritual teaching aid for children and adults. The Park, a model of the Holy Land originally built in 1874 along the shores of Lake Chautauqua, expanded over the years, at one point including an adjacent Jewish tabernacle. Visitors could (and still can) walk through Palestine Park, imagining themselves in the ancient Holy Land as they gaze out over the Mediterranean Sea (Lake Chautauqua). In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Chautauqua's visitors even dressed in biblical costumes and reenacted biblical scenes at the park. "Palestine Park" was imitated across the United States, evolving into the contemporary Holy Land theme park, whose most well-known

modern incarnation may be the “Holy Land Experience” in Orlando, Florida.⁶ These representations of the Holy Land suggest a transformation of sorts in U.S. readers’ and travelers’ desires and expectations. Americans increasingly sought to contain the image of the Holy Land within the borders of the United States and to preserve a picture of a biblical Holy Land untouched by the passage of time. In these late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century iterations, we see that the Holy Land no longer seems to support the readings writers and travelers wish to make. Moreover, the Holy Land itself is becoming increasingly unnecessary to the “Holy Land experience.”

Final Frameworks

This study, I hope, will contribute to the field of U.S. literary criticism, first, a greater awareness about the Protestant and secular assumptions that we as critics often bring to the construction of literary genealogies. Protestantism, an understanding of religion as private rather than public, and secularism, a commitment to separating education, and literary study in particular, from the world of religion and religious teachings, have often explicitly and implicitly structured literary study. These lenses, however, have prevented us from seeing that religion is a powerful cultural force that has informed perceptions of empire, gender, and race in the United States. In Twain scholarship, for instance, the question of Twain’s personal religious beliefs, as Peter Messent writes, his

“complex and often contradictory attitude toward religion,” has persistently occupied critics.⁷ Stanley Brodwin has argued that Twain’s “personal struggles with theology” shaped a “kind of controlled spiritual and moral rage” that divorced Twain from conventional Christianity.⁸ Harold K. Bush, conversely, has connected Twain to the American jeremiad tradition, showing that the author was a “profoundly spiritual and religious presence,” who never completely abandoned orthodox Christian belief.⁹ This debate about Twain’s individual struggle with faith, however interesting, has obscured that fact that Twain, as he wrote about Christianity, participated in a very public conversation. When religious themes surface in Twain’s writings, as in his discussions of Christian tourists in Palestine or of U.S. missionaries in Hawaii, they are often deeply entangled in the operations of empire. Twain’s musings on Christianity emphasize religion’s fundamentally social and narrative functions. *Innocents Abroad* and *Following the Equator*, especially as we place them in conversation with each other, disclose Twain’s particular interest in the ways that space is constructed through religious narratives. Scholars have attempted to discern Twain’s “true” beliefs in order to analyze the meaning of Twain’s religious irreverence. Instead, critics should be seeking to uncover the way that religious language sustains the relationships to which Twain consistently draws attention. When Twain calls himself “St. Mark, Missionary to the Sandwich Islands,” as Amy Kaplan notes, he mocks Christianity certainly, but how this joke relies upon Protestant Christianity’s national purchase has yet to be fully examined by literary critics.¹⁰

The Holy Land, as an imagined and physical site upon which religious, national, and international forces converge, illuminates the limitations of these Protestant and secular assumptions, revealing connections between texts that have often been segregated by traditional periodizations and genre categorizations. Twain's interest in global sacred geographies in *Following the Equator* places him in conversation with Cummins, who addresses the convergence of international capitalism and transnational Christianity in *El Fureidîs*. Though the earnest piety of *The Lamplighter's* authoress clashes sharply with Twain's characteristic irony, Cummins and Twain may be regarded as participants in a national conversation that spans antebellum and postbellum periods and crosses the boundaries between domestic fiction and late-century realism. Seeing the Holy Land in U.S. literary works allows us to connect the early-national historical fiction of Child, not only to contemporary manifestations of religious culture like biblical geography, but also, and perhaps unexpectedly, to Delany's *Blake*. Seeing the Holy Land in "Ligeia" allows us to connect Poe not only to nineteenth-century millennialism and biblical archaeological efforts, but also to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The distinct, discrete traditions into which we have classified these texts have prevented us from noticing the startling and significant links between them.

Secondly, I hope that this study will demonstrate the possibilities of new kinds of interdisciplinarity—namely between literary and religious studies. U.S. biblical geographical efforts, missionary labor, and religious tourism in the

nineteenth-century Near East provide virtually untapped histories within which to re-contextualize nineteenth-century U.S. literatures. Similarly, the work of religious studies scholars—I have here relied upon the classic theories of sacred space expounded by Mircea Eliade—may help literary critics generate new questions and analytical frameworks for literary study. The Holy Land presents one particular framework that illuminates the interdependence of religious and literary histories in the United States. Approaching Poe, for instance, with an eye toward Holy Land imagery and American religious investments in the Near East, reveals interesting connections between Poe and his cultural context that have yet to be examined. Since Toni Morrison's influential *Playing in the Dark* claimed Poe as one of the most important U.S. writers of "American Africanism," much work has been completed on Poe's relationship to and representation of national and regional racial ideologies.¹¹ Conversely, remarkably little scholarship has been undertaken on religion in Poe's writings. Because Poe's personal letters reveal him to be skeptical and apathetic in his personal religious beliefs, scholars have neglected to note the religious themes and references that appear in Poe's writing. As the Holy Land appears in Poe's writings, however, it highlights the relationship between these discourses. Many of Poe's representations of racial apocalypse to which Morrison and others have called attention, invoke images of the Holy Land. Poe's fiction, including "Usher," "Ligeia," and *Pym*, as I have attempted to demonstrate, reference the unfolding of biblical prophecy in the Near East as an allegory of U.S. racial anxieties and conflicts. Contextualizing

Poe's writings in contemporary conversations surrounding prophecy and millennialism opens up a multitude of questions and contexts for further Poe study. The example Poe presents suggests that religious studies may offer a new set of contexts and questions for literary study. In this project I have focused on religious history and discourses surrounding Protestant Christianity in the nineteenth-century United States, but we could also look to Islam, as Tim Marr does in *The Cultural Roots of America Islamicism* or as Wai Chee Dimock does in "Deep Time." An interdisciplinary approach that fuses religious and literary study may help us recognize certain paradigmatic and limiting disciplinary assumptions.

One of those disciplinary assumptions—the traditional nation-based study of literature—has come under fire in recent decades, and, despite my own project's focus on literary nationalism, I hope that it ultimately contributes to the emerging field of transnational American literary study. U.S.-Holy Land culture presents an example of the kind of transnational, trans-cultural histories of which Ralph Bauer, Susan Castillo, and Ivy Schweitzer have advocated scholarly investigation, and furthermore, U.S.-Holy Land culture suggests ways of expanding beyond the current geopolitical focus of transnational studies, of contextualizing the nation within a framework of global religious geographies.¹² Religion, as a site of cultural encounter, as a form of identity that cannot be equated with national identity, as a phenomenon that both crosses and constitutes borders, facilitates analysis beyond the rigid, exceptionalist national

paradigms that have structured U.S. literary study. By re-envisioning American literary movements like frontier fiction to show how they develop, draw upon, and disseminate an obscured Holy Land heritage, I hope to demonstrate how the creation of national identity relies upon religious imagery that links the United States to global culture. By seeing how the Holy Land functions as a reference point in discussions of the nation, we see how the national depends upon the extra-national. The U.S. nation was invented within a comparative model. The United States was imagined not in isolation, but in relation to the Holy Land.

Amy Kaplan writes, “the idea of the nation as home . . . is inextricable from the political, economic, and cultural movements of empire.”¹³ I have attempted to demonstrate in this study how the idea of the Holy Land as home is inextricable from the logic of U.S. nationalism and imperialism, that the history of U.S.-Holy Land encounter and representation has shaped the ongoing development and construction of the nation.

Notes

¹ Herman Melville, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876; reprint, Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1991), 55: 1.17.1. Further references will be to this edition and will be parenthetically cited *CL*. Following the conventional citation of the poem, quotations will be identified by part, canto, and line number.

² Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 95.

³ Britain withdrew from Palestine in 1947, the Mandate ending as Arabs and Jews engaged in a civil war. See Naomi Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand: British Rule in Palestine, 1917-1948* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

⁴ As the nineteenth century progressed, American cultural and commercial efforts in the Near East gradually merged with British interests. At the beginning of the nineteenth-century, the United States competed with Britain in geographical and missionary projects, but by 1871 the American Palestine Exploration Society had merged with the British Palestine Exploration Society, expressing the growing sense of an Anglo-American alliance in the region.

⁵ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 18-20.

⁶ "The Holy Land Experience" is a "living biblical museum and park that brings the world of the Bible alive!" according to the theme park's website. At "The Holy Land Experience" visitors are immersed in the world of first-century Near East, where they can wander through a Jerusalem street market, follow the Via Dolorosa to the recreated site of Jesus Christ's tomb, and visit the "world's largest indoor model of Jerusalem."

<http://www.holylandexperience.com> (accessed March 5, 2009).

⁷ Peter Messent, "Mark Twain, Joseph Twichell, and Religion," *Nineteenth Century Literature* 58, no. 3 (Dec. 2003): 371.

⁸ Stanley Brodwin, "Mark Twain's Theology: The Gods of a Brevet Presbyterian," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*, ed. Forrest G. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 221, 231.

⁹ Harold K. Bush, Jr. "A Moralist in Disguise: Mark Twain and American Religion," in *A Historical Guide to Mark Twain*, ed. Shelly Fisher Fishkin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 66.

¹⁰ Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 62.

¹¹ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 6.

¹² Ralph Bauer, *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Susan Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer, *A Companion to the Literatures of Colonial America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

¹³ Amy Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 1.

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