

ing that they missed a book that relates directly to the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Christopher Brown's work, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, Harper, 1992), tells of the German militiamen who formed killing squads in Poland in Adolf Hitler's "final solution" against European Jews during World War II. In age and marital status they resembled the Mormon militiamen at Mountain Meadows. After forcing Jewish men, women, and children from their homes, the Germans marched them to killing pits. The killing was at close quarters and personal with each soldier assigned a Jew to walk the final yards. The commander gave his militiamen a choice; they could participate and kill, or refuse and step out of the ranks. One in five Germans refused to kill. They were not subject to disciplinary action. This raises critical questions about authority, obedience, personal values, and conscience. While Walker, Turley, and Leonard note individuals who opposed the planning and execution of Mountain Meadows, they do not slow the narrative to consider the meaning of such resistance. Why did these Mormon individuals oppose their leaders and peers? And why did not one in five of the murderers of Mountain Meadows step out of the ranks?

Massacre at Mountain Meadows takes the reader to September 13, 1857, with a brief epilogue that covers the execution of John D. Lee twenty years later. As the authors note, their book considers the crime and is but the "first half of the story" (xii). A second installment, concerning the punishment, will be necessary to extend our understanding of the Mountain Meadows Massacre and its continuing resonance. Even such an unthinkable crime might have, with time, lost its emotional power. What has ensured that Mountain Meadows remains bloody ground is the perception that punishment was not swift and that some got away with murder.

Dixie Heart of Darkness

Shannon A. Novak. *House of Mourning: A Biocultural History of the*

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The debate over the Mountain Meadows Massacre could be said to have two narrative as well as physical poles, one positioned in Arkansas and the other located in Utah. The Arkansan pole is a sixteen-foot-high cross standing in a graveyard near the Carrollton Lodge in Carrollton, Arkansas. The cross faces west—toward Utah. Its inscription reads: “VENGEANCE IS MINE: I WILL RE-PAY, / SAITH THE LORD[.]” Strangely, the bones this cross memorializes are not buried in this graveyard. Associated with the cross is a cairn made of granite exported from Utah and a cedar sign engraved with words declaring (among many other things): “Presently, the LDS Church owns the grave at Mountain Meadows in Utah. They [sic] control the interpretation of the massacre. This replica of the original grave marker allows Arkansas relatives to memorialize the victims and interpret the massacre in their home state” (3–4).

Over a thousand miles away from the Arkansas memorial, the second pole is positioned over remains buried in a desert clearing outside St. George, Utah. This pyramid-shaped memorial (8–9) explains its intent: “Built and maintained by / The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints / Out of respect for those who died and were buried here / and in the surrounding area / following the massacre of 1857. / Dedicated 11 September 1999[.]” A second plaque on this memorial explains further: “1999. Under the direction of President Gordon B. Hinckley and with the cooperation of the Mountain Meadows Association and others, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints replaced the 1932 wall and installed the present Grave Site Memorial. President Hinckley dedicated the memorial on 11 September 1999” (9).

From between these two poles erupts a turbulent field of narrative energy, rife with competing stories laying claim to the truth of what happened at Mountain Meadows in September of 1857. Such narratives, forensic anthropologist Shannon Novak says, often commit two fallacies: (1) Many pose as “morality tales” to bolster some moral judgment that “vilifies or glorifies a present-day

person or institution" (4–5); and (2) Many restrict their settings to the West, "as if the Arkansas emigrants first came into being when they entered the Utah Territory and took up their assigned role in Mormon History" (5). To correct this imbalance, she injects into the discussion yet another competing narrative strain: the victims' own stories, rendered through an experimental form of anthropological inquiry based on analysis of historical records, memorials, and antebellum American socio-political contexts, intertwined with forensic analysis of victims' remains from the 1999 excavation of a mass grave at the massacre site. As a result, *House of Mourning* is a compelling, sometimes grisly, often heart-breaking, partly analytical and partly intuitive, always-bold act of narrative retrieval from some of the most confusing and, at times, worst language wielded in the history of the Mormon settlement of Utah Territory.

Part of the point of murdering people is to kill any rival tales they might tell that threaten the viability of one's own narrative or that obstruct progress toward achieving a "happily ever after" ending. In some cases, murder strives to silence competing narratives by sending a strong message to other bearers of contradictory tales: "This could happen to you." Novak's uniquely integrated approach—a "biocultural history" of the Mountain Meadows Massacre—combines evidential analysis of a sample (twenty-eight of a possible one hundred and twenty persons) of the victims' physical remains with her investigation into the historical records that victims and perpetrators of the massacre left behind. She thus explores which stories reveal some truth about the Arkanosan travelers murdered at Mountain Meadows and which stories obscure it.

For example, in the course of her biocultural analysis, Novak confronts some of the most scurrilous rhetoric the massacre's perpetrators heaped upon their victims. Such language includes John D. Lee's assertion that members of the Fancher/Baker wagon train were "rotten with the pox" [syphilis] (88) and William Dame's purported insistence that "all the women were prostitutes" (109). People familiar with rhetoric justifying bad acts will mark these statements right away as being suspect. To her great credit, Novak does more than simply display these remarks as evidence of the killers' callousness. She gives Lee, Dame, and others

wielding damaging words fair critical treatment as she discloses the wider social context for making such pronouncements. She demonstrates how, during Victorian-era America, judgments upon others' physical constitutions implied judgments upon their moral constitutions. This was a widespread practice, not one limited to any particular religious or American cultural environment: "Regardless of the mechanism, 'social reformers and social scientists of the early nineteenth century did not draw a qualitative distinction between physical and moral causes of diseases.' Chronic illness, in particular, became entangled with an individual's identity" (89).

After placing such language in context, Novak compares Lee's and Dame's reports against the 1850 mortality and accidental death census, other medical and historical information, and analyses of the victims' bones. The victims' bones show that members of the wagon trains suffered from dental health diseases and also bore evidence of anemia, which would have been common for a group of Southerners who had been "on the road" for as many months as the wagon train had been. But contrary to Lee's report, the analyzed bone showed no evidence of syphilis or any remarkable pathology suggesting that the wagon train members were especially diseased or morally profligate. In fact, Novak asserts, the overlanders seem to have bucked common trends in disease, accidental deaths, and infant mortality and appeared, in their individual bones, to be unusually vigorous members of the population.

Lee's and Dame's reported accounts of the emigrants' decadence contributed to the atrocities committed against them and, by extension, against their offspring, since, as Novak says, "to insinuate that parents were afflicted with disease—especially one such as syphilis—was to comment on the character, or future character, of their offspring" (109). Thus, Novak performs the important act of shattering the control such character-assassinating language seeks to exert not only over the meaning of the "bad outcome" (108) the travelers suffered but also over the murderers' own outcomes where their consciences, reputations, and prospects were concerned.

As she sifts through the biocultural bones—rhetorical and physical—associated with the Mountain Meadows Massacre, Novak makes an especially provocative comparison between the

American colonists' donning of Indian costume to carry out the Boston Tea Party and the Mormons' purported donning of Indian paint and attire to commit the massacre. Citing other scholars, she notes that, as an overt act to separate themselves from England, the Boston colonists donned Indian dress, not because they thought such costumery provided good disguises but rather to draw the "boundaries between 'us' and 'them'—to set the colonists off as *Americans* rather than Englishmen or Europeans" (175). Again citing relevant scholarship, Novak notes that the Mormons' reputed application of Indian paint and dress at Mountain Meadows was a form of "playing Indian" that may have gone beyond a simple attempt by criminals to mask their identities. It endowed the wearers of "misleading dress" not only with solidarity but also with "a surprising degree of power, conferring upon its wearer a doubled consciousness, the physical equivalent of metaphorical language" (176). In other words, she suggests, the costumery freed Mormons that she believes participated in the attack to commit the slaughter.

Novak builds on her assertion that local Mormon militia dressed in Indian attire to make a salient point. She notes that the killers made no real effort to bury the bodies, exposing the remains to predation and weathering. She remarks, "If the American revolutionaries had made a point—both economic and political—by dumping tea into Boston Harbor, the Mormons at Mountain Meadows sent their own message by leaving bodies in the wilderness" (177). Since Novak's assertion that Mormons actively participated in the massacre is controversial, and since she provides no specific historical or forensic evidence that fixes with certainty the killers' reasoning for supplying their victims with "not much of a burial" (179), some might find her narratization of this element of the massacre too intuitive to prove meaningful. Such intuitive moments in *House of Mourning* mix liberally with the analytical ones. One of the challenges that readers of this book face is determining whether the analytical moments bolster the strength of the intuitive moments, whether the intuitive moments weaken the strength of the analytical ones, or whether both work together convincingly. Usually, Novak builds her circumstantial cases to a point that renders them at least worthy of consideration.

Applying her techniques of biocultural analysis to these and to many other narrative, historical, and physical artifacts, Shannon Novak shoulders her way through the crowd clamoring around the Mountain Meadows Massacre. She states early in the book that her purpose is to shift “attention from the question of motive to the question of loss” (6) and to focus readers’ awareness on the victims of the massacre; but by telling us more about the victims, she most assuredly tells us more about their murderers. In dispersing popular “morality tales” through her analytical narrative prowess, she creates in their stead another kind of morality tale, one with a non-Mormon-specific theme running along the “civilization is fragile” lines of the “going native” stories of William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies* and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. She does not do this to excuse the slaughter but rather to call it what it is: another villainous massacre in a long human history of villainous massacres, “as complex, compelling, and potentially divisive as any battlefield atrocity or act of ethnic cleansing” (xiii). In fact, one of the quotations she uses as the epigraph for her introduction comes from Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “Metzengerstein,” a gothic tale about a feud between two Hungarian families: “Horror and fatality have been stalking abroad in all ages. Why then give a date to this story I have to tell?” (1).

But to my thinking, the most important office that Novak performs specifically for the Arkansan dead in *House of Mourning* is to dispel some of the narrative pall hanging over Mountain Meadows. She revives in engaging fashion the emigrants’ tales—those competing narratives that the men carrying out the massacre sought to silence. In bringing those stories to life, she gains a measure of justice for the victims, restores to them their good names, and provides some balance to the polemics.

Novak takes the title of her book, *House of Mourning*, from Ecclesiastes 7:2: “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.” Historians, anthropologists, descendants of the massacre victims, and Mormons harboring a more than passing interest in the Mountain Meadow Massacre will find this book a sobering and provocative read.