

She is “a mighty woman with a torch,” and “From her beacon-hand/ Glows world-wide welcome.” Again, we may recall her *Epistle to the Hebrews*, in which Lazarus speaks of the need for “a beacon-light” for the Jews, and “the torch of visible community”—a phrase borrowed from George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (*Epistle* 14-5). However, where in the *Epistle* she seems to desire that this “torch” appear in the form of a “resolute and homogenous nation” (15, emphasis mine), her vision in this poem is quite different. The Statue—and America more broadly—is hailed as the “Mother of Exiles,” indiscriminately accepting a vast array of refugees who arrive at her shores. She writes, “Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp,” again rejecting the burden of European history; tradition must be updated to meet the needs of the present, specifically the needs of the persecuted and destitute peoples, the “wretched refuse,” of Europe. She rejects the idea that immigrants should hold to all the customs they bring along with them to a new land; in particular, as she writes elsewhere, she believes strongly that Judaism should not subsist in orthodoxy, but rather should be reformed and updated to better survive the trials of modernity. Underlying this statement is, additionally, a reminder of the evils that the present generations have inherited from this history of pomp, evils such as anti-Semitism. When she considers those “tempest-tost” individuals fleeing persecution—a descriptions she uses frequently in her prose to reference the Jews (most often, but not always, those fleeing Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century)—she envisions the Statue of Liberty extending to them the promise of community; it is one that must be stripped of the outmoded traditions of the past, but also one that they, a foreign people, will help to constitute.

As we saw in “In Exile,” the immigrant’s identity is in a state of flux between old and new, as is the identity of America. Again, the vision is a utopian one. Lazarus posits America, land of immigrants, as the space where the Jews can finally be at “home” in community as it occurs through the free movement and interaction of individuals; as she writes in the *Epistle*, “Wherever we are free, we are at home” (73). According to this formulation, home, divorced from the concept of “homeland,” can take place anywhere. She thus breaks with the desire for an authentic, mythical Jewish community in favor of one in which the Jews can exist, as brothers, among others—as, in Nancy’s terms, “beings in common” (57). By promoting the exilic model of community Lazarus is resisting the “storied pomp” of myth, and its “doubly totalitarian” (according to Nancy, in form and in content) will to power (56). Instead she presents the scene of a gathering, of “huddled masses” existing together, where “neither the community nor, consequently, the individual...invents the myth: to the contrary, it is they who are invented or who invent themselves” (59). Community is not produced in her vision; rather it appears amongst individuals who “yearn to breathe free” and hold *in common* a desire to feel at home in the world.

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just
rocks

derek owens started teaching at st. john’s university in 1994; before that taught in the expository writing program at harvard, the experimental college at tufts, and worked as an academic counselor in the higher education opportunity program at siena college. in 2006 he created the institute for writing studies, a multifaceted program containing the university’s two writing centers, the first-year writing program, and the writing across the curriculum program. his teaching and research interests include composition pedagogy; writing program administration; ecocomposition and sustainability; nonfiction prose; place-based pedagogy; future studies; and experimental, open, and hybrid forms of writing.

one

I'm sitting between a German stewardess named Ritva and a Michigan masseuse named Shanti in cow barn somewhere in rural New Jersey watching Tom Brown show us how to track mice over bare rock. There are over a hundred of us in this barn and we have been sitting on rough wooden benches for a week now, sleeping in tents in a neighboring field and attending daily lectures and demonstrations on wilderness tracking and survival skills. In the morning we are fed oatmeal ladled out of enormous pots and in the evening, after the last of the workshops and a dinner of vegetarian stew, people gather about the fires working on their bow drill technique or weaving cordage.

We are an eclectic bunch. There are turkey hunters from Kentucky who have come here to hone their tracking skills. There is an excess of Germans, one of whom informs me that Tom Brown is huge in their country, and I wonder if they read him in the same romanticized way their ancestors did Karl May. Some are Tom Brown groupies who have attended this week-long workshop before (if you pay for the course once you can request to come back as a grunt for free). A lot of them are tanned, skinny boys in their teens and twenties with hair half-way to dreadlocks and who walk around perpetually barefoot. They are like a tribe of adolescent Mowglis. Several have brought didgeridoos which they play, kind of, around the campfire. Then there's the couple in the tent next to mine, fresh from a two-week wilderness survival EMT training course in California. They tell me of the impending cataclysms predicted by futurist visionary Gordon Michael Scallion, whose laminated

maps of a disfigured Future America can be bought online. "There's a lot of work to be done when the red skies come," they tell me, "and we want to be prepared. We want to help people." They seem downright cheery about the coming apocalypse, and nights they keep me up with their lovemaking. Ritva is here on vacation, and Shanti too.

I am here because my friend Nick, a buddy from my undergraduate years I met on the squash courts and who introduced me to the Sex Pistols and later became the front man for a popular Long Island ska band, back when LI had a rep for its homegrown ska scene, has been talking to me for some time about Tom Brown Jr.'s Tracking, Nature, and Wilderness Survival School. Nick has gone to three of Brown's week-long courses and is busting with oodles of information he has picked up from entering the Tom Brown world. Nick's a tad obsessive. Around this time (and all this is taking place thirteen years ago) he's immersed in some obscure hardcore Kung Fu practice and a Buddhist diet that as far as I can tell consists of little more than bananas, all day, and sucking on dried ginseng. He tells me about Brown's "grandfather," a displaced Apache scout from whom he learned all his skills, as well as Grandfather's apocalyptic visions, one of which culminates in "red skies" and at which point all the "children of the earth" will need to disappear into the woods to wait out the ensuing age of cannibals.

Having never met an apocalypse narrative I didn't like, this is the kind of thing I eat up and so I go read all the Tom Brown books--The Tracker, The Journey, The Search, The Vision, The Quest, as well as his instructional field guides. I find the guides to be chock-full of what I tell myself might be useful information some day (the illustrations on scat identification came in handy once) but it's his memoirs that catch my attention. These visionary narratives are wonderfully bad. Horribly clichéd and awkwardly drawn, they are a blend of hyper-romanticized new age Native American spirituality, coming of age story, nature writing, end times visions, and personal myth-making by a man who, during the course of the Standard course I eventually attend, I learn is one part egomaniac, one part nuts, and one part the real deal.

On the day before our lectures begin we get a glimpse of Brown as he drives up the dirt road in his Hummer. (The eyes of the college kid I make small talk with on the bus ride out here light up: "Check it out--a Hummer!" Remember, this is 1996, when Hummer sightings were still relatively rare.) Brown steps down from his behemoth and makes his way into a house a little distance from the barn in what can only be called a John Wayne swagger. He's a good looking man, tall and muscular, wearing one of the Tracker t-shirts they sell in the store. He wears dark glasses, a knife on his belt, and a cigarette in his hand. It's a perfect blend of Douglas MacArthur meets Rambo. I'm not completely surprised as I've seen photos of Brown before, though the Hummer definitely throws me, as does the Marlboro, and I find myself searching for anything Native American on his person--a turquoise bolo, a God's Eye sticking out of his back pocket, LL Bean moccasins--but there's nothing. It's a draw--he loses major cred for the Hummer, but it's a wash because he hasn't accessorized

with hokey pseudo-Indian baubles.

That night, while Brown is presumably out skinning New Jersey bear, one of his assistants gives the first lecture. He's a laid back guy, funny and self-deprecating, with none of the bravado we'd glimpsed in Brown earlier in the day. A former hunter who got entranced with what the Tracker School teaches, this guy's presentation is part warm-up act, part riot act. It's here where we learn that when we're in the barn we are to listen, not talk or ask questions; Brown and his assistants have the stage, not us. We can ask questions during the workshops scattered throughout the ensuing days, but not when a teacher had the cow barn stage. We're informed that only Brown himself is allowed to smoke in the barn, to which the audience responds with sidelong glances. The assistant notices and responds sheepishly, "Yes, Tom smokes, I know it's weird, we're trying to get him to quit." I find myself liking this guy, and as it turns out the other teaching assistants are similar--sincere, environmentally conscious, not full of themselves. (One of them worked for the EPA in another life before she joined the school.) During this opening act we hear about Brown's having tracked over 500 people for law enforcement agencies throughout the country, plus all the military personnel he has trained (years later he would go on to be a consultant for the film *The Hunted*, and even design the knife Benicio del Toro uses in that film, a copy of which you can buy from the Tom Brown store for \$300), but we are all familiar with this history. Brown's celebrity status precedes him, having been on magazine covers and even the Letterman show several times.

The next morning the master joins us in the barn for his first lecture. An ever present cigarette in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other, he opens with a delivery that is by turns arrogant, saccharine, bossy, and wistful. His pedagogy is not so much old school as it is Old Testament; he refers to himself repeatedly as a teacher with a capital T. He talks about teaching a lot; to him a "teacher" is something "holy," a disciple of the Earth Mother. (Every so often he slips into a folksy cadence that vaguely recalls George Bush Sr.) His opening monologue is laced with phrases like, "I am obsessed with education;" "I am a warrior;" "This is not going to be like some college course--we will go much deeper." By the time we break I'm wondering if I've made a terrible mistake.

But: Over the next five days I proceed to write 400 pages of notes and drawings in two fat notebooks. It's more information than I have ever collected in any course, undergraduate or graduate. We receive detailed information on such topics as making fire from hand drills, identifying wild grape (drinkable) from Canadian moonseed (poison), constructing a solar still, building a debris hut, flint knapping, reading pressure releases, using a throwing stick, the four sacred food groups, brain training, food identification, setting a snare. We learn what the four most important elements are in a survival situation (see if you can guess; answer at the end). Say what you will about Brown's delivery, his exaggerated mannerisms and dripping ego, the man and his teaching assistants deliver an extraordinary amount of data. It's all the more impressive when you keep in mind that this "Standard

Course" is the equivalent of Bonehead Survival for Beginners; Brown offers dozens more advanced courses beyond this one. (I learn later in the week that this is the course he dislikes the most; a weeding out process, apparently one gets to know the real Brown once they ascend to the higher levels.)

The culminating demonstration on how to track mice over bare rock is a bit of a let-down; turns out if you shine light at an acute angle in the dark over nearly any surface you might see grit impressions where anything larger than a beetle has made tracks in the dust. But the highlight of the week for me is a demonstration on the last day when we are brought into the woods and shown a dozen spots where Brown had earlier that morning tracked creatures through the brush. His assistants are standing at each location next to patches of ground where they point to popsicle sticks Brown has stuck in the earth, each one a few inches from a track, the name of some critter written on each one. We walk past these stations single file and squat and stare until we are able to visualize the little animal footprints. A fold in the leaves is where a cat had stepped several hours earlier, paused, frozen. A pinch of dirt on piece of moss signals where a toad has crept out from under some wet leaves. A rabbit hair on a plant stem shows where a bunny had passed through.

The experience is altering. At first it's all just leaves and humus. But then suddenly the tracks reveal themselves--the round imprint of the cat's front foot, the arrowhead shape of half a deer hoof in a bed of pine needles, a dog's toenail. Where the woods used to be an abstract tableau--a cohesive, seamless environs that one walked through but never read--is now revealed to be a stew rich with complex codes. I leave those woods rethinking the concept of landscape: not as something spread out before a person, like nature's tablecloth, but rather as a dense layering of vectors, dotted lines, routes, and paths--webs of narrative interlaced and slung across the ground and into the canopy, all of it criss-crossing and evolving. The effect is as if having viewed the world all one's life from just one eye, and then suddenly opening up the other.

Of course, I have no way of knowing if what I'm seeing is really there. Brown's popsicle stick stuck next to a bent leaf is hardly proof that this is where an owl dropped down in the night to snag a mouse. After a week of this it's clear to me that Brown has experience and skills I'll never have but he's also a bullshit artist (there's a good chance his mystical childhood narratives were all fabricated, there being no evidence that his Apache "grandfather" or childhood companion "Rick" even existed). But whether he's yanking my chain or revealing to me the true secrets of reading the land--and I suspect it is a combination of both--I leave that week-long encounter with a different desire to read places differently, whether wilderness, rural, suburban, or urban. To be sure, I leave the Tom Brown standard course knowing I will never sign up for any future classes; as much as I'm pleased with the 400 pages of notes I just can't reconcile the experience with the watery faux native American hoo-ha mixed with this cultish fetishization of "Master Teacher." Besides, I came to this event mostly to learn more about the man's visions of apocalypse, wanting to put them in

some larger cultural context, and it now seems one has to go through a handful of the "philosophy" courses before getting access to his inner fantasies about the coming age of cannibals he hints at in his books.

But I'm also left thinking about how the metaphor of tracking points to a methodology whereby one might draw inferences about an unseen past, a past written in the dirt of history and vice versa. I leave the cow barn and the Mowgli boys and Swedish stewardesses and unnervingly gleeful chatter about the coming red skies with a strong desire to start reading any site--backyard, city cul de sac, suburban sump--as if they were big fat books of glyphs, all written on clear plastic pages. Palimpsests, sandwiched together, and all the half-erased signals showing through. I leave wondering what it might mean to "read" place, to (re)write environs in the course of a more attentive seeing. To cook up narratives offered up by a bug hibernating in a bark cleft, vole turds at the base of a fencepost.

two

--or, more interesting yet (for the 400 pg notebooks quickly gather dust after I return home, there being little call to dress a deer in my suburban enclave), how to translate these seeing skills hinted at in this wilderness survival course to the project of reading history? To visualize the past, any past, as a woods for close reading? And render a continuum of sorts, connecting ancestry and self to place and place to self and ancestry, making relief maps from that different kind of data?

I spent much of my childhood wandering up and down the Chemung River in Elmira, New York. Lighting firecrackers and roman candles, shooting BB guns, walking out stupidly (so, so immeasurably stupid) on river ice as close to the central open water as I dared. Hopping into the basement cavities of cottages long disappeared, built close to the water's edge at the turn of the century in a section known at the time as Little Bohemia where there once stood a popular theater pavilion. The crumbling concrete piers of the long-collapsed bridge to Rorick's Glen are still there, underneath which my much gutsier friends John and Greg would swim, breathing from pockets of air expelled and trapped beneath the concrete towers during previous passes. This is where I fished for carp with Ken and Steve, using molasses dough balls for bait, and where Dave and I once found a bloated pig half-submerged twenty feet from the water's edge. We pelted it with stones so as to hear the hollow thump as they bounced off the slick tight skin of the carcass. In high school, learning to drink beer on the dike, the evening rendezvous with girlfriends on river banks. Most of my time on the Chemung I spent alone, batting away gnat clouds, wandering a swath of land that on steamy August afternoons could still exude a primordial air, where ferns and poison ivy gathered in the remains of forgotten dirt-filled cellars, and the occasional iron porch

railing, the last vestiges of pre-World War II homes, get swallowed up by broad-leafed river bamboo.

In late summer the jewelweed rises taller than one's head, the seedpods fat and waiting to burst. If you walk into these stands of touch-me-nots and wave your outstretched arms across the stalks their pods quietly explode, jettisoning ingredients into the air, each package containing a seed, a dark dot of something or other, and a green bit of curlicue. The trick is to pinch off the fattest ones without letting them pop, seeing how many you can line up in the palm of your hand before one erupts and springs the others, setting off a chain reaction.

In August John and I could walk across easily, the river not more than a foot deep, and on the other side follow a stream into the hills leading up to Mount Zoar. There we found leeches in shadowy pools and if we were lucky a possum skull in the rotting leaves. If we wandered a few miles east we'd come to Foster's Pond where the "dead house" of the infamous "Helmira" civil war prison camp stood. Here dead Confederates were nailed into their coffins, their names and the dates of their deaths recorded and placed in tightly corked bottles tucked in the right armpit.

Several decades later John and I are down by the river again, falling immediately into our adolescent habits and exploring a gully emptying into the Chemung. Using William Ritchie's *The Archaeology of New York State* as a guide we find net sinkers and hammer stones, and eventually what we suspect to be a mortar, pestle, choppers, and mullers, along with some large slabs with curious angular grooves--tools from the ancient Lamoka Indians who lived in the neighborhood a thousand years prior.

three

The land I and my ancestors grew up in is drenched in the most sensational of histories. Central and western New York State was saturated with spiritual leaders and visionaries during the nineteenth century, a rich psychic and spiritual laboratory. I've come to regard this cast of characters as regional kinfolk, oddballs driven by visions who seem now to me remotely like family.

"For whatever reason, the New York descendants of the Puritans were a more quarrelsome, argumentative, experimenting brood than their parents and stay-at-home cousins."

There was no stranger place in the United States at this time. New York State, a land of angels and buried treasure, visions and Second Comings as common as thunderstorms. Psychical exaggerations were rampant here, expected even, the region's birthright. At the dawn of the 19th century, religious and utopian "excitements" sprouted like plantain ("White Man's Foot") across the glacial kames and kettles of the western lands. These soils, some of the richest in the state, made a powerful magnet, and the filings pulled into this alchemical hinterland were common folk, uneducated, not just superstitious but progenitors of superstition, seeking and so inventing a more primitive relationship with their Christian gods. Their exegetical designs were as homespun as they were prophetic, cultivated to attain a more perfect, more uncooked, more ancient tasting of supernal rapture. "There is an over-all, one-of-a-kind nonesuchness that separates upstate from all other land-units of the world..."

There must have been something in the water. By 1820 nearly sixty people per square mile lived in this area historians now call the burnt-over district, named for the zealous conflagrations and evangelical firestorms that swept in waves across the region. Before the Erie Canal the primary east-west route crossed just north of the Finger Lakes, so many of the burnt set up camp in the negative space between those fingers, ears cocked and ready to receive voices. Lyman Beecher, writing to Nathaniel Beman in 1828:

"There is nothing to which the minds of good men, when once passed the bounds of sound discretion, and launched on the ocean of feeling and experiment, may not come...nothing so terrible and unmanageable as the fire and whirlwind of human passion, when once kindled by misguided zeal....For, in every church, there is wood, hay, and stubble which will be sure to take fire on the wrong side....New-England of the West shall be burnt over..."

Their families back in New England thought these westward "go-outers" had fallen under the spell of "Genesee Fever," or what doctors called "nervous fever." Tens of thousands got dosed with fear sermons by threatening evangelists the likes of Charles Finney and Father Nash, who urged the Lord to "wake up these stupid sleeping ministers [else]...they will wake in hell" and "smite them this night." Entire congregations reduced to writhing and wailing, catharsis through intimidation. More than a few pushed into insanity.

The "emotionalized culture" of this 19th century "inner space" was ripe for strange sightings, as these were people just itching for divine apparition. Seventh Day Adventists saw the letters G-O-D appear in the sky, bursting from a "serpentine silvery colored belt." Odd lights spotted around Venus and Jupiter, as well as a cross sprouting on the surface of the moon. Comets, northern lights, and eclipses shook the psyches of citizens in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New England. In 1844 a pamphlet was published telling of an unusual shower of "meat and blood" falling on Jersey City. Throughout New England

there were multiple accounts of "praeternatural happenings": odd thunderclaps, needles and splinters sailing through houses, flying Goose-shot striking homeowners and making dogs' noses bleed. Travelers "strangely molested" by stones, dirtclods, corncobs, frying pans. "Peels" (fire shovels) and "beesoms" (brooms) attacking families. The frontier a cacophony of spirits, poltergeists, and daemonic companions visiting town after town, painting the mental landscape in a diabolical hand.

Historians like Whitney Cross describe these rural towns as populated by raw, naïve, gullible, tobacco-spitting, heavy-drinking citizens (the early Penn Yan was sometimes called Pandemonium because of its taverns). In those days science could still be closer to alchemy. The President of Union College thought alcohol in the stomach could be ignited by spontaneous combustion. Academics were busy proving that hairs, dropped in a glass of water, actually came alive. Doctors recommended that hemorrhoid sufferers carry horse chestnuts in their pockets. Farmers claimed to have found the bones of giants rising up through their fields. A Penn Yan doctor reported finding seven-foot skeletons buried in a conical mound near Keuka Lake.

The spiritual biodiversity was considerable. Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Adventists, Arminians, Freewill Baptists, Campbellites, Disciples of Christ, Unitarian Baptists, Mormons, Millerites, Quakers, Universalists, Congregationalists, Shakers, Christian Unionists, Swedenborgians. And their metaphysics equally divergent: espousers of communism, pre- and postmillennialism, spiritualism, perfectionism, masonry, antislavery, temperance, revivalism, celibacy, common marriage, Millerism, Oberlinism, pietism, Fourierism, Owenism, Mesmerism, Grahamism, phrenology, Swedenborgianism, and animal magnetism.

It was not uncommon for preachers to be self-styled visionaries denouncing church government and sometimes even the Bible: "stubborn folk who recognized no authority this side of Heaven." Nor were these zealots and devotees motivated by economic or social objectives, their motives idiosyncratic and private: "they may well have been as little driven by outward circumstance as any group of persons in history."

Some of the most original theological philosophies in American history took root across upstate New York, and my mother's side of the family has lived at the epicenter of these entrancements for at least seven generations. This was "the storm center." "The psychic highway." The "infected district."

"Messiah is traveling in the storm...."



Even today sizeable tracts of land in central New York State remain ignored, hidden. Although this is now the land of winery tours, where cottages from the ramshackle to the elegant dot the banks of the lakes and tourism doubles summer populations, one can still drive away from the 4th of July parties, the water skiers, the lingering smell of boat fuel and in twenty minutes, after a few turns here and there onto empty roads, find oneself heading into countryside that seemingly uninhabited were it not for the endless acres of corn.

A glimpse into the area's pulse, at least in the less traveled pockets: in 1990 my wife and I attended a wedding reception outside Interlaken, which sits between Cayuga and Seneca, the two largest lakes. We got lost on a series of dirt roads and drove past listing Greek revival farmhouses in states of disrepair, car engines chained to tree limbs, the occasional school bus chassis sinking into yards of waist-high grass. We found the party in a trailer, a makeshift VFW hall balanced on stacks of cinder blocks. The father of the bride, a man who looked to be in his 70s, took short cuts to the bathroom by walking on top of the dinner tables. The best man had changed into hunting clothes and stayed planted by the keg, his ample backside crack leading to no small amount of giggling by the bridesmaids. The bride's mother had suffered some manner of breakdown and stood mute against the wall, wringing her hands and avoiding eye contact. The bride and groom's first dance was "Stairway to Heaven."

The aboriginal character of the rural zones stands in contrast to the European town names scattered across the state: Italy Hill. Sempronius. Avon. Lodi. Romulus. Scipio Center. Naples. Pompey. Belfast. Euclid. Paris. Dresden. Utica. Rome. Poland. Norway. Canterbury Hill. Verona. Virgil. Versailles. Syracuse and Ithaca. But because they are juxtaposed with communities more indigenous in name--Beaver Dams, Sheds, Angus, Himrod, Beartown, Flint Town, Fish Creek Station, Farmers Mills, Painted Post, Horseheads, Big Flats, Gas Spring, Arkport, Podunk--even the more classical names seem oddly homespun, conjuring not so much echoes of their overseas cousins but something natavistic.



Offered here, a cataloguing of key players in the nineteenth century lands of the burnt-over:

1. Mother Ann Lee, "feminine spirit of a bisexual god," who came to New York to put the horrors of childbearing hundreds of miles behind her and in the process created a culture where sexual and spiritual energies were channeled into making functional art built to last millennia, where tongues were spoken in, and sparkling balls of love brought back from heaven like so many souvenirs.

Ann Lee bore four children in England; all died. Her final delivery required forceps, no doubt a form of torture in 1770, and afterwards she avoided her marriage bed as if it were

"made of embers." She made entreaties to her god for redemption; in sleep she would shake as one possessed. Within several years she was having regular visions that convinced her that lust was the root of all worldly corruptions, and the only route to salvation was through virgin purity and rejection of carnal desires. She left for America--while crossing the Atlantic she saw Angels hanging on the masthead--and settled the first Shaker settlement outside Albany. The word "Shaker" was an imposed label, a holdover from her earlier days with the Shaking Quakers, a.k.a. the shiverers, a.k.a. the jumpers.

After Mother Ann Lee's death--her common, unadorned headstone can be found surrounded by those of other Shakers in a plot just outside Albany's airport--Shakerism grew in popularity, evolving into something more spiritually eclectic: adults and children breaking out into beautiful, unknown songs; entering passive "non-trances;" succumbing to violent gyrations; spiritual drunkenness; people falling to the floor and lying helpless for hours; voices uttered in personalities not one's own; babbling in euphonious pseudo-languages, temporary blindness...

Travels to the spirit world were common, and Shakers would return with gifts from their "heavenly parents": "Spectacles of Discernment," "sparkling balls of love, lamps "to be kept well trimmed and burning so that the enemy may not impede our progress," celestial wine, silver sacks filled with the bread of life, priceless gems, "six clusters of white plums from the Angel of Peace, with his love and peace written on the leaves that hang to the stems of the cluster." Fans, hymns, poems, and maps drawn in odd, delicate hands, and delivered with small tokens--a bottle of wintergreen oil, a dress pattern.

2. Here in the burnt-over district is where the brethren of William Miller convinced tens of thousands that in a matter of days Time was near ending and God's trumpets would awaken the slumbers of the tomb, sucking the righteous to heaven as the wicked dead would be plucked from their graves and cast into lakes of fire and endlessly harassed.

In the first half of the nineteenth century scores were nourished by a fixation with the magic number 1,000. Some believed a thousand years of heaven on earth had begun, or soon would, presaging Christ's return. Others expected the second coming to arrive any day, followed by a thousand-year run of milk and honey etceteras. Whether one buttered their spiritual bread on the pre- or postmillennialist side, thousands upon thousands across New England and New York equated the godhead's re-entrance with this magical idea-force. "The coming of the bridegroom" + 1,000 (or vice versa) = the End-times. It was a sum of exceptional motivational power and the area most affected was central and western "York state." By the time William Miller's prophecies took hold, spiraling out from his preachings in central New York, more than 50,000 United States citizens were expecting that time would "run out" in 1844, the date (reluctantly) set by Miller for Christ's return. He began preaching in 1831 that the Earth, as forecast in the Bible, would be destroyed sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844 (a hermeneutic error: after the deadline came

and went the date was later changed to October 22, 1844).

The shy preacher had had a rather standard apocalyptic dream: desert wanderings, a cross-roads, mysterious voices, mystical tableaux, drops of blood like rain. "I see children of God who are alive then, will be changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air where they will be married to him." While the chosen were plucked from the planet the earth would be slash-and-burned, a purifying for Christ's landing.

Not the most charismatic of speakers, Miller's vision nevertheless tapped a chord as listeners became "zealously Engaged." The audiences were fertile ones; Adventist longings for Christ's return had been running deep throughout the area, going back to the Great Stir of late 18th century New England. Revivals were held in every county in New York state, over 1,300 recorded between 1825 and 1835. Miller's disciples held camp meetings with a circus-sized tent that could easily hold three thousand. Diagrammatic charts and prophecy banners were printed and reproduced, detailing the inevitable progression towards an impending judgment day. These featured lush illustrations of Revelations-inspired imagery: lions with human faces, hydra-headed beasts, sword-wielding saviors on horseback.

Some Millerite perfectionists believed that whether one was snagged up to heaven or kicked into hell, it was all preordained anyway, and thus one was unaffected by one's earthly actions. Hence some stole goods, others kept "a very bad house;" one respected preacher fell into "uncivil conduct." There were reports of kissing, embracing, and promiscuous lodgings so as to beget spiritual children. An entire congregation in Rochester was engaged in foot washing.

"Gods Car is moving forward with its wheels of burning fire in
our midst utterly consuming every vestige of our old Nature..."

As the approaching cataclysm drew near some of the expectant got ready for their bridegroom by giving away family fortunes and farms. The cry of "Come out of Her my people" made the rounds as people were encouraged to separate themselves from the government and churches of Babylon. One gathering of Millerites assembled for days and nights in Springwater Valley, near Rochester, in the days prior to the anticipated coming, in the process neglecting and forgetting their children. Accounts of Miller's Adventists standing on hills and barn rooftops, arms akimbo and garbed in white ascension robes, were common, if embellished. "May we all be ready & meet in the skies..."

With the rising of the sun on October 23, 1844, the Millerites transformed overnight into The Disappointed. Several of the unstable were to succumb to mental illness. One distracted man took a knife to his throat with such force "as to almost sever his head from his body;" a woman fed teaspoons of arsenic to her one and three year old children, then herself. These tales helped paint the Millerites as largely unbalanced when in fact their

hunger for rapture was always less idiosyncratic than reflective of widespread cultural longings. Before Miller came onto the scene more than ninety cases of "religious melancholy," "religious insanity," and "nervous fever" had already led to suicide in New England and New York between 1815 and 1825. The religious revivals of early 19th century America coincided with a spike in asylum construction.

"How long, O Lord, our Saviour, / Wilt thou remain away?
/ Our hearts are growing weary, / with thy so long delay."

3. My central New York is the land where the Prophet, Joseph Smith, walked out of the woods with the one true religion as revealed to him by a 1,000-year-old dead Angel (or an Indian, as early accounts are conflicting--one clearly fabricated rendering goes so far as to have him conversing with a bullfrog) with the oddly Italian-sounding name of Moroni. While the Millerites were taking their charts and tents on the road and describing the Theories of Last Things to enthusiastic audiences up and down the Erie canal, a young diviner named Joseph Smith was brewing his own genesis. In these days many took it as fact that the hills were packed with buried Indian treasure, the burnt-over district's own version of a gold rush. Smith came from a family of "money diggers" and "glass-lookers," his father—a Millerite himself for a time—and uncle using divining rods to seek out buried valuables. But young Smith's preferred tool was a seer stone, an occult gewgaw popular at the time. (In a 1842 narrative, "A Key to the Old and New Testament," one John T. Matthews writes of a white stone he kept in his pocket with the letters S M or W S inscribed upon it, which Matthews understood to mean either "Secret of Masonry" or "World's Savior." Matthews was convinced his little white stone gave him power over every nation on earth, and those who wouldn't heed his power he would "break in pieces like the vessels of a potter.")

Not long after being arrested and accused of disorderly conduct and con artistry for using his "peep stone" to locate buried treasure, the 1,000 year old angel/dead Indian materialized before Smith, telling him that all religions were wrong and that God had called upon him to rekindle a more primitive Christianity. Smith was directed to a large hill near Palmyra where a series of golden plates covered with hieroglyphic markings were revealed. After taking the plates back home Smith translated them by stuffing his face into his hat, into which he'd dropped his peep stone--"the Urim and Thummim"--and channeled for days while his wife took dictation. The Book of Mormon was born and it teaches us, among other things, that Native Americans are actually descendants of the Lamanites, a dark-skinned Hebrew people that migrated to America in 600 BC and eventually slaughtered the lighter-skinned race of Nephites. Today the Church of Latter Day Saints is one of America's wealthiest religions, with assets in the tens of billions of dollars.

4. Here is where Father John Humphrey Noyes, the "Modern Abraham" and spiritual leader of a new tribe of "Bible Communists," designed a thriving community (peaking at around 300 members and lasting several decades) where marriage was "complex" and with multi-

-iple partners, birth control was encouraged through coitus reservatus, eugenics promoted through "scientific breeding," labor shared equally among the sexes, and women got to wear pants beneath their dresses.

As a young man Noyes drank considerably, eating lots of tobacco and craving chili peppers. For several weeks he wandered on the brink of insanity in New York city, sleeping on the steps of city hall. Afterwards he voiced the opinion that the second coming had already occurred back in AD 70 and our obligation was now to duplicate heavenly life on earth. Since marriage did not exist in the afterlife, intimate engagements proliferated there, and so those who were blessed, already perfect in the eyes of god, should do likewise here on earth.

By the late 1840s Noyes had established the Oneida community, where love for just one person was considered idolatrous, and so sexual relations with other members of the community were encouraged. So as to avoid unwanted pregnancies and spare the torment of women having their babies die during or after childbirth (prior to the forming of the community Noyes's wife had experienced five difficult childbirths, four of them premature and ending in death), men practiced coitus reservatus. Adolescent boys were trained by being paired with postmenopausal women, whereas the older men adept in self-control initiated the virgins, twelve and up. Noyes did much of the initiating, selecting the virgins shortly after their first period. Some young women had intercourse with men daily, or more often. They called these encounters "interviews."

Noyes matched sexual partners in a manner of eugenics referred to as stirpiculture, ideal parental specimens hooking up with one another to produce more perfect progeny. When children came along they belonged to the community, not the biological mother. The "sickly family love" women were wont to display towards their babies—"philoprogenitiveness"—was considered excessive and unholy, for it got in the way of loving one's god. By having children taken care of by the community, women were allowed to serve God, their highest priority.

In May of 1868 there was a woman in the community who doted excessively on her child. When the child died, Noyes interpreted this as a reprimand to her from God, a pruning demonstration. She was persuaded by Noyes's opinion, concluding: "This propensity in woman to have pets and worship them, seems barbarous to me now. It belittles her, detracts from her charms, her power of usefulness, and above all is an abuse of God. Thee desire of my heart is to rise out of this liability and separate myself entirely from the spirit of idolatry, and be what God designed woman should be—a true helpmeet to man." Women accused of "idolatry"—too much affection lavished upon their children—were punished by being separated for weeks from their children, regardless of how much the children might beg to be with their mothers. Typically it was the grandmothers who would take over.

One of Noyes's lovers and disciples, Mary Cragin, was leader of the community's Children's House during the early 1850s. After presenting the girls with dolls so that they might teach themselves how to sew clothes for them, the girls quickly became overly attached to them. Cragin formed a committee to study the "doll-question," which concluded that one must fear the Lord prior to becoming a mother, and that "doll-spirits" seduced the girls from their tasks. As a solution the dolls were burned. The destruction of the graven images was recollected by one woman this way: "We all formed a circle round the large stove, each girl carrying on her arms her long-cherished favorite, and marched in time to a song; as we came opposite the stove-door, we threw our dolls into the angry-looking flames, and saw them perish before our eyes...."

In 1881 the Oneida community dissolved after nearly three successful decades, eventually reborn as a mousetrap factory.

5. It was in the burnt-over district where American spiritualism was born, starting in a tiny Hydesville cottage where eleven- and fifteen-year-old sisters, bored and eager to dupe their gullible parents and neighbors, began snapping their toe joints and bouncing apples tied to strings, yo-yo like, across upstairs floorboards, fooling an eager public into believing that these were the mutterings of the dead which only the sisters could translate.

Within a year after the Fox sisters began translating the knockings of ghosts—they had moved to Rochester, where they now heard buckets of coagulated blood poured across the floors of their home—channeling and mesmerism spread like a contagion in neighboring towns. In the summer of 1850 close to one hundred mediums had set up camp in Auburn, not far from Hydesville, and they conveyed their messages in automatic writing, slate writing, and table raising. They spoke in the voices of swearing drunken sailors, oversexed male suitors, and Indian braves. (Since those further up the hierarchy of Spheres—Christ, for example—were too far out of reach, one had to settle for those occupying baser positions in the afterlife). At séances the attendees watched bells hover in the air, felt spirit hands tickle their legs and nether regions, and suffered fruit baskets being placed atop their foreheads. Ectoplasm spilled from the noses, ears, and mouths of mediums; ectoplasmic hands and feet sprouted from navels. Over in Europe female mediums worked without clothes, even underwent gynecological exams to ensure no extraneous materials had been hidden inside.

John Spear, a spiritualist inspired by the Fox sisters and specializing in "impressions," received the voices of Daniel Webster, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, as well as information thousands of pages long sent to him from the Association of Beneficents, a club of sorts in the spirit world. In the mid 1850s he founded the Harmonia Community near Kiantone Creek where colonists were to renounce property, live in octagonal houses, drink water only from magic springs, and dig for buried treasure. Instructed by a kind of spirit club calling itself the Association of Electric-Izers, Spears invented what he called a perp-

etual motion machine that had to be jump-started by the "Mary of the New Dispensation," a woman of spiritual intelligence who could nurse the machine into action with her touch. No one, Spear included, could explain what the machine actually did, but people called it Heaven's Last Gift to Man, the Philosopher's Stone, the Art of All Arts, and the Physical Savior. While on display in a building in Randolph, New York, an angry mob smashed and scattered the machine throughout the town. Spiritualism was of "a religious imagination that was graphic and literal. The plain people of New York responded to visual, exactly measured detail; and whether the subject was Hell, the Second Coming, the New Jerusalem, or the spirit world, really did not matter all that much to them."

By the 1850s a wealth of journals, newspapers, pamphlets, and bulletins were in circulation, all devoted to mesmerism, electricity, spiritualism, and news from the dead: The Spiritual Telegraph, the Spiritual Philosopher, Spirit Messenger, Messenger of Light, Christian Spiritualist, Spirit World, Banner of Light, the Religio-Philosophical Journal, New England Spiritualist, The New Era, Light from the Spirit World, Messages from the Superior State, Elements of Spiritual Philosophy, and my favorite, The Clairvoyant Family Physician.

6. Across New York state the less scandalous utopian fantasies of social architect Charles Fourier manifested in a number of short-lived Fourierian phalanxes. Fourier advocated polymorphous sexual engagements (he himself was fond of watching "sisters of Sappho" engaged in erotic display), looked forward to the day when domestic "anti-sharks" would swim in the sea, and predicted that humans would one day evolve into a race of tailed men with eyes sprouting at the tips of those tails. But it was his visionary philosophy of labor based upon an individual's private desires and harmonious collective living arrangements that many Americans found attractive.

These "phalanxes" were brief, but at least thirty of them popped up between Maine and Ohio, a number scattered throughout upstate New York.

7. This is the region where Cyrus Teed (a distant cousin of Joseph Smith), engaged in his electro-alchemical experiments, received a vision from the Mother/Bride, she of the "matchless finger nails" who taught Teed that the earth was a hollow orb turned inside out, a seventeen-layered concave shell containing humanity and all of the cosmos. The universe was closed, sealed forever within this grand sphere, a cosmogony finite and knowable, at the center of which spun the sun, a little "heart-shaped disc." Teed became Koresh, the second coming of Christ, and preached Koreshanity, which promoted celibacy even though Koresh lived with a woman he called the "Pre-Eminent." Although Teed's followers in New York state numbered only five, near the end of the 19th century a hundred Koreshans followed him to the navel of this "Cosmogonic Egg," establishing a village on the southwest coast of Florida.

8. And then there is Jemima Wilkinson, the Publick Universal Friend.

Many long-time residents of Penn Yan can trace their families back to one of the first American cults, followers of the Publick Universal Friend. My mother, who grew up in Penn Yan, has a family connection: Eleazor Ingraham, one of the original members of this religious society, was my mother's father's great great grandfather. In 1782 a traveling female preacher visiting New Milford, Connecticut so inspired the Ingrahams and half a dozen other families "of very honorable and Christian character" that they sold their property, following Wilkinson into the wilderness of western New York.

"She seemed as one moved by that 'prophetic fury' which 'sewed the web,' while she stood uttering words of wondrous import, with a masculine-feminine tone of voice, or kind of croak, unearthly and sepulchral."

Born Jemima Wilkinson in 1752 on a Rhode Island farm surrounded by Solomon's seal and skunk cabbage, she became the first American-born female leader of a religious movement, the Publick Universal Friend, a.k.a. the Friend of Friends, the Friend to All Mankind, the All-Friend, the Comforter, the Best Friend. She lived in an era when humans were not unaccustomed to visions and to whom God spoke directly, His voice crawling into the ear unexpectedly as one plowed or made soap or writhed on a sickbed. After joining the New Lights, a raucous congregation more zealous than the Quakers, Jemima Wilkinson caught a case of "Columbus Fever."

For three days she lay in bed, near death or seeming so. When the fever broke this woman sat up declaring Jemima Wilkinson had forever departed and henceforth citizens would know this body by the "new name which the mouth of the Lord Hath named" the Publick Universal Friend "raised up by God to give comfort to His people."

In the throes of this metamorphic fever in which she "dropt the dying flesh and yielded up the ghost" her brother recalls her proclaiming, "There is room Enough."

"The Fever being Translated to the head She Rose with different Ideas...."

No longer recognizing her family as relatives (although some sisters and a brother would later join her congregation) she began preaching within the week, advocating celibacy, denouncing slavery, and promoting a doctrine of "love, charity, resignation, unlimited salvation, and good works." She delivered her message in a masculine voice "very grim and shrill for a woman" and with a Rhode Island accent, that "peculiar dialect of the most illiterate of the country people of New England."

By 1787 "Jemimy Wilkerson the Imposter" had two hundred among her followers, a motley congregation of "Baptists, Friends or Quakers, Episcopalians, Moravians, Jews, and a

considerable number of Nothingarians." Her broad-brimmed beaver hat tied down over long black curls might have inspired the dress of her Jemimakins: Arnold Potter and William Turpin, two devotees, "tall, handsome young men...with large round flapped hats, and long flowing strait locks, with a sort of melancholy wildness in their countenances, and an effeminate dejected air."

Her sermons "had but little connexion," displays of meandering, interior logic and awkward cadence yet administered with unflinching confidence. Her ministry was the stuff of dream interpretation, prophecies and faith healing. The Friends kept records of their visions, their leader appearing often in their oneiric revelries.

Rachel Malin, one of the Friend's closest followers, records in her book of dreams:

The 10 of the 9 Mo 1815 the F dreamed that there was a great woman head brought to the Friend and it taulked with the Friend and sed that it was agoen to have its body again.

Another entry tells of how the friend:

dreamed that everything was cut short, that the hair was cut short, and that the time was no longer than from mid night to mid day.

Searching for a home where "no intruding foot" might interfere, a sect member followed the northern trail of General Sullivan's genocidal campaign against the Iroquois, conducted several years before, but the scars of that slaughter made it "too soon to enter the sad, dark, land of the lakes." Several years later twenty-five members, my distant relative Eleazor Ingraham included, traveled to Crooked (Keuka) Lake and established a settlement there. Rather than camp in the remains of Indian orchards, where apple shoots had begun to sprout again, they preferred a blank slate, clearing twelve acres of virgin forest where they lived in tents and huts. During the winter one of the members, in the parlance of the Friends, "left time," and they buried the body in a hollowed-out log sealed with a slab in a grave hacked from the frozen soil.

When the settlement was ready for her, The Friend and her entourage joined other cult members in Wyoming, Pennsylvania, site of the bloody massacre eleven years earlier that helped spark the Sullivan genocide. They traveled by boat in snow and rain up the Chemung River to Elmira (Newtown at the time) then through the remains of Catherine's Town (now Montour Falls) until stopping at the southern tip of Seneca Lake, the site of present day Watkins Glen, a sunny little strip of a town famous now for its Nascar races. After a "Great exhortation" they sailed halfway up the lake and disembarked whereupon "the Friend had a Prayer by the Shoar."

Eventually followers of The Friend would number close to three hundred. They settled in New Jerusalem, a few miles west of present day Penn Yan, and at the time it was the largest western settlement in New York. Eleazor Ingraham, my great great great great grandfather, "made the Friend's shoes and 'done' that work for the family." He would not leave time until his eighties.

She lived her years with a dozen celibate women who tended to her needs. Indians called her Squaw Shinnewawna gis tau, ge, "Great Woman Preacher." After a battle with dropsy this "second wonder of the western country," bloated in body but possessing a "calm and pleasant countenance," left time on the first day of the seventh month of the year 1819 as recorded in the Death Book of the Society of the Universal Friends. (In Quaker fashion Friends rejected the heathen names of days and months.) Her grave is kept secret, rumored to be known to no more than two descendents of the cult.

These characters, these visionary nutjobs and whackos, these agents of divine translation, each with his or her direct access to some private godhead—I am quite fond of them. I have adopted them as regional kinfolk, a small host of spiritual relatives to whom I give safe harbor somewhere in the back of my constructed regional history.

4

After John and I had gathered several hundred pounds of ancient Lamoka rock tools from the banks of the Chemung and divided them between us, I gathered mine in heavy plastic milk crates that I still had from high school when I stole them from behind the 7-11. When I got back to Long Island I eagerly showed my prizes to a colleague, an anthropologist.

After picking up each one and hefting it in his hand for a few moments, he set them down one by one on the table then gently scolded me for digging them up. Had these truly been artifacts I would have been disturbing a site of importance, terrain better left to experts. Fortunately no harm was done, for my friend John and I had been fooling ourselves. Perhaps if we had uncovered a few flint shards, or a more convincing cache of clearly honed tools, we might have indeed unearthed something significant something. But as it was these were, in the end, "just rocks."

I keep one of these rocks on the windowsill in my office: a net weight, or what I claim to be such, figure eight shaped, used by Indians to tie to the corners of nets so that they would spread wide and sink straight down to the river floor. It fits perfectly in the hand. I keep it on a shelf in my office, next to bits of beach glass, Indian cups, my great grandmother's shells, a plastic robot circa 1968, dried gourds, a rabbit skull, a chunk of tiger eye, my

grandfather's shaving mug, and other ephemera, not one of them historically significant and yet imbued, each one, with some small zap of, for me, totemic power. Through them I am reminded that the ghosts of a childhood, a region, a family tree, can perhaps be as alive as we permit them to be. The continuum of one's little micro-life more than just a projection cast forward into a succession of moments pooling ever into the present, but as much a burrowing downward and backwards, thread-like roots branching into the strata, connecting the dots.

materials

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"excitements"
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Carl, *The Tavern Lamps are Burning*, viii.

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"go-outers"
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"Genesee Fever"
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"nervous fever"
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"wake up these stupid sleeping ministers..."
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"Undoubtedly many individuals or families..."
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Foster, 65.

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Foster, 66.

"The coming of the bridegroom"
Cross, 287 [check pg.]

"I see children of God who are alive then..."
Rowe.

"a very bad house..."
Cross, 314.

"Gods Car is moving forward..."
Cross, 314.

"Come out of Her my people..."
Rowe, 116.

"May we all be ready & meet in the skies..."
Rowe, 137.

"as to almost sever his head from his body..."
Rowe, 103.

"religious melancholy," "religious insanity," asylum building
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"How long, O Lord, our Saviour..."
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"dropt the dying flesh and yielded up the ghost."
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"second wonder of the western country"
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"calm and pleasant countenance"
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answer

Food, shelter, fire, water. (But not in that order; try and guess what comes first.)

hr

the Student as student

jennifer rich is associate chair and assistant professor of writing studies and composition at hofstra university. she has published articles in film and Shakespeare studies and is the author of two ebooks on critical theory and modern feminist theory.