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Introduction

BEGIN AT THE END.

In April 1861, the same month Confederate batteries opened fire on Fort Sumter, readers of the *Atlantic Magazine* found a story titled “Life in the Iron-Mills” that opens by asking, “Is this the end?”¹ From its epigraph to its final image of a carved korl woman pointing to the horizon where “God has set the promise of the Dawn” (*LIM*, 451), Rebecca Harding Davis’s story telegraphs its concern with last things. After the Welsh iron-mill worker Hugh Wolfe dies, his korl sculpture’s lips “seem to tremble with a terrible question. ‘Is this the End?’ they say,—‘nothing beyond?’” (450). Davis even suggested to the magazine’s assistant editor, James T. Fields, changing the title to “Beyond” in order to convey “the subdued meaning of the story,” amplifying this apocalyptic motif and its inscription onto physical space.² But Fields put his foot down, selecting the title that would cement the story’s reputation as a bellwether of realism and a repudiation of an antebellum religious and literary world that to many later critics seemed as obsolete in industrial America as the smoke-begrimed “little broken figure of an angel pointing upward from the mantel-shelf” (430).³ Like some relic displaced from Little Eva’s bedroom, the angel seems to signal that in this emerging modern world, there will be no triumphant deathbed scenes offering glimpses of heaven—just “the End” with “nothing beyond.”

Fields’s editorial control over the story’s title and his censorship of a crucial passage in which a working-class Christ appears before Wolfe suppressed the religious dimensions of the text, essentially turning “Life in the Iron-Mills” into a document of American secularization.⁴ Yet as scholars have shown, Davis’s engagement with debates over the role of Protestant churches in confronting urban poverty and labor strife persists in the text’s religious imagery, biblical allusions, and narrative structure.⁵ The most fundamental medium of the story’s religious imagination, however, lies not in these diegetic elements but in its setting—in the incandescent, spiritually charged spaces the characters

look and move through. Most spectacular is the hellscape that Hugh's cousin, Deborah, observes as she approaches the mill:

Fire in every horrible form: pits of flame waving in the wind; liquid metal-flames writhing in tortuous streams through the sand; wide caldrons filled with boiling fire, over which bent ghastly wretches stirring the strange brewing; and through all, crowds of half-clad men, looking like revengeful ghosts in the red light, hurried, throwing masses of glittering fire. It was like a street in Hell. (*LIM*, 433)

Balancing this infernal vision is the sunset Hugh first sees reflected in the river, "a glimpse of another world than this." Lifting his gaze, the picture "became strangely real," as "overhead, the sun-touched smoke-clouds opened like a cleft ocean,—shifting, rolling seas of crimson mist, waves of billowy silver veined with blood-scarlet, inner depths unfathomable of glancing light. Wolfe's artist-eye grew drunk with color. The gates of that other world!" (444). Finally there is the glowing landscape across the river that a kind Quaker woman points out to Deborah through the window of the jail cell where Hugh lies dead. Likened to "the hills of heaven," where "the light lies warm . . . and the winds of God blow all the day" (450), the Quaker settlement that becomes Hugh's final resting place and Deborah's home wavers between an earthly place and an eschatological promise. From hellish industrial scenes to heavenly pastoral landscapes, space is the primary means through which Davis's text activates readers' apocalyptic imagination, their sense of what lies beyond this world. Such use of represented space by a variety of writers and artists in the antebellum United States in order to visualize Christian sacred history—the vast arc of God's plot of redemption from the Creation to the Last Judgment narrated in the Bible—and ultimately to make moral claims on their audiences is central to what this book terms apocalyptic geographies.

While those spaces are just as likely to express hopeful, millennial visions as they are to prophesy catastrophe, they can be considered apocalyptic in the word's literal sense (derived from the Greek *apokalypsis*) as an "unveiling" or "uncovering."⁶ In the genre of apocalyptic texts that includes the Book of Daniel (ca. 164 BCE), the Book of Revelation (ca. 90 CE), and the Persian *Bundahishn* (1000–1100 CE), an angel or other supernatural being offers a vision that reveals "a transcendent world of supernatural powers and an eschatological scenario, or view of the last things, that includes the judgment of the dead." Though in popular usage apocalypse typically connotes the end of the world, John J. Collins notes that apocalypses "are not exclusively concerned with the future" but "may also be concerned with cosmology, including the geography of the heavens and nether regions as well as history, primordial times, and the end times."⁷ An apocalyptic geography in this sense refers to the cosmic

architecture revealed through a supernatural vision—whether the relationship of Earth to heaven and hell or one particular site within that cosmography—that functions to convey and reinforce a particular narrative of sacred history.

Nineteenth-century Americans typically used the word “apocalypse” to refer not to an event but to a single text: the Book of Revelation, also known as the Apocalypse of John.⁸ But given the distinctive configuration of space and time that Michael E. Vines calls the “apocalyptic chronotope”—the “temporal and spatial unboundedness” that enables “a God’s-eye view on human history and activity”—a number of antebellum literary texts can be understood to participate in the apocalyptic tradition.⁹ Indeed, as Douglas Robinson has argued, not only can major works by Emerson, Poe, Melville, and others be considered apocalypses, but “the whole question of the apocalyptic ideology, of the historical transformation of space and time from old to new, from corruption to new innocence, from death to rebirth, is fundamental to American literature.”¹⁰ This highlights a second meaning of apocalyptic geography: just as for antebellum Americans an “apocalypse” meant not primarily a cataclysmic event but a particular kind of text, Martin Brückner has argued that in early America and well into the nineteenth century, “geography” referred not only to the physical structure of the Earth but to “a broadly defined genre consisting of many vibrant textual forms: property plats and surveying manuals, decorative wall maps and magazine maps, atlases and geography textbooks, flash cards and playing cards, paintings and needlework samplers.”¹¹ An apocalyptic geography in this sense refers to a text—a geography—that “purport[s] to unveil to human beings secrets hitherto known only in heaven.”¹²

To recognize “Life in the Iron-Mills” as animated by a pervasive form of religious spatial imagination at work in antebellum culture is to restore it to an archive of apocalyptic geographies threaded through American literary history and beyond. It is to register, for instance, the long shadow of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), in which Tom and Eva (like Hugh) witness the “sea of glass, mingled with fire” described in the Book of Revelation reflected in the waters of Lake Pontchartrain, and the gates of the “new Jerusalem” in the sunset clouds; and in which Eliza (like Deborah) finds a vision of “Paradise” in a Quaker settlement across the Ohio River.¹³ So too, it is to recognize Davis’s debt to more obscure figures like Presbyterian minister and social reformer George Barrell Cheever, whose sensational 1835 temperance tale “Inquire at Amos Giles’ Distillery” takes place in a rum distillery that glows as if “one of the chambers of hell had been transported to earth, with all its inmates.”¹⁴ Reaching back further, it is to find echoes of the Oriental tales that filled eighteenth-century American magazines, in which angelic guides lead protagonists to mountaintops or other heavenly perches where the universe (and typically the errors of Calvinist orthodoxy) can be encompassed at

a glance.¹⁵ Further still, it is to recognize in the iron mill not only, as the overseer Kirby and his privileged guests do, an image of “Dante’s Inferno” (436) but also the ancient tradition that stretches behind it, back through the Revelation of John and the Jewish apocalyptic books to the “Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Crown Prince,” the seventh century BCE Neo-Assyrian text that scholars consider the “oldest known visionary journey to hell.”¹⁶ So while “Life in the Iron-Mills” represents a seminal moment in what Gregory S. Jackson has termed “the spiritualization of American realism”—the seed of the “spiritual sight” that will become literalized in a multimedia text like Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890)—the story might just as accurately be captioned as the materialization of American sentimentalism, or the fictionalization of Protestant evangelicalism—or the modernization of apocalypse.¹⁷

The historical and global reach of literary apocalypse lends itself to the enlargement of perspective that Wai Chee Dimock calls “deep time,” in which literature breaks free of the confines of national history and continental geography and becomes “a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures” across “millennia.”¹⁸ For the Protestant evangelicals who are the focus of this book, apocalyptic time enabled a way of imagining modern social life distinct both from the “homogenous, empty time” that Benedict Anderson associates with the “imagined communities” of the modern nation-state and from the corresponding secular conception of geopolitical space that emerged with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which Elizabeth Maddock Dillon notes “sought to replace an earlier map of the world on which religion, rather than the sovereign state, served as the organizing principle for grasping the globe in its entirety.”¹⁹ Indeed, for many antebellum Protestants, apocalyptic expectation (including optimistic forms that anticipated a peaceful earthly millennium) became the primary lens for understanding the emerging form of modernity known today as globalization.

Even as the apocalyptic imagination dislodges texts like “Life in the Iron-Mills” from secular time and space and highlights “imagined spiritual communities” beyond the nation, its multisensory and above all visual mode of expression bursts the bounds of print itself and restores the literary to a broader field of religious media.²⁰ The traditional manifestation of apocalyptic revelation in visions encouraged a number of antebellum painters including Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Frederic Edwin Church, Robert S. Duncanson, and Jasper Francis Cropsey to explore apocalyptic themes in works that depict scenes from scripture as well as volcanic eruptions and other cataclysmic geological phenomena.²¹ Other artists went further, translating sacred history into immersive multimedia spectacles. In New York and elsewhere, audiences flocked to “sacred dioramas” of *The Creation of the World* and *The*

Deluge, attractions that combined painted scenes with light and sound effects, and sometimes mechanical figures.²² In the 1830s, visitors to the Infernal Regions exhibition at the Western Museum in Cincinnati found themselves transported to Dante's Inferno, where they confronted some thirty life-size wax figures carved by the sculptor Hiram Powers and presided over by a giant mechanical Beelzebub.²³ Like the texts they evoked, these spectacles purported to disclose a realm beyond appearances, enabling viewers to perceive the material world as embedded in a larger cosmic framework. In short, in Davis's America (as in our own) learning to think apocalyptically meant thinking not just about disasters or the end of the world but about media: the medium of scripture, the penumbra of printed texts and images emanating from it, popular visual media, and matter itself—nature, the body, the land—as conduits through which sacred power passes into the world. In the fullest sense, then, an apocalyptic geography is more than a vision of cosmic space and more than a text that reveals that vision: it encompasses the entire media system in which such visions and texts circulate.

Apocalyptic Geographies studies the relationship of religious media and the landscape in the antebellum United States in order to rethink the meaning of space in American culture. As it traverses a range of genres and media including sermons, landscape paintings, aesthetic treatises, abolitionist newspapers, slave narratives, novels, and grave markers, it traces the birth of a distinctly modern form of sacred space at the nexus of mass print culture, the physical spaces of an expanding and urbanizing nation, and the religious images and narratives that ordinary Americans used to orient their lives. The book's central case study investigates the efforts of Protestant evangelical publishing societies to teach readers to use the landscape to understand their own spiritual lives and their role in sacred history. This "evangelical space," I argue in the first part of the book, ultimately spread beyond devotional culture to infuse popular literature, art, and politics by the 1850s; in turn it was appropriated, challenged, and parodied in several major secular print cultures that are the focus of the book's later chapters.

For an earlier generation of Americanists, the phrase "American space" likely conjured up images of Puritans carving settlements out of the "wilder-ness" or Leatherstocking passing from the forest onto the prairie; for scholars today it might evoke a cosmopolitan *letrado* embarking from Cuba to New York or a slave ship plying the "black Atlantic."²⁴ *Apocalyptic Geographies* showcases a different set of spaces: painters contemplating creation from mountain-top hotels; slaves kneeling in Caribbean churches to await the Jubilee of emancipation; Native and white families gathered around religious newspapers on the shores of the Great Lakes; Protestant missionary women in Asia writing memoirs about their journeys; Jesuit priests watching cathedral spires rise in

the heart of the Mississippi Valley. By foregrounding such scenes, I argue that the landscape meant more than physical territory to be conquered or new markets to be exploited: it signified an arena of intense spiritual longing and struggle that was shaped decisively by religious media. Indeed, the land was itself a medium through which antebellum Americans looked to see the state of their souls and the fate of the world unveiled.

As it explores these spaces, *Apocalyptic Geographies* intervenes in several scholarly conversations. It recontextualizes studies of antebellum print culture by Trish Loughran, Meredith L. McGill, and others to emphasize the ways many Americans understood print not simply as a secular medium connecting (or dividing) an expanding republic but as a sacred conduit linking a community of believers spread across time and space to each other and to God. In the process it highlights a religious dimension often missing from the various transatlantic, hemispheric, and global reframings of American literature that have emerged as part of the “spatial turn” of the last two decades.²⁵ I argue that the “literary geographies” mapped by scholars including Brückner, Paul Giles, and Hsuan L. Hsu can be deepened by attending both to theories of sacred space and to the study of what cultural geographers call “moral geographies,” or the ways people invest particular places and landscapes with value and map moral categories and conceptions of obligation onto physical space.²⁶ Finally, because of the importance of landscape as a medium of spiritual vision in antebellum America, this book seeks to add nuance to critical scholarship that sees landscape representation chiefly as an expression of expansionist political desire—what Angela Miller calls “the empire of the eye.”²⁷ Running alongside that imperial vision, at times reinforcing it and at others ignoring or even resisting it, runs a tradition of using the landscape to imagine new forms of selfhood, community, and agency suited to the modern world.

The remainder of this introduction provides an overview of a few key concepts that anchor the chapters that follow. First I relate landscape to geography through the concept of “mediascapes.” Next turning to accounts of American sacred space, I use the work of cultural geographers, spatial theorists, and scholars of religion to lay the groundwork for understanding the modern form of sacred space produced by religious media. I conclude by sketching a map of the rest of the book.

Excavating Sacred Mediascapes

In nineteenth-century America the landscape told many stories. It told of the rise of a vast continental empire; of a market economy shouldering aside traditional patterns of production, consumption, and exchange; of dizzying advances in transportation and communication that prompted one midcentury

observer to marvel that “fifty years ago, there were no steamboats, no locomotives, no railroads, and no magnetic telegraph. Now time and space are absolutely annihilated.”²⁸ By registering such momentous changes (even if by concealing or distorting them) the landscape—understood both as the physical environment perceived and shaped by humans and as the representation of that environment in words and pictures—helped narrate the emergence of the modern world. But the landscape told other stories as well, ones scholars are less likely to recognize as modern. For many Americans it told of a cosmic struggle between good and evil, and the diffusion of the Gospel around the globe; it told of the individual’s spiritual quest to find God and the attempt to make sense of suffering; most dramatically it heralded the dawn of a millennial age when the enslaved would go free and warned of an impending day of doom when God would return to punish the wicked. These were stories in which the annihilation of space and time took on a different meaning: apocalyptic stories.

For much of the twentieth century this latter group of stories seemed to many observers in the West poised to wither away before the advance of a more enlightened, secular age. But in recent decades, thanks to a resurgent Protestant evangelicalism in Africa and the Americas and the global spread of radical Islamist ideologies, the holes in that secularization narrative have become glaringly apparent. We now live in what some scholars call a “postsecular age,” one in which the accounts that Charles Taylor calls “subtraction stories”—triumphalist narratives of the gradual emancipation of humankind from religious dogma—no longer seem convincing.²⁹ In a new millennium convulsed by climate crisis and religious conflict, as apocalyptic futures increasingly grip the public imagination, it is perhaps this second group of stories that we most urgently need to understand.

When Hugh Wolfe beholds that otherworldly sunset with his “artist-eye,” he enacts a form of spiritualized landscape perception that had been cultivated in the United States since the 1820s through numerous popular media forms, from paintings and sermons to novels and moving panoramas.³⁰ For the more than 100,000 largely middle-class *Atlantic* readers who encountered Davis’s story in 1861—a readership centered in New England but extending to London, the Midwest, and California—the most prominent nodes in this media network were undoubtedly the spectacular “Great Pictures” of Frederic Church, the most popular landscape painter in the nation.³¹ Inspired by the success of British painter John Martin’s *Last Judgment* triptych when it was exhibited in New York in 1856, Church launched a series of single-painting exhibitions on both sides of the Atlantic in the late 1850s and early 1860s that translated Martin’s apocalyptic vision into a naturalistic idiom.³² As audiences flocked, opera glasses in hand, to see Church’s huge, gemlike canvases, they



FIGURE 0.1. Frederic Edwin Church, *Twilight in the Wilderness*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 40 × 64 in. (101.6 × 162.6 cm). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund, 1965.233.

encountered pyrotechnic sunsets drenched in carmine and cadmium yellow in works like *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860), luminous depictions of the divinely ordered processes of creation and destruction in tropical landscapes like *The Heart of the Andes* (1859) and *Cotopaxi* (1862), and anxious meditations on political crisis in arctic scenes such as *The North (The Icebergs)* (1861) and *The Aurora Borealis* (1865).

Viewers had plenty of help deciphering what they were seeing. In pamphlets and broadsides distributed at the exhibitions as well as published art reviews and sermons delivered in nearby churches, art critics, ministers, and other arbiters of taste interpreted Church's canvases as visualizations of sacred history and dramatizations of personal spiritual life. In 1860 the *New York Albion* described *Twilight in the Wilderness* (fig. 0.1; see plate 1) in terms that anticipate Wolfe's sunset prospect: "the heavens are a-blaze," the reviewer wrote, as "the clouds sweep up in flaming arcs, broadening and breaking toward the zenith, where they fret the deep azure with the dark golden glory." Where this reviewer used lush description to evoke a "natural apocalypse" (in David C. Huntington's words), others invited viewers into Church's pictures, immersing them in spiritually charged moral landscapes.³³ Writing in the *Christian Intelligencer*, New York Presbyterian minister Theodore Ledyard Cuyler described *The Heart of the Andes* (fig. 0.2; see plate 2) as a spiritual allegory that visualized John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), in which the hero, Christian,



FIGURE 0.2. Frederic Edwin Church, *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859. Oil on canvas, $66\frac{1}{8} \times 119\frac{1}{4}$ in. (168×302.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, bequest of Mrs. David Dows, 1909.95.

undertakes a perilous journey from the “City of Destruction” to the “Celestial City,” encountering obstacles like the “hill Difficulty” along the way.³⁴ “The ‘Heart of the Andes’ is a picture for young men,” Cuyler wrote. “It is luxuriant in rapid growths. It has a glassy river flowing on under o’er-arching verdure until it plunges over a precipice—an allegory of the sensualist’s career.” Noting the “flashing peak of alabaster brightness in the far-away distance, which recalls the Apocalyptic visions of heaven,” Cuyler urged “the aspiring youth who gazes at this matchless picture [to] bear in mind that it is only he who spurns the seductive waves of temptation, and bravely masters the ‘Hills of Difficulty’ for Christ’s sake, that shall yet make good his entrance to the golden glories of the New Jerusalem.”³⁵ Cuyler’s mapping of Bunyan’s great Puritan allegory onto Church’s tour-de-force of naturalistic observation might seem farfetched until we recall that Church himself painted two scenes from *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in the late 1840s and contributed a design to a moving panorama based on the book in 1850.³⁶ More to the point is the way Cuyler uses print media to fuse the picture’s exotic setting with an evangelical literary text in order to visualize the spiritual development of an assumed white male viewer, in effect transforming a Catholic landscape into a Protestant spiritual medium, what Rebecca Bedell calls “a tropical version of *Pilgrim’s Progress*.”³⁷

Viewers who saw *The Heart of the Andes* in any of the eight U.S. cities where it toured between October 1859 and May 1861 would have encountered similar messages.³⁸ They might have heard the Rev. Z. M. Humphrey of the First Presbyterian Church in Chicago compare navigating the uneven terrain of *The Heart of the Andes* to the increasingly strenuous stages of an individual’s

“Christian progress,” from “the Cross” to the banks of “the River of Life,” and on toward “the unreached summits of human perfection which are still infinitely below the absolute perfection of the heavenly world.”³⁹ They might have heard the Rev. Dr. Richard Newton, in a sermon delivered at St. Paul’s (Episcopal) Church in Philadelphia, use the painting as an object lesson in how to contemplate the lives of great biblical figures (in this case the Old Testament character of Abigail), telling listeners that the details were “the episodes of the painting, and you must take them into the account before you can do justice to it as a whole.”⁴⁰ They might have even heard the famous Congregationalist minister Henry Ward Beecher declare from his Brooklyn pulpit that “it was a sin for any man in the country to miss seeing Church’s Heart of the Andes, when it could be inspected for twenty-five cents.”⁴¹

As Protestant ministers used landscape paintings as visual aids to bring home the realities of sin and salvation, their audiences brought the landscape home in a literal sense, not only in engravings like the one William Forrest produced of *The Heart of the Andes* in 1862 (ensuring that prints of the painting could be found hanging in parlors across the country) but in the books they read.⁴² The title page of an American Tract Society (ATS) edition of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (fig. 0.3) from the 1850s that depicts Christian kneeling against a backdrop of conical peaks that bear a striking resemblance to Church’s Andes signals just how intimate and self-reinforcing the association between landscape imagery, print, and Protestant piety had become. When the ATS used the same image to illustrate a Dakota translation of Bunyan’s allegory in 1858, it demonstrated how evangelical fervor to spread that sacred landscape could conspire with colonial designs to appropriate physical territory.⁴³ While art historians have traced the transatlantic itineraries of Church’s paintings and literary scholars have charted the “transnational circulation” of texts like *The Pilgrim’s Progress* to illuminate the global contours of the “evangelical Protestant public sphere,” bringing those objects together highlights another form of mobility: how spatial images and narratives move across media to create vivid imagined landscapes where viewers could rehearse their own spiritual journeys.⁴⁴

Jennifer L. Roberts has argued that pictures in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries “register the complications of their own transmission” across physical space through the pictorial language deployed within the frame: in her words, “geography *inhabits* pictures rather than simply surrounding them.”⁴⁵ *The Heart of the Andes*, with its transatlantic and continental itineraries, might seem to epitomize the spectatorial economy Roberts describes, yet the picture itself presents a puzzle. Unlike contemporary Hudson River School paintings that depict transportation and communications technologies integrated harmoniously into pastoral landscapes, from the canal and telegraph

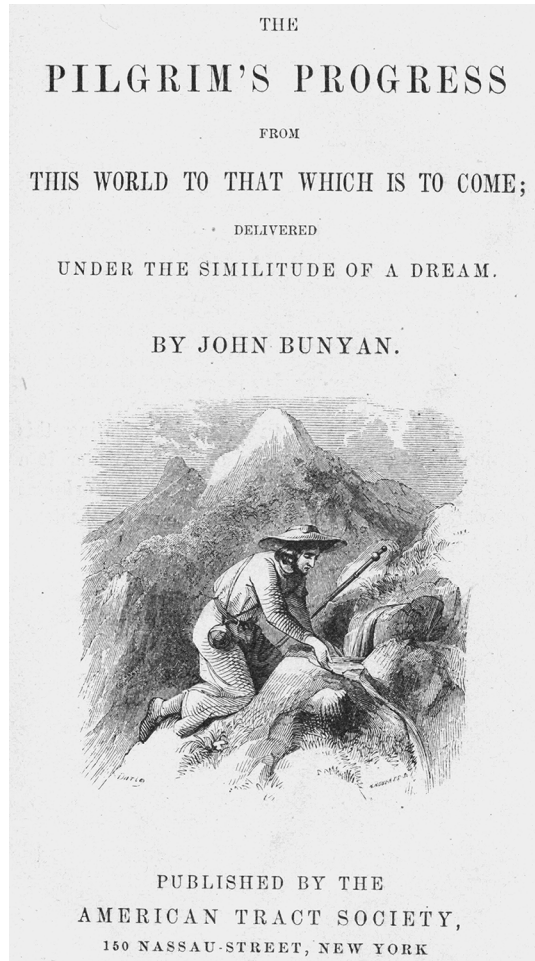


FIGURE 0.3. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress, from This World to That Which Is to Come; Delivered Under the Similitude of a Dream* (1678; New York: American Tract Society, [185-?]), title page. The University Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

poles that lead the eye toward a glorious future on the horizon in Asher B. Durand's *Progress (The Advance of Civilization)* (1853) (see fig. 6.1) to the graceful parallel curve of river and railroad in Jasper Francis Cropsey's *Starrucca Viaduct* (1865) (fig. 0.4), Church's composition permits no such smooth navigation. The rocky falls in the middle ground impose a barrier that denies any upstream passage. Likewise, the footpath in the left foreground beckons the viewer into the picture, leading to the shrine where two pilgrims have stopped

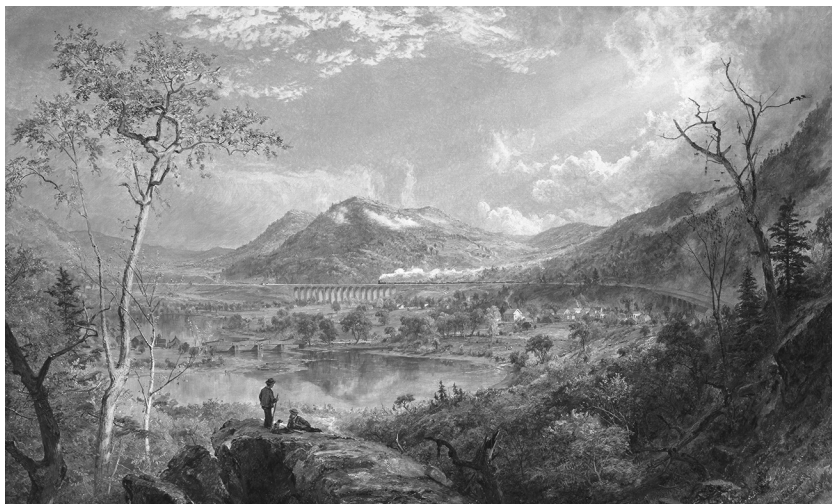


FIGURE 0.4. Jasper Francis Cropsey (American, 1823–1900), *Starrucca Viaduct, Pennsylvania*, 1865. Oil on canvas, $22\frac{3}{8} \times 36\frac{3}{8}$ in. (56.8×92.4 cm). Toledo Museum of Art (Toledo, Ohio).

Purchased with funds from the Florence Scott Libbey Bequest in Memory of her Father, Maurice A. Scott, 1947.58.

to pray (fig. 0.5); once there, the white cross directs the eye toward a church basking in the well-lit pastoral upland, but the overgrown bank of trees descending from the left interrupts the visual trail, rendering the route uncertain. Instead of depicting travelers moving parallel to the picture plane across bodies of water as he had done in *Hooker and Company Journeying through the Wilderness in 1636 from Plymouth to Hartford* (1846) and *New England Scenery* (1851) (fig. 0.6), here Church has scooped out the foreground and emphasized the chasm with the perilously overhanging cluster of trees on the right side. Paradoxically, this most mobile of paintings arrests the viewer's movement through its lush inner geography at every turn.

Yet if *The Heart of the Andes* fails to “register the complications of [its] own transmission” in Roberts’s sense, a kind of “geography” nonetheless “inhabits” the picture. Clearly many viewers did find a form of transit enacted there, one in which the plunge of the young “sensualist” into perdition was of greater concern than the passage to London and the way to the “New Jerusalem” was more real than the road to Chicago. Here the spatial challenges famously posed by the picture—the physical ordeal of navigating Andean terrain to produce a composite view of an entire region (as Church and Alexander von Humboldt before him had done), the aesthetic task of integrating the painting’s obsessive detail into a harmonious whole—converge with Protestant eschatological imperatives: completing the individual Christian pilgrimage toward the New



FIGURE 0.5. Detail of Frederic Edwin Church, *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859. Oil on canvas, 66 $\frac{1}{8}$ \times 119 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (168 \times 302.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, bequest of Mrs. David Dows, 1909.95.

Jerusalem and contemplating the sweep of sacred history from Edenic lowland to apocalyptic peak.⁴⁶ The transit dramatized in Church's canvas, in other words, is through *sacred* geography, the collection of holy places (some historical, others mythological) referenced in the Bible and other religious texts that provides the setting where dramas of individual and collective salvation play out.

The interplay of physical and spiritual itineraries in *The Heart of the Andes* epitomizes the confluence of two distinct forms of space in antebellum America: the sacred geographies Protestants had long used to chart their spiritual journeys within the unfolding design of sacred history, and the emerging modern spaces of a globalizing capitalist economy and an expanding nation. That is, in addition to mediating modernity's "horizontal" networks—the uneven spread of goods, people, and information across the Earth's surface—the landscape facilitated "vertical" circuits, connecting people to powers and realities



FIGURE 0.6. Frederic Edwin Church, *New England Scenery*, 1851. Oil on canvas, 36 × 53 in. (91.4 × 134.6 cm). George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, Springfield, Massachusetts. George Walter Vincent Smith Collection. Photography by David Stansbury.

they conceived to exceed the earthly realm. The concept of a “mediascape” is particularly useful for capturing this dual process of mediation. As defined by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, the term refers both to the material media networks used to “produce and disseminate information” and to “the images of the world created by these media.”⁴⁷ In this case, the antebellum mediascape encompassed the network of magazines, newspapers, books, churches, exhibition halls, and art galleries through which words and images were disseminated *and* the verbal and visual landscape images disseminated through those media. While the concept thus helps relate the material and representational dimensions of modern media, several scholars of religion have adapted Appadurai’s taxonomy of “scapes” (a suffix intended to convey the cultural instability and disjunction wrought by globalization) as a model for thinking about the role of religion within globalizing modernity.⁴⁸ What Thomas A. Tweed terms “sacrosapes” represent “*religious flows*” that enable not only “*terrestrial*” and “*corporeal crossings*” through physical space but also “*cosmic crossings*” that transport believers across “the ultimate horizon of human life.” “Religions,” Tweed explains, “travel vertically back and forth between transcendence and immanence. They bring the gods to earth and transport the faithful to the heavens. And they move horizontally, back and forth in social space.”⁴⁹

One example of such a religious mediascape is the “ethical soundscape” analyzed by anthropologist Charles Hirschkind, who argues that the circulation of cassette sermons through the Middle East beginning in the Islamic Revival of the 1970s had the effect of “reconfiguring urban space acoustically through the use of Islamic media forms.” Hirschkind describes the experience of riding in a Cairo taxi as the words of the *khatib* (preacher) coming through the speakers mixes with the beat of Western pop music percolating in from the street, the visual blare of passing billboards and storefronts, and the canny commentary of fellow passengers. The cassette sermon is significant, Hirschkind argues, not primarily for the theologies or ideologies it inculcates but because of “its effect on the human sensorium, on the affects, sensibilities, and perceptual habits of its vast audience.”⁵⁰

Despite its radically different historical and cultural context, *Apocalyptic Geographies* charts a similarly vibrant confluence of traditional and modern, a mediascape in which the Word spilled out of churches and into packed exhibition halls where crowds gawked at spectacular Holy Land panoramas and biblical paintings, and mass-produced Bibles and tracts were carried by pious volunteers through city streets and backwoods settlements. Caught up in their own wave of religious revivals, antebellum Americans experienced a religious mediascape that shaped the human sensorium in equally dramatic ways. But this one privileged vision as a tool for living a Christian life in the modern world. Protestants who practiced the discipline of devout looking that David Morgan terms “visual piety” carved out an alternative to the secular “scopic regime” that equated vision with Enlightenment, imperial control, and the “instrumental rationality” of modern science.⁵¹ In doing so they contributed to a counter-Enlightenment project of cultivating the “spiritual senses” that engaged a diverse range of believers on both sides of the Atlantic.⁵² Those senses included hearing as well as the kinesthetic sense of moving through physical space. But vision took special prominence, as a Protestant tradition of spiritual sight rooted in the eighteenth-century revivalism of Jonathan Edwards intersected with the rise of mass visual culture in which, in Michael Leja’s words, “a world in which pictures were rare and remarkable began to give way to one permeated by them.”⁵³

Given W. J. T. Mitchell’s axiom that landscape is “a medium” that facilitates “exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other,” it is no surprise that the landscape emerged as a privileged nexus within this religious mediascape.⁵⁴ As a visual medium (even when evoked through language), landscape deals with what can be seen; geography, by contrast, describes a spatial order that exceeds immediate perception. But in the nineteenth century, landscape art often aspired to transcend the limits of the senses and provide access to those encompassing realities—in essence to become a form

of geography. Whether that meant using a landscape painting to represent the nation, Humboldt's cosmos, or the Christian universe, the landscape became a medium between the senses and geography. It became a tool for thinking across geographical scale, for linking regional, national, global, and cosmic spaces. For Protestants who learned to use the landscape as a tool for what geographers term "cognitive mapping"—mentally orienting oneself within one's spatial environment—modernity's horizontal and vertical itineraries converged in spectacular moments of vision that carried viewers beyond their immediate experience in multiple senses.⁵⁵ Restoring landscapes to the religious mediascape in which audiences encountered them—learning to read them not only as meditations on physical mobility but as maps for spiritual transit—is crucial to understanding the new form of sacred space that antebellum evangelicals created.

Evangelicals and the Production of American Sacred Space

Many accounts of how Americans "sacralized the landscape"—made it holy—focus on churches and other religious buildings.⁵⁶ Historians have traced the proliferation of Anglican churches in colonial Virginia, the transformation of New England Congregationalist meetinghouses into steepled churches, the construction (and destruction) of Roman Catholic cathedrals and convents during the antebellum period, and the rise of auditorium-style churches during the same years to house a new generation of Protestant revivalists.⁵⁷ Other scholars have broadened the frame to consider an array of natural and built landscapes that communities have constructed (and contested) as sacred, including mountains, battlefields, national parks, and even amusement parks.⁵⁸ At its most capacious, this conception of sacred space encompasses the entire continent, as a Puritan tradition of projecting the biblical Holy Land onto New World terrain grounds exceptionalist tropes of "redeemer nation" and Promised Land that continue to echo in the national imagination to this day.⁵⁹ The diversity of scope, scale, and definition on display in such accounts has led one scholar to declare "a renaissance" of sacred space, and another to argue that the concept has become so capacious and "politicized" that it has "los[t] its value as an analytical category" and should be abandoned altogether.⁶⁰

Despite their differences, nearly all of these accounts emphasize contiguous physical spaces. But as geographer David Harvey points out, space is not limited to the "absolute space" of buildings and national territory—physical spaces demarcated by "bounded territorial designations."⁶¹ It also includes the "relative space-time" generated as transportation and communication networks warp the rational, Cartesian order of absolute space into new configurations of proximity and distance. And it includes the "relational spacetime" that

occurs when space is absorbed in the mind and infused with “dreams, day-dreams, memories, and fantasies.”⁶² In antebellum America, a period often narrated in terms of the triumph of absolute space (reflected in the extension of the Jeffersonian survey grid and the consolidation of national territory), people experienced modern space in all three forms. In 1835, from his post as president of Lane Theological Seminary near Cincinnati, prominent evangelical minister Lyman Beecher marveled at the relative space-time taking shape around him in “the West,” where as a result of “24,000 miles of steam navigation, and canals and rail roads, a market is brought near to every man, and the whole is brought into near neighborhood”:

When I perceived the active intercourse between the great cities, like the rapid circulation of a giant’s blood; and heard merchants speak of just stepping up to Pittsburgh—only 600 miles—and back in a few days; and others just from New Orleans, or St. Louis, or the Far West; and others going thither; and when I heard my ministerial brethren negotiating exchanges in the near neighborhood—only 100 miles up or down the river—and going and returning on Saturday and Monday, and without trespassing on the Sabbath;—then did I perceive how God, who seeth the end from the beginning, had prepared the West to be mighty, and still wieldable, that the moral energy of his word and spirit might take it up as a very little thing.

Not only does Beecher reveal how steam travel was changing people’s lived experience of American geography, but his fusion of that networked landscape with postmillennial eschatology—a prevalent form of sacred history that held that God was working through human means to usher in the 1,000-year period of peace and prosperity prophesied in scripture—turns the Mississippi Valley into a sacred spacetime in which Protestants are summoned to unite behind a common mission to “evangelize the world.” While such “providential developments” convince Beecher of the truth of Jonathan Edwards’s prediction that “the millennium would commence in America,” he warns that European immigration threatens that prospect, setting the stage for an impending battle of Catholic “superstition” and “despotism” versus “evangelical light” and “liberty.”⁶³ In short, the sacred space that Beecher and his clerical brethren helped create was not limited to the churches where they ministered; rather, their spoken and printed words generated a more expansive apocalyptic geography by assembling a dispersed community of devout listeners and readers and transforming the Mississippi Valley into the setting of a “cosmic drama” in which the fate of the West, the nation, and the world hung in the balance.⁶⁴

Then as now, evangelicalism was a vibrant religious movement characterized by considerable denominational, regional, and racial diversity but united by a common theology “characterized by a stress on conversion, the Bible as

supreme religious authority, activism manifest especially in efforts to spread the Christian message, and a focus on Christ's death on the cross as the defining reality of Christian faith."⁶⁵ This book focuses on a small but influential subset of that movement: the highly literate, largely middle-class Congregationalists and Presbyterians like Beecher who dominated the interdenominational voluntary associations that arose in the 1820s in the Northeast to promote causes such as Bible distribution, foreign missions, temperance, and eventually abolitionism. In Mark Noll's terms, these evangelicals were "formalists" (they retained greater respect for order and institutions than "antiformalists" like Methodists and Baptists who stressed "spiritual liberty"), predominantly northern white men and women whose leadership of the Benevolent Empire helped sustain the explosive growth of evangelical churches that occurred between the 1780s and the Civil War.⁶⁶

This group, which included preachers, artists, reformers, novelists, editors, and publishers, illuminates the encounter between traditional Protestant sacred geographies and the emerging spaces of modern America. Not only did these evangelicals possess a rich tradition of sacred geography drawn from the Puritan past; they also proved adept at using modern methods to spread their message, combining technologies such as steam presses, stereotypography, and new forms of illustration.⁶⁷ In the process they adapted a number of traditional Christian topoi (formulaic images that recur across media and through time) and narratives to interpret the modern world taking shape around them.⁶⁸ That world included a capitalist economy rooted in industrial methods of exploiting land and labor, virulent forms of racial hatred and violence, newly popular modes of cultural expression, and an emerging mass media that would give rise to the condition of ubiquitous mediation that contemporary theorists have termed "media culture."⁶⁹ By bringing religious ideas and practices to bear on these conditions, I argue, these evangelicals created a modern, networked form of Protestant sacred space that I call evangelical space. As they mapped sacred geography onto terrain being transformed by modern flows of goods, information, and people, landscape representation emerged as a crucial tool for teaching audiences to inhabit a particular moral geography and to adjust their actions accordingly.

Of course this form of spatial imagination represents just one version of evangelical space. Methodist circuit-riders, anti-mission Baptists, and black Christians in the so-called invisible church of the Slave South all created their own sacred mediascapes through their words, songs, and movements. By focusing on this particular form, I am less concerned with comparing different flavors of piety than with tracing a particularly consequential model of media distribution and its corresponding theory of how texts change readers and shape the course of history. That faith in the agency of religious words and

images to circulate universally and almost instantaneously across vast stretches of physical and social space, sparking mass conversions, calling on readers to act on behalf of distant strangers, and hastening the coming of the millennium, is what marks this space as evangelical. While evangelical space originated in religious texts and organizations, it did not remain confined to them but spread through a broad swath of American popular culture, influencing everything from novels and paintings to tourism.

The apocalyptic geography condensed in Beecher's 1835 tract figures prominently in countless literary works of the antebellum period, perhaps nowhere more forcefully than in the best-selling novel penned by his daughter Harriet Beecher Stowe less than two decades later. In its breathtaking claims to summon into being a national "family" of devout readers, its plot that propels readers through national and international geographies while simultaneously guiding them on a spiritual tour of Christian cosmography, and its scenes in which characters gaze across landscapes that disclose visions of a world to come, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* represents the triumph of evangelical space as American space. As the novel proliferated across a transatlantic mediascape through illustrated editions, paintings, and popular theatrical shows, what emerged was an immersive sensory environment—a space that was socially "produced" in the sense described by spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre's influential spatial "triad" captures how modern space is not simply given or inert but is actively created through the dialectical interaction of three spatial registers. The first is "spatial practice," the ways people negotiate their physical environment: Lefebvre gives the example of a modern city-dweller's daily commute to work, but one could also think of the physical printing of Stowe's novel and its circulation through "material space" as it was carried on foot or by railroad car, perused in parlors and reading rooms, and enacted onstage. Next is "*representations of space*" or "conceived space," the maps, blueprints, and other images created by "scientists, planners, urbanists," and "artist[s]" that represent the "dominant" form of space designed by powerful elites; this might include the various landscapes and geographies described and depicted within Stowe's novel, such as the panoramic view of the plantation South that Tom famously witnesses from the deck of a Mississippi steamboat. Finally there is the emotionally rich "*representational spaces*" or "lived" spaces people experience as they infuse the material spaces around them with the "images and symbols" existing in their mental worlds; for our purposes this is the space of the reader, who may feel compelled to inhabit the novel's expansive moral geography, weeping with love for distant strangers and trembling with apocalyptic dread, or who may resist it as many readers did, especially in the South.⁷⁰

While Lefebvre's theory gives a sense of how evangelicals used media to produce sacred space, applying it to the religious world of the nineteenth

century requires some retrofitting, since he considered “religio-political space” to be an archaic vestige of “pre-capitalist societies,” from ancient “Greek temples” to the “tombs” and “crypts” of medieval Catholicism. With the rise of “nation states,” such spaces gave way to “the space of a secular life, freed from politico-religious space.”⁷¹ In Lefebvre’s Marxist subtraction story, religious space is by definition a premodern mystification of “real” (i.e., material) forces, and to become modern is to be liberated from it. Kim Knott has attempted to correct this bias and adapt Lefebvre’s theory to the study of contemporary religious space, noting that “religion, which is inherently social, must also exist and express itself in and through space.”⁷² But this points to a broader methodological issue. Jeanne Halgren Kilde, in her overview of approaches to “religious space,” describes a key shift in how scholars theorize religion. “Hermeneutical approaches” influenced by the mid-twentieth-century work of Mircea Eliade assume an “ontological or substantive” orientation, which means they privilege the meanings that religious insiders ascribe to religious spaces. Eliade, for example, interpreted the “*axis mundis*” or sacred center as the place where the divine erupts into ordinary existence, while Victor and Edith Turner explored the transformative sense of collective identity or “*communitas*” experienced by believers during Christian pilgrimages. Then in the 1980s a group of “socio-historical approaches” emerged that emphasize sacred spaces as social constructs, human products that reflect the power dynamics and exclusions of the societies that produced them. In the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, David Chidester, and Edward T. Linenthal, religious space is viewed not as a manifestation of divine presence but as the result of a social process through which human actors “sacralize” a given space through rituals and stories. Closely related to this approach is an eclectic cluster of “critical-spatial approaches” by theorists influenced by poststructuralist theory, including Lefebvre and Edward Soja. While religion per se is not a central concern of these thinkers, scholars of religion have applied their theories to interpret religious spaces as products of social power rather than manifestations of sacred power. A final category of “critical-spatial approaches from inside the study of religions” in effect reverses that flow of influence, as scholars such as Tweed, Knott, and Robert M. Hayden have recently developed theories that “ask how the study of specifically religious spaces can contribute to the broader discussion of human spatiality rather than the other way around.”⁷³

While the current study draws insights from each of these camps, I maintain that even as the turn from hermeneutical to socio-historical and critical-spatial methods has enabled a deeper understanding of sacred space as the product of historical forces, it has also made it difficult to see sacred spaces as anything *other* than human constructs. As Belden C. Lane notes, the socio-historical approach considers “sites as neutral and indifferent objects” and

“fails to recognize place itself as a participant”; he proposes a “phenomenological approach” that stresses how “places themselves participate in the perception that is made of them.”⁷⁴ Extending Lane’s insight, one might say that media is another crucial component in the sacralization process that has been reduced to a “neutral and indifferent object.” While the historical turn in the study of sacred space was marked by secularist assumptions, the postsecular approach pursued here emphasizes the ways antebellum Americans understood media networks (and the forces of modernity more broadly) as instruments of God acting through history—the sort of sacred media that Beecher perceived unfolding around him in the West and that Stowe later claimed she herself became as her great novel poured forth from her pen. In other words, American modernity did not replace sacred geographies with secular ones: it created spaces that were both modern and sacred, and media was a crucial player in that process.

As this project aims to redefine our sense of sacred space, it seeks to intervene in discussions of American space more broadly. American Studies has used space as an organizing theme since its inception, in classic studies of Puritan sacred geography—what Cotton Mather called “Christiano-graphy”—and the subsequent development of a national origin myth centered on westward expansion and tropes of wilderness and garden.⁷⁵ In recent decades the field has moved beyond the continent and the frontier, emphasizing the global reach of American power and raising vital questions about the spatial scale appropriate to the study of American cultures. Yet something has been lost in that shift. Despite scholarly investment in the religious origins of the “American Mind” for much of the twentieth century, by the turn of the millennium religion had largely receded from critical concern even as it assumed an increasingly prominent role in national culture and politics and in geopolitics, prompting Lawrence Buell to wonder if Americanists were, like the characters in the popular evangelical novel series, “in danger of being ‘left behind.’”⁷⁶ The recent flowering of scholarship on what Michael Warner has termed the “evangelical public sphere” offers an opportunity to catch up.⁷⁷ As a transatlantic enterprise that sought national and global influence, the evangelical mediascape examined here offers an ideal lens through which to combine the insights of classic accounts of American space with important newer work on its transnational dimensions. Together they provide a fuller understanding of America’s role in the rise of global modernity, including the apocalyptic geographies that now confront us all.

Time grows short: we need a map. Each of the six chapters that follow revisits a familiar antebellum cultural object—landscape painting, abolitionism, the sentimental novel, tourism, Transcendentalism, sensational fiction—and

restores a sense of its numinous strangeness by reconstructing its place within the religious mediascape. The book's first part narrates the emergence of evangelical space in the 1820s and early 1830s, its adaptation to new ends in the abolitionist press of the late 1830s, and its spread to American popular culture by the 1850s. Chapter 1 defines the book's central concept, evangelical space, by showing how the evangelical print that flooded the nation in the 1820s and 1830s combined with an emerging landscape art culture to produce spectacular visualizations of the evangelical spatial imagination. Reading illustrated religious tracts, almanacs, and Bibles alongside one of the most iconic landscape paintings of the period—Thomas Cole's *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow* (1836)—reveals that landscape art enacted a symbolic synthesis of two competing impulses in northern evangelical culture: the individual believer's inward pilgrimage toward God and the collective work of global missionary activism. Chapter 2 traces how American abolitionists took up evangelical media strategies in the mid- and late 1830s, launching circulating antislavery libraries that adapted evangelical space to the geographies of slavery. Like its evangelical forerunners, the American Anti-Slavery Society urged readers to extend their "ethical horizon" beyond the local, but it also used events in the Caribbean and elsewhere to refocus evangelical zeal from Asia to the U.S. South. In the process, it transformed the world missionary enterprise into a model for national reform. Chapter 3 examines Harriet Beecher Stowe's work for one of the nation's most prominent evangelical newspapers, the *New-York Evangelist*, as a literary apprenticeship that recasts the cultural significance of the most popular book in nineteenth-century America. The dozens of pieces Stowe published in the *Evangelist* between 1835 and 1852 reframe *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a sustained reflection on modern media that dramatizes mass print as a sphere where evangelical piety and an emerging democratic society converge, a prospect that raises both millennial promise and apocalyptic peril. By crafting a novel that scrutinizes the problems of apocalyptic interpretation—a meta-apocalypse—Stowe theorizes the human itself as a medium through which information, feeling, and divine power circulate.

While the first part of *Apocalyptic Geographies* tells a story of direct influence and continuity, the second part turns from this linear account, shifting its focus from emulation and continuity to contestation and rupture. These chapters reveal a mediascape strikingly different from evangelicals' idealized sphere of universal print diffusion and irresistible conversion—one characterized instead by patchy distribution, perishable paper, and resistant or indifferent readers. While evangelical space retains a prominent cultural presence, these chapters trace its mediation by an archive of ostensibly secular objects

with the help of several scholars whose work probes the meaning of secular modernity, including Charles Taylor, Tracy Fessenden, Bruno Latour, and Talal Asad. Chapter 4 revises standard accounts of the secularization of antebellum culture by examining the widespread practice among Protestant travelers of using physical landscapes as media for visualizing sacred history. Using tourism literature, aesthetic treatises, and best-selling sentimental novels by Susan Warner and Maria Cummins to uncover the clash of religious and secular interpretations in tourist landscapes, this chapter redefines what one critic calls the “secular center” of the American 1850s—not as a cultural space from which religion has been evacuated but one in which the proliferation of religious “options” plays out.⁷⁸ Chapter 5 reads Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854) as a parody of a popular evangelical genre, the missionary memoir, in order to recover a conception of “cosmic modernity” that challenges recent accounts of a secularized global modernity. Thoreau’s polemical engagement with missionary culture in the context of the Transcendentalist project of comparative religion dramatizes how the modern encounter with global religious difference catalyzed new conceptions of the local and new spiritual communities while shaping the deepest, most private experiences of the self. Chapter 6 descends into the profane depths of antebellum literary culture to probe the ways religious difference haunts the sensational public sphere. Excavating a neglected body of popular fiction circulating in the “Great West” in the 1840s and 1850s, I argue that these violent, quasi-pornographic novels stage vivid scenes of vision across the landscape that articulate a regional strain of republican ideology. The Catholic conspiracies and corrupt Protestant elites that constantly threaten the body politic in this fiction dramatize the dilemmas of political mediation in an expanding federal republic, anticipating Asad’s critique of secularism’s fictions of “direct access” and exposing the roots of the convulsions that grip Western liberal democracies today as a crisis not of de-liberation but of mediation.⁷⁹

I conclude by looking beyond the Civil War to consider the ways evangelical space continued to shape how Americans saw the landscape and themselves in cultural arenas from literary realism to the conservation movement. Mark Twain, in his riotous, irreverent travels through the Holy Land and the Far West, becomes a representative figure of how a secularizing America remained haunted by a sense of sacred presence rooted in the soil itself.

While the first part of this book tells a story of the rise of white Protestant evangelicals within U.S. national culture—of how their form of evangelical space became American space by the eve of the Civil War—the second tells an ironic story about how that space escaped their control as writers and artists from other traditions reconfigured the relationship between landscape

representation, media, and the sacred to produce their own apocalyptic geographies. There were, of course, many other mappings that are not fully explored here, including those from within African American, Native American, and African diaspora communities. While figures including William Apess, Frederick Douglass, Phillis Wheatley, Robert S. Duncanson, and Henry Obookiah all appear in the chapters that follow, a more complete account of how they and others appropriated and adapted evangelical space must await its own study. The decision not to attempt such an account here is partly owing to my emphasis on mass media and popular culture: whites tended to control the printing presses, galleries, and other means of cultural production necessary to generate the widespread middle-class cultural phenomena studied here. In addition, expanding this study beyond its current focus on a particular evangelical tradition would require crossing into other traditions (particularly Methodism) and other forms of evangelical space that I feared would quickly outrun my expertise (not to mention my word limit) and threaten the coherence of the story I had to tell. Finally, a number of other scholars have already begun to explore subaltern evangelical mediascapes in greater detail, particularly in the case of scholarship on the “evangelical black Atlantic.”⁸⁰ So while this book largely offers an account of antebellum culture’s dominant spaces rather than its resistant ones—of evangelical “strategies” as opposed to “tactics,” to borrow Michel de Certeau’s terminology—the existence of those alternative spaces is always implied and awaits further elaboration.⁸¹

In June 1861 Frederick Douglass delivered a lecture before the Spring Street AME Zion Church in Rochester, New York, in which he reflected on “The American Apocalypse.” Slavery, he told the audience, “is not an earthquake swallowing up a town or city, and then leaving the solid earth undisturbed for centuries. It is not a Vesuvius which, belching forth its fire and lava at intervals, causes ruin in a limited territory; but slavery is felt to be a moral volcano, a burning lake, a hell on the earth, the smoke and stench of whose torments ascend upward forever.”⁸² His metaphor made explicit the parallel many observers at the time and since have drawn between the “apocalyptic” imagery of Frederic Church’s *Cotopaxi* (fig. 0.7; see plate 3) of the following year and a nation convulsed by Civil War.⁸³ But as Douglass described the “war in heaven” captured in John’s “apocalyptic vision,” he invoked a specific sense of the relationship between apocalypse and geography that most modern-day critics fail to recognize. Declaring that “the human heart is a constant state of war,” Douglass reminded his listeners that “what takes place in individual human hearts, often takes place between nations, and between individuals of the same nation. Such is the struggle now going on in the United States.”⁸⁴ In this light, Church’s refulgent scene symbolizes more than political conflict: it becomes a vehicle for individual moral and religious scripts of the sort that

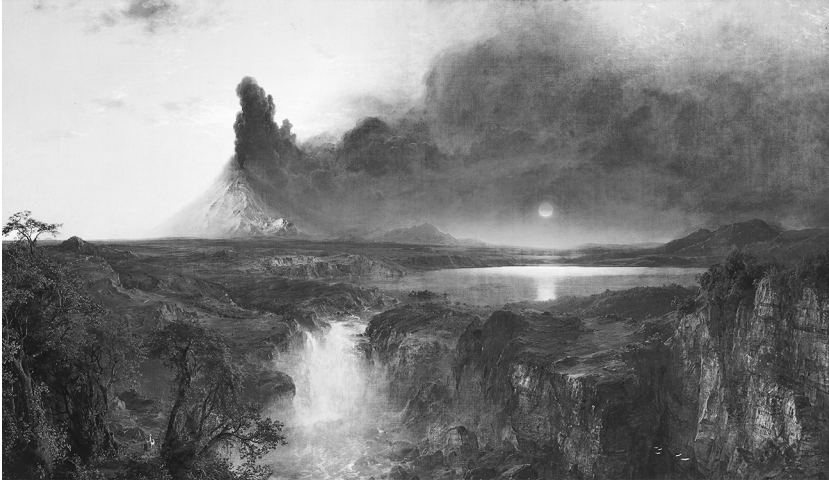


FIGURE 0.7. Frederic Edwin Church, *Cotopaxi*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 48 × 85 in. (121.9 × 215.9 cm). Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, 76.89.

The Heart of the Andes had activated a few years earlier. Douglass's address, which appeared in the pages of *Douglass' Monthly* the following month, signaled the pervasive use of the landscape to help Americans mediate between individual and collective dramas of redemption, and between this world and a world to come. The story of how the landscape became the nation's most powerful apocalyptic medium begins decades earlier with the rise of a new evangelical mediascape.

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