

THE SPIRIT OF PLACE: SOUTHWESTERN LITERATURE  
AND THE POETRY OF KENNETH W. BREWER

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of  
Texas State University-San Marcos  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

by

Dayna E. Patterson, B.A.

San Marcos, Texas  
May 2008

THE SPIRIT OF PLACE: SOUTHWESTERN LITERATURE  
AND THE POETRY OF KENNETH W. BREWER

Committee Members Approved:

---

Mark Busby, Chair

---

Roger Jones

---

Robin Cohen

Approved:

---

J. Michael Willoughby  
Dean of the Graduate College

**COPYRIGHT**

by

Dayna E. Patterson

2008

To my husband, Charles, and our daughter, Madeleine.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank Star Coulbrooke for introducing me to Dr. Brewer and his poetry. I would also like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Busby, for sparking my interest in Southwestern literature. Thanks to Dr. Jones for encouraging me to look at the works of newer poets, which gave me the idea to write about Brewer. And thanks to Dr. Cohen for her thoughtful comments for revision. Lastly, I would like to thank my husband, Charles, for his unfailing support and his insightful, honest criticism.

This manuscript was submitted on January 18, 2008.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
A Poet's Life.....	5
A Poet's Work .....	10
A Poet's Region.....	13
Overview of Contents.....	16
II. NATIVE AMERICAN GEOSPIRITUALITY AND BREWER'S POETRY ..	19
Humanity and the Natural World .....	22
Life Cycle.....	25
Environmental Awareness .....	29
A Breach with Nature: The Bomb.....	30
Desert Landscape, Minimalist Style.....	37
Conclusion .....	40
III. BREWER AND MAGICAL REALISM.....	41
The Irreducible Element and the Nasty Shock of Reality .....	46
The Phenomenal World: Flying Dogs.....	49
Unsettling Doubts: Hallucination or Reality.....	51
Merging Realms: Two Worlds in One .....	53
Disruptions of Time, Space, and Identity .....	56
Conclusion .....	57
IV. UTAH LITERATURE AND THE "AMERICAN" ELEMENT .....	59
Zane Grey's Fascination/Repulsion .....	62
Edward Abbey and the Mormon Paradox.....	64
Wallace Stegner: A Gentile among Saints.....	66
Terry Tempest Williams: Mormons and Nuclear Fallout.....	71

May Swenson's "Summerfall".....	73
John Sterling Harris: Pioneer Graveyards and Tacky Chapels.....	74
Ken Brewer: Semblance and Polygamy.....	77
Conclusion.....	80
V. CONCLUSION: THE SPIRIT OF PLACE.....	82
WORKS CITED.....	89

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Southwestern literature, like the Southwest, is difficult to define. Some people ascribe Southwestern literature to the literature of the Southwestern United States, but which states does one include or exclude? Typically, academics see New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona as constituting the heart of the Southwest, and other states are sometimes included as well. In Writing the Southwest, editors David King Dunaway and Sara Spurgeon define the region using the following geographic boundaries:

By “Southwest” we refer primarily to Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico, states that share the Colorado Plateau, the upper Rio Grande valley, and the arid land surrounding it. This region is bounded, in literary historian Lawrence Powell’s terms, by “the land east of the Rio Colorado, South of the Mesa Verde, West of the Pecos, and North of the border.” (xxii).

Dunaway and Spurgeon go on to say that “The Southwest’s range could be expanded in all directions: North to Utah, South to Mexico, West to California, and East to Texas and Oklahoma” (xxii).

One of the reasons that the Southwest is so difficult to define is because state boundaries are artificial, and limiting the influence and creation of Southwestern



literature to certain states is also problematic. Dunaway and Spurgeon concede that the Southwest might include Utah, but often this state and its literature are excluded from the Southwestern literary tradition. My object is to explore the relationship between Southwestern literature and the works of a handful of notable Utah writers or texts, focusing particularly on the poetry of Dr. Kenneth Wayne Brewer, Utah's second Poet Laureate. In doing so I hope to show that Utah literature, in reflecting a significant part of the spirit of the Southwest, adds to the richness and diversity of Southwestern literature.

But which of the many definitions of Southwestern literature most adequately defines this region's creative output? For the same reasons that ascribing Southwestern literature to certain states is problematic, any definition of Southwestern literature is also bound to be artificially divisive and limiting. In researching various definitions of this body of literature, I found that many writers shy away from any definitions whatsoever, preferring broad generalizations.<sup>1</sup> In Kathryn Wilder's "Introduction" to Walking the Twilight: Women Writers of the Southwest, she describes how she collected the stories in the book by calling for submissions without defining Southwestern literature, preferring instead to allow writers to judge whether or not their writing was Southwestern. The result was she received—and published—stories that stretched her ideas of what might usually be considered Southwestern, including one story set in Wyoming and others in California and Oklahoma. There is definite merit to Wilder's approach, allowing the writers to decide rather than imposing specific state boundaries or restrictive criteria.

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, David King Dunaway's "Introduction" to Writing the Southwest or Rudolfo Anaya's "Foreword" to the same volume. Also, see Kathryn Wilder's "Introduction" to Walking the Twilight: Women Writers of the Southwest.

If one were to imagine a continuum plotting definitions of Southwestern literature with Wilder's open-ended approach on one end of the spectrum, Paula Gunn Allen's definition would fall at the opposite end. Of the many definitions of Southwestern literature that exist, Allen's stands out because of its specificity. This thesis will both draw on and challenge Paula Gunn Allen's definition of Southwestern literature as a basis for exploration of Brewer's poetry.

Allen gives her definition of Southwestern literature in her preface to Writing the Southwest. She explains that for her, Southwestern literature is characterized by three cultural bases: “the Pueblo, the Mexican Hispano, and the American” (xvi). By American, she refers to any non-native, non-Hispanic peoples—her substitution for the term Anglos.<sup>2</sup> She writes that the relationship between a particular kind of Native American civilization and Southwestern literature is the “bedrock” on which the literature is founded and sets it apart from the literature of any other regions in the Western Hemisphere. The Native American civilizations she includes are those of ancient Pueblos, Mogollons, and Maya and their descendants, the Hohokam, Pueblo, Pima (now known as Akimel O'odham), Yaqui, Diné, and Mexicans of Aztec-European descent. Allen goes on to say that these groups have left a legacy of the concept of a “geospiritual community,” an intimate relationship between humans, plants, animals, land, and supernaturals, and that this geospiritual community characterizes the central narrative of Southwestern literature (xx-xxi). In Chapter II, I will argue that geospirituality is indeed an important theme of Southwestern literature and strongly present in Brewer's work but

---

<sup>2</sup> The term “Anglo” is a problematic one since it specifically refers to Anglo-Saxons or people of British origin. Replacing this term with the broader “American” allows for greater diversity in the origins of the people to whom it refers.

that its origin and scope of influence is not limited to the specific Native American groups that Allen lists.

On top of the bedrock of Native American geospirituality, Allen writes, is the Spanish/Portuguese-colonial presence<sup>3</sup>. Two of the distinguishing features of this narrative heritage, according to Allen, are “magical realism,” or “the active and compelling presence of the dead—as living—and the legendary quality of most Hispanic literature of the Southwest” (xxi). In Chapter III, I will argue that magical realism is indeed an important theme in Southwestern literature and Brewer’s work but that it moves beyond regions of direct Spanish/Portuguese colonization.

The third dimension in Allen’s tri-cultural model is the American, which includes all that is involved with the modern American myth of the West with its cowboys, outlaws, sheriffs, pioneers, and so on. In Chapter IV, I agree with Allen that the “American” element is an important theme in Southwestern literature, and I posit that the ambivalence the “American” element creates is a major factor in this body of work and in the works of many Utah writers.

After explaining her tri-cultural definition of Southwestern literature, Allen concludes:

When these various strands combine, they result in writing that is Southwestern in aesthetic quality, theme, structure, point of view, and deep meaning. A truly Southwestern work almost inevitably combines the ancient, the medieval, and the contemporary in ways that yield maximal meaning comprehensible within several contexts. (xxiii)

---

<sup>3</sup> I am unsure as to why Allen includes the Portuguese as colonial influences in the Southwest. To my knowledge, the Portuguese did not colonize any part of the Southwest.

According to Allen, then, the influences of the tri-cultural model she outlines will almost always be combined in Southwestern literature.

In this thesis, I will examine each of the three aspects of Allen's tri-cultural model in relation to the literature of Utah with particular emphasis on Brewer's poetry in order to demonstrate how rigid definitions of Southwestern literature are inherently problematic and should be considered with critical distance. I will argue that geospirituality, magical realism, and the ambivalence of the "American" element are all important themes of Southwestern literature, but that it is too narrow and limiting to ascribe the genesis of these literary techniques to specific groups of people. I will demonstrate that these themes are apparent in Brewer's poetry and in the works of many Utah writers in order to emphasize the contribution of these writers to Southwestern literature in general.

### A Poet's Life

Because Brewer's work is less known outside the state of Utah, it is helpful to consider his background and literary heritage before launching into an exploration of Southwestern elements in his writing. Kenneth Wayne Brewer was born on November 28, 1941, a week before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Shortly thereafter, his father, Ulysses Brewer, left to fight in WWII, leaving Brewer's mother, Edna Juanita Virt Brewer, alone to raise him until 1945. One of the few things that he and his father did together and bonded over when the soldier returned was hunting, and Brewer would later write about those excursions with his father and the ambivalence of the experience. He grew up in Indianapolis and during his father's deployment, he and his mother moved in with his maternal grandmother, Mary Belle Virt. Later on, because both of his parents

worked, his father as a freight truck driver and his mother as a typist for the same firm, Brewer was raised in part by his grandmother. In high school, he was especially involved in athletics, particularly football and basketball.

In 1959, Brewer graduated from Thomas Howe High School and began attending Butler University. He was also working at a candy and cigarette warehouse for a meager \$1.65 per hour when a friend invited him to go with him to college in Silver City, New Mexico. He accepted. Until a severe leg injury prematurely ended his athletic career, he played football at Western New Mexico University. He received his Bachelor of Arts in 1965 with a double major in English and mathematics.

Brewer returned to school to pursue an MA in English Literature with a British literature emphasis at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. It was there that he met his mentor, poet Keith Wilson. Brewer describes meeting Wilson and the impact this poet and teacher had on him:

I came to writing relatively late in my life. I was in my first year of graduate study at New Mexico State (1965) when I attended my first poetry reading. Keith Wilson, a faculty member in English at NMSU, read that night. I had never heard poetry read by the "living" poet; I was studying long-dead British poets. I was so taken by Keith's reading that I began trying to write "poems" that very night. I took my earliest attempts to Keith and he gave me books to read by William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Robert Creeley, Gary Snyder, Denise Levertov. He helped me get published for the first time, in a magazine called *Potpourri* published by

Carlos Reyes in Oregon (1967). I've been at it ever since. (Education Update)

Although Brewer never officially took any classes from Wilson, he would meet with him in his office to get advice about his poetry, which proved to be very beneficial for the inchoate poet.

With his master's degree from NMSU (1967), Brewer taught a year of high school in Las Cruces, New Mexico. He was also part owner with his friend Mark Medoff of a cantina called Billy the Kid's Comedy Cantina. He married his first wife, Carol Ann Hayton, on August 22, 1964, and they had two children: Kimberly Diane (Marsing), born February 10, 1964, and Jonathan Keith, born September 9, 1969.

Brewer later reflected on how important his eight years in New Mexico had been in informing his idea of the West. In an interview with W. T. Pfefferle for the latter's book Poets on Place, Brewer states that the West he encountered when he left Indiana to go to school in New Mexico was a surprise: "I've slowly come to understand the West," he said, "and it's not the West that I knew as a kid. I suspect it's not at all what people east of the Mississippi think of" (qtd. in Naparstek). Brewer adds, "I don't care much for . . . people from the East who think they're bringing culture to the West. I've got news for them. We've got plenty, thank you" (qtd. in Naparstek). As Brewer experienced the West through his transitional years in New Mexico, he discovered a rich history and culture that in turn comes across in his poetry.

In 1968, Brewer heard about a teaching position at Utah State University in Logan, Utah, which is north of Salt Lake City near the Utah-Idaho border. He was hired under the condition that he would pursue a doctoral degree. While he taught freshman

composition and remedial English on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at USU, he would drive the ninety or so miles from Logan to Salt Lake City to take doctoral courses at the University of Utah. While at the U of U, Brewer worked with Henry Taylor, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1986 for his collection The Flying Change. Eventually Brewer did obtain a Ph.D. in 1973 after publishing his first poetry compilation, Catching Light.

In 1977, he and his first wife divorced, and the following year on September 22, 1978, he married Roberta (Bobbie) Stearman, also a professor of English at USU. Their marriage was interrupted by a brief divorce after which they were remarried. During the years that followed, Brewer was very active in the Utah writing community and beyond. From 1977 to 1982, Dr. Brewer published four volumes of poetry. During the 1980s, he became involved in theater troupes including the Valley Players. He continued to publish poetry and won many awards for his research and writing. He also worked on the Utah centennial poetry anthology in 1996. He taught everything from poetry to essay writing and his teaching career at USU spanned 32 years when he retired in 2000. He retired as early as he possibly could, he said, in order to devote more time to his writing and to the Utah writing community (Barney).

Throughout his career, Brewer published eleven volumes of poetry, including Round Again: A Cycle of Poems (1980), Collected Poems of Mongrel (1981), To Remember What is Lost (1982), Hoping For All, Dreading Nothing (1993), Lake's Edge (1997), The Place in Between (1998), and Sum of Accidents (2003). He also published more than 300 poems, essays, and reviews in literary journals throughout the United States and Canada, including Poetry Northwest, Kansas Quarterly, New York Quarterly,

Writer's Forum, High Country News, Western Humanities Review, and Timberline, among many others. In addition to these publications, Brewer worked on several compilations in conjunction with other Western poets and artists.

On January 24, 2003, then Governor of Utah Mike Leavitt appointed Ken Brewer to be the second Poet Laureate of Utah, succeeding Brewer's friend and former colleague, David Lee. In Utah, the Poet Laureate holds this honorary position for five years, is unpaid, and carries the responsibility to promote the arts through readings, school visits, and workshops. One of the many projects Brewer worked on during his term as Poet Laureate was putting together a video documentary of Utah Writers. He also participated in hundreds of poetry readings around the country.

Three years into his term as Utah's Poet Laureate, Brewer discovered he had pancreatic cancer after collapsing at a writer's conference in Wyoming. A very public nine-month struggle ensued during which Brewer continued to write poetry at a fever pitch, producing the equivalent of four collections, including a bestiary entitled Why Dogs Stopped Flying, Small Scenes: 20 Woodcuts and 20 Short Poems (woodcuts by Utah artist Royden Card), and a murder mystery in verse entitled Chiaroscuro. One of his last collections is Whale Song: A Poet's Journey into Cancer, which treats the subject of healing spiritually and coming to terms with, rather than fighting, illness. Near the end of his life, Brewer was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Utah Humanities Council for his contribution to the arts. He passed away in his home in Providence, Utah, surrounded by friends and family on March 15, 2006.



### A Poet's Work

Brewer often described himself as an oral poet and poetry as a physical act. In an interview with Dennis Lythgoe, he says, "I'm an oral poet. I don't follow the poetic line. For me the rhythm is the whole piece. That creates a problem in getting poems published. A lot of the breaks are pretty arbitrary, so I'd much prefer to be heard than to be read on the page." When Brewer gave readings, he would "beat his right hand like a conductor" and bounce his feet to the rhythms as well, much to the entertainment of his audiences.

Brewer's poetry is often described by readers and critics as accessible, free from arcane and elitist language, down-to-earth, honest, and centered on lived experience (KUTV). His early verse Brewer describes as "psychological poetry," which centers on his views and emotions (Marion). He comments that "A lot of poets start out writing poetry that's more personal because thoughts can be expressed quickly . . . . You don't write a novel because there's turmoil in your life. Instead, . . . you jot down impressions" (qtd. in Marion).

Brewer writes in free verse, and his lines are relatively short, which is understandable considering Brewer often stated he was a literary child of William Carlos Williams (Watanabe). His poetry incorporates a minimalism, an economy of language that readers and admirers of Williams can certainly appreciate. For example, one of Brewer's early poems entitled "Round Again" illustrates this minimalist style:

the orchard bloomed  
all at once this morning  
red limbs

suddenly white in the sun  
 down around folded  
 tendrils in moist shadow

drawn to the earth  
 and the sky  
 warmed again.

A former student and protégé of Brewer's, Star Coulbrooke, aptly describes the language Brewer uses as "achingly beautiful," and composed of "spare and unimposing imagery and dialogue" (qtd. in Marion). Linda Marion comments that Brewer writes "in spare, bare, forthright language—occasionally sad, sometimes humorous, always evocative." Brewer experiments in later poems with longer lines, but he always retains a Williamsesque economy of words.

Among the many other poets whose writing had an impact on Brewer are poets such as Gary Snyder and Walt Whitman (Watanabe). When asked to name his favorites, he lists many poets and writers that have influenced his work:

Keith Wilson, William Carlos Williams, Gary Snyder, William Stafford. I would add such poets as John Milton, John Berryman, Ann Stanford, May Swenson, Walt Whitman, Henry Taylor, Emily Dickinson, Robert Bly, Gwendolyn Brooks, Theodore Roethke, Randall Jarrell, Michael Harper, Robert Frost, Allen Ginsberg, Yeats, Lowell, Plath and Sexton—a diverse group and not a complete one. As to other writers, Shakespeare's plays, William Barrett's *Irrational Man*, Richard Selzer's fiction and nonfiction,

Odo Marquard's *In Defense of the Accidental*, Daniel Dennett and Richard Rorty have all struck me in significant ways at particular times in my life. My "favorites" keep changing so much that I probably do not truly have "favorites." I read as much as I can and I read broadly in all sorts of writing. (Education)

Included in this list are several poets who might be considered "nature" poets, such as Snyder, Whitman, Dickinson, Roethke, and Frost. One important theme in Brewer's work that surfaces again and again is that of nature and humanity's relationship to it. Like Snyder and others, Brewer's work reflects concern over the way people treat their environment. In his short poem "Trees," his environmentalist attitude is clear: "If you knew that no other planet / in the entire universe had them, / would you cut them down for matches?" (Small Scenes 17).

During the last several months of Brewer's life, the phase Brewer called his "fever pitch" phase, he continued to explore the relationship between mankind and nature. He was especially interested in trying to come to terms with his cancer and impending death, and he looked to nature as he had throughout his life. Laura Seitz from Deseret Morning News notes that "Brewer experienced an evolution of language as he wrote about cancer. He noticed all the 'military terms,' such as 'fight, battle, kill,' and he used those in his early poems. But gradually he came to feel that he should talk about cancer in a different way." Seitz goes on to quote Brewer as he further explores his decision to move away from militaristic diction: "It's your cancer—a house guest who stays longer than you wanted him to. You kill your spirit when you use military language. There are other parts of you that need to be healed. I focus now on spiritual healing."

Brewer's point of view echoes Susan Sontag's Illness and Its Metaphors in which she explores the reasons for attaching military language to cancer and the detrimental effects it has on the ill person. Brewer, like Sontag, recognizes the difference between health and healing; he does not seek a cure (his particular cancer was incurable), but instead seeks spiritual well being and peace of mind.<sup>4</sup>

While it is clear that many writers and poets have influenced Brewer, he has not shied away from branching out and experimenting with new forms in his work. For example, his mystery novel in verse, Chiaroscuro, is the first of its kind in general. It had its precedent in Brewer's tendency to favor collections of his poems strung together by loosely connected images, such as Lake's Edge and The Place in Between. Brewer comments on this format for many of his collections:

Most of the poetry books I have published are "connected" poems, a focus on one or two main characters and a loose "plot." The poems are linked in such a way that they tell a story. I have most recently completed a murder mystery in poems. Such books required a more focused, and different, attention for me than the sort of "daily writing" in journals that I did throughout my teaching career. (Education)

### A Poet's Region

Throughout Brewer's poetry, place heavily influences his diction. In an interview with a former student and teacher of creative writing at Weber State, Sundy Watanabe,

---

<sup>4</sup> Brewer's poem "Dilemma" aptly describes the poet's transition away from using military language to confront his cancer: "Should I name this tumor 'Hiroshima?' / Should I name it 'Verdun?' / Or should I think of this medicine / as instruments to heal rather than to kill?" (qtd. in Pugh).

Brewer underscores the importance of place in his poetry:

I think you become attached to the place where you are. I'm from Indianapolis. I grew up in Indiana, and in my earlier poems, when I first started writing, I was trying to write about Indiana. And that was okay while I was still close to it in feeling and time, even though I wasn't actually in the place. But now this [Northern Utah] is where I'm grounded, so I write about where I am. . . . I think one role of a poet is to observe as closely as possible everything around him. So if we're following that tenet, we're obviously going to be regional. We're going to be grounded in the very local, and the very particular. . . . [William Carlos] Williams taught us to ground everything in the particular and the local, and that's where you find the universal. You really write from where you are and ground it on that very solid foundation of time and place. And I mean, by time and place, not just everything around you, but where you are inside yourself. (3)

As Brewer states, his earliest poems are centered in Indiana. These include the "Fat Boy" poems, many of which remain unpublished. An example of a "Fat Boy" poem is "Credo." In it the speaker recreates religiosity in Indiana (or the lack thereof) to track the progression of his own spiritual life "at the edge of disbelief" (l.2). In later poems, Brewer writes about New Mexico from his eight year's experience there; "New Mexico, by Moonlight" is an obvious example. Most of Brewer's mature poetry, from 1968 on, is grounded in Utah, and particularly Northern Utah. The Lake's Edge is an example of a

collection inspired by Northern Utah geography; it is set in the Bear Lake area north of Logan.

In the same interview, Watanabe asks Brewer why he thinks some people attach negative connotations to the category of "regionalism." His answer defends the importance of place on the individual and the writer. He responds:

Well, I don't know, really. To me, it's a badge of honor. I don't think of it in a negative way at all. Growing up in Indianapolis, I lived two blocks from the railroad tracks that divided the school districts. I was two blocks away from Sherman Drive where the railroad tracks ran, being just inside the boundaries of Thomas Carr Howe High School, which was the college-prep high school. Two blocks away, across the railroad tracks and just a few blocks beyond to the west, was a black neighborhood.

Everybody on that side of the railroad track went to technical school, which was an enormous high school but not known as a college-prep school. They had all the auto shop and all the wood working, all the home economics. They were really strong in mathematics, too, so they did have some college-bound, but Howe was considered the college-prep high school. Two blocks.

Brewer continues:

So that idea of place and geography had an incredible impact on my life, and also my interest in accidents. I didn't choose to live there. It was my grandmother's house. My granddad built that house in 1930—sometime before I came along. So a whole series of accidents placed me in that

house by the time I had to go to school. That geographical marker changed my life. Those little kinds of place markers have that kind of impact on who you become. Our lives follow those kinds of little moments—historical markers. The geography of my neighborhood marked a moment in my life, marked a way of determining who I was going to be and who I actually became. So, in a sense, I don't know how you escape regionalism. It's got to have an impact on who you are. (4)

By embracing regionalism, Brewer's poems reflect how landscape, in time and place, shape the poet and the people who also occupy that space. Through Brewer's use of imagery that is grounded in the particular, human beings are intimately woven into the fabric of the landscape. His poetry leaves one with the impression that human experience and the influence of region are indivisible.

#### Overview of Contents

The analysis of Utah literature with an emphasis on Brewer's poetry and its relationship to Allen's definition of Southwestern literature will be organized as follows: Chapter II will take the first part of Allen's tri-cultural model and apply it to Brewer's poetry. In it, I will make the argument that Native American "geospirituality" is an important aspect of several of Brewer's poems, regardless of the fact that Utah writers and poets tend to focus on different Native American groups than the ones Allen lists as having created a geospiritual concept. In other words, I will show that geospirituality is an important Southwestern theme but that its creation and influence is not limited to Native civilizations on Allen's list. I will also examine how Brewer's poetry reflects

geospirituality by heightening readers' sensitivity to environmental concerns, such as nuclear testing, and through his minimalist style that captures a desert aesthetic.

Chapter III will challenge the second part of Allen's definition in conjunction with Brewer's work. I will affirm Allen's assertion that magical realism is a key narrative technique in Southwestern literature, but I will argue that its influence does not necessarily have to be linked to direct Spanish or Portuguese colonization. Although Spaniards did not colonize Utah, the influence of magical realism is still apparent in its literature. This chapter will draw examples particularly from Brewer's collection of poems entitled The Place in Between, in which the widowed speaker of the poems continues his relationship with his deceased wife. The idea of the dead as living is a key aspect of magical realism, and this collection of Brewer's poems exemplifies this aspect of Southwestern literature.

Chapter IV will address the third part of Allen's definition: the influence of Americans. I will draw on examples from a range of Utah writers and poets, including Zane Grey, Edward Abbey, Wallace Stegner, Terry Tempest Williams, May Swenson, John Sterling Harris, and Ken Brewer, in order to demonstrate how these writers treat Mormon pioneers with ambivalence in their works. By drawing on specific examples in Utah literature, I will illustrate how the "American" element is a key aspect of Brewer's poetry and the works of many Utah writers.

In Chapter V, I will discuss Allen's definition of Southwestern literature and argue that any definition of this body of work will fall short, inevitably leaving out literary works that contribute to the diversity of Southwestern literature. I will review several definitions of Southwestern literature and further the argument that narrow definitions are



inadequate when applied to such a diverse body of work. In doing so, I aim to challenge the reader's notions of the Southwest and of region as it pertains to dogmatic physical and intellectual boundaries. I will emphasize that evoking the Southwest's spirit of place is the most important aspect of Southwestern literature because it is broad enough to include a wide range of literary techniques and themes that reflect the diversity of the Southwest.

## CHAPTER II

### NATIVE AMERICAN GEOSPIRITUALITY

#### AND BREWER'S POETRY

According to Paula Gunn Allen, Southwestern literature conforms to a tri-cultural model with a strong Native American influence as the first part of her model. She writes in the preface to Writing the Southwest that this “bedrock” sets Southwestern literature apart from the literature of any other region. The Native American civilizations she includes as influences on Southwestern literature are those of ancient Pueblos, Mogollons, the Maya and their descendants, the Hohokam, Pueblo, Pima (now known as Akimel O'odham), Yaqui, Diné, and Mexicans of Aztec-European descent. These groups, she states, have given rise to the concept of a “geospiritual community,” which she defines as an intimate relationship between humans, plants, animals, land, and supernaturals. Geospirituality involves a reverence for the natural world and an understanding of mankind’s place in it as equal to, rather than dominating over, the earth’s plants, animals, and land. A geospiritual worldview subverts the Old Testament injunction that man rule over the earth’s flora and fauna and instead places men and women on a parallel plane with the earth and all its inhabitants, as well as its spirits. In this way, geospirituality is an effective counter discourse to accepted modes of Western

thinking. Allen declares that geospiritual community characterizes the central narrative of Southwestern literature (xx-xxi). It is difficult to tie the literature of Utah, and in particular the poetry of Kenneth Brewer, back to the specific Native American civilizations that Allen lists. She does mention that Southern Utah was populated at one time by the Diné, among others, linking at least part of the state to Allen's list of Southwestern natives (xvii). Whether or not these specific groups lived in Utah, the sense of a geospiritual community is certainly present in Brewer's work, as well as the work of other Utah writers such as Terry Tempest Williams. Indeed, a geospiritual sense can hardly be restricted to certain Native groups; it seems rather to be a key feature in the world view, and hence the literature, of most Native Americans.

Geospirituality is an important influence in Williams's writing even though the Native American civilization that she centers on in Refuge in particular is not on Allen's list: the Fremont.<sup>5</sup> According to David B. Madsen, in Exploring the Fremont, it is difficult to categorize the Fremont because they actually represent several disparate groups that were lumped together with a common name and first defined in 1931 by Noel Morss, a young anthropology student from Harvard. Madsen describes the influence of the Southwest on the Fremont peoples:

Most archaeologists believe the Fremont developed out of existing groups of hunter-gatherers on the Colorado Plateau and in the eastern Great Basin. These small groups were, like their Fremont descendants, diverse, flexible, and adaptable. They ranged from fairly large and relatively

---

<sup>5</sup> In other works, such as Pieces of White Shell, Williams compares Navajo and Mormon culture. I use Refuge as an example here in order to show that geospiritual sensitivity is not necessarily linked to the specific Native American groups Allen lists.

sedentary populations in environments where resources were more readily accessible, to small, highly mobile family-sized groups where resources were widely dispersed. Over a span of about a thousand years, from sometime after 2,500 years ago to about 1,500 years ago, different groups of these hunter-gatherers gradually adopted, in a piecemeal fashion, many of the traits associated with the farming societies of the Southwest and Mexico. (par. 4)

While the Fremont are not technically on Allen's list of Native American civilizations of the Southwest, they might be considered descendants and have at least been influenced by Southwestern groups in their life-ways.

More importantly, Williams's Refuge captures her keen sense of geospiritual community, which fits the first dimension of Allen's tri-cultural model. Her memoir draws heavily and consistently on the idea of geospirituality, including the supernatural in nature. Because of her Mormon upbringing, Williams explains, it is not difficult for her to sense the spiritual in nature. She writes, "I was raised to believe in a spirit world, that life exists before the earth and will continue to exist afterward, that each human being, bird, and bulrush, along with all other life forms had a spirit life before it came to dwell physically on the earth. Each occupied an assigned sphere of influence, each has a place and a purpose" (14). While Williams attributes part of her geospiritual sense to her religious upbringing, Native American concepts of geospirituality certainly influence that sensitivity. Throughout the text, Williams depicts the intimate relationship between birds, humans, lake, and land, and the devastating effects that occur when human beings are not keenly aware of the delicate balance of those relationships.

Brewer's writing, like Williams', conveys a strong geospiritual sense. The geospirituality of Brewer's work is evident in several ways: his poetry acknowledges the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world; it frequently highlights the theme of the life cycle, further closing the artificial gap between people and their surroundings; it heightens environmental awareness; it underscores significant breeches between mankind and nature, particularly concerning the atom bomb; and, the minimalism of his poetic style reflects the desert landscape in which he lives. I will discuss each of these aspects in order to illustrate how geospirituality is an integral part of Brewer's poetry.

#### Humanity and the Natural World

Brewer's poetry points again and again to the significant relationship between people and their environment. Many poets in their earlier phases write about nature as an entity with which the speaker in the poem wants to meld. Brewer is no exception; however, his stance is unique in that he shows how human beings are already joined with nature. In his poem "Crossing" from Sum of Accidents, the speaker observes a redtail hawk on a cloudy day and ends the poem with an image of the speaker disappearing in the air like the hawk:

What keeps me  
behind this window?  
  
I could cross  
the end of my street  
whirl in the air,

disappear like a hawk  
 through the mouth of night. (12-18)

The question, “What keeps me / behind this window?” draws attention to the speaker as observer. A glass pane separates him from the scene he observes. The title of the poem, “Crossing,” connects to line 14 where the speaker states the possibility of crossing, passing beyond what artificially separates man and nature, represented by the pane, and literally being swallowed in the “mouth of night.”

In another poem called “Rainwash,” published in the same collection as the previous poem, the speaker recalls a rainstorm in which he becomes drenched. The speaker thinks of the rain washing his skin cells into the earth, and instead of looking upon this event as a desired unification with nature, he feels unsteadied by it:

Like a slow dripping on my head  
 this memory of rain unnerves me.  
 I am not troubled by rain itself,  
 only its memory and the thought  
 of what it carries away, forever:  
 coded cells washed to the ground,  
 their dead messages lodged  
 beyond time and recollection.

Standing at the rim of Dead Horse Point  
 a thousand feet above Green River,  
 I opened my eyes outward to the rain.

It was then I first realized  
 bits of me were sliding  
 down redrock into deep earth  
 like my voice through space. (1-15)

This poem makes an interesting comparison to “Crossing.” In both poems the speaker observes nature; in the first, the speaker is separated by the window from the natural world he observes and thinks about closing the gap by crossing the street and disappearing into the night; in the second, the speaker/observer feels “unnerved” by the memory of nature that removes a part of himself involuntarily. “Unnerved” literally means “to deprive of courage, strength, or steadiness” or “to cause to become nervous” (unnerve). Rather than depicting a speaker who wants to transcend a barrier between self and nature, the speaker in “Rainwash” loses a small part of self in the form of skin cells and feels a coinciding loss of strength and steadiness at the realization.

Superficially, these two poems seem to be saying something contradictory. It is significant, though, that they appear back to back in Sum of Accidents, and there are good reasons why Brewer chooses to arrange the poems this way. In both poems, nature is the central image onto which the speaker psychologically grafts himself. In both, the reader gets a sense of place by the description of the landscape (snow, mountains, redrock, place names—all examples of regionalism). And, most importantly, in both, that which separates man from nature is merely a construction; in “Crossing,” it is the window; in “Rainwash,” it is a notion of separateness. Both constructions are stripped away in these poems as the speakers acknowledge belonging to something larger: the natural world. In a reading at Weber State, Brewer emphasized, “I don’t split humans

from nature” (Watanabe). For Brewer, human beings are intimately connected with nature.

### Life Cycle

Another way that geospirituality manifests itself in Brewer’s poetry is through the poet’s frequent return to the idea of the life cycle. Brewer’s poems often treat the themes of birth, life, love, renewal, regeneration, sorrow, sickness, and death, covering a broad range of life phases. In “Feeding Birds,” he treats the topic of death as a normal, natural process that also closes the illusory gap between humans and the natural world. The speaker of the poem describes the different birds (“Towhees, siskins, jays, / finches, juncos, song sparrows, / grosbeaks”) that come to eat at the variety of bird feeders in his yard and he ends with ravens (7-9).

I have never seen a raven  
 near my sanctuary,  
 only in the tall mountain pines  
 and once in the Canyonland desert.  
 Yet being part of the earth,  
 I provide for ravens too.  
 In a wide, slow circle above me,  
 like a child’s impatient mouth,  
 they wait to be fed. (22-30)

In lines 22-23, the speaker declares that he has never seen ravens near his sanctuary, which would seem to contradict the closing lines of the poem unless the slowly circling



ravens above the speaker exist metaphorically as an embodiment of death. Ravens often symbolize death and foreboding in literature.<sup>6</sup> The speaker anticipates that he will feed the ravens (death) with his own flesh at some future date for they circle above the speaker as scavenger birds tend to do when looking for a meal. The speaker does not express fear or consternation at this thought but rather acknowledges candidly that he is “part of the earth” (26). The image of the "child's impatient mouth" points to youth and posterity playing as important a role in the life cycle as death (29). As in "Crossing" and "Rainwash," "Feeding Birds" underscores the idea that humans are a part of nature's life cycle, a key concept of geospirituality.

Brewer's poem "The World Gone," like "Feeding Birds," contains an excellent example of the life cycle motif surfacing in his poetry. The poem is a triptych that tells the story of a woman whose son and then husband both drown. In the first section, the speaker narrates how the father and son go ice fishing and how "the child dropped / below the solid ice, / two feet thick, dark, / cold, heavy" (36-39). In the second section, the woman's husband gets pinned beneath a horse in the river: "The man gulped, / choked, scratched at / the loose riverbottom, / then died" (52-55). The woman lives alone by the third section, and the imagery beautifully conveys the cyclic nature of life:

Now she lives  
at the Lake's edge.  
She quilts  
a waterwheel pattern.

---

<sup>6</sup> Poe's "The Raven" contains an apt example of the raven as a harbinger of woe.

In summer,  
She sits on the deck  
and watches the Lake  
glimmer and rock

like a cradle.  
She feeds birds  
and keeps a bell  
on her cat.

Sometimes, in winter,  
she sleeps the night in her chair.  
Sometimes, she dreams  
the world gone,  
  
then wakes to the sun  
hot on the frozen Lake. (64-81)

It is significant that the woman chooses to quilt a "waterwheel" pattern, which evokes the idea that life is cyclic. The water takes away the woman's son and husband, yet there is a pattern of life and death that she recognizes and incorporates in her art. The life cycle is also underscored in this section by the careful diction that highlights binary relationships: the seasonal change from summer to winter, the transition from day to night, the feeding of the birds and the bell on the cat, the dreams of the "world gone" and waking up to that

world, the hot sun on the frozen lake (79). Another important image is that of the Lake glimmering and rocking "like a cradle" (71). Like the child's mouth in "Feeding Birds," the Lake rocking like a cradle makes one think of new life, also a vital part of the pattern. Rather than dwelling on the sorrow of the woman, which Brewer might have easily done in this poem, instead he has her quilting a waterwheel pattern and through this imagery acknowledges humanity's place as part of the natural world and its changes.

Brewer continued to explore the relationship between mankind and nature while he struggled with cancer. Some of his last poems, such as "Whale Song" and "Ripeness" look to nature for metaphors about illness. The latter poem incorporates the life cycle theme as the speaker compares his cancer to ripe fruit that signals the end of one season and the beginning of the next:

In our back yard, the apple tree and the plum  
sag with heavy, ripe fruit, their branches  
nearly to the ground in this late summer.  
I am ripe with cancer that slowly blossoms,  
that spreads its weighty fruit through my body,  
such ripeness ends one season, promises the next.

The speaker's body becomes the tree, the cancer is the "weighty fruit," and although "ripeness" signals the end of one season, it heralds in the next. One season of life ends and another season of life begins (e.g. life after death, the next generation of human beings, obtaining immortality through poetry). Like in "The World Gone," the emphasis on seasons, a pattern of life and death, draws humanity and nature together.

## Environmental Awareness

One important way that Brewer's poetry manifests geospiritual sensitivity is in the recurring theme of environmental awareness. Allen's notion of geospirituality is broad enough—in its emphasis on human connectedness to nature—to include a proactive attitude in human beings toward their surroundings. Brewer's collections contain several poems that advocate environmental responsibility.

In poems like "Trees" and "Mesa Moon," both from Small Scenes, the speaker of the poems underscores the value of the earth's resources. In "Trees," the speaker puts the value of trees into perspective with a question:

If you knew that no other planet  
in the entire universe had them,  
would you cut them down for matches? (17)

These three simple lines point to the uniqueness of a part of Earth, trees, that people often take for granted. The first two lines contain nine syllables while the last line has only eight, leaving the reader with a sense that something is missing. Brewer purposely arranges the lines this way to create an ending effect of emptiness or incompleteness, adjectives that might also describe an Earth without trees. Also, it is significant that Brewer chooses matches rather than some other item for which trees are routinely cut down, such as paper. Matches are extremely useful, but when one is lit, the fire that consumes the match chemically alters the wood. The imagery of the consuming fire parallels the modern human consumer who often alters the environment without taking into consideration the long-term effects, without asking questions like the one in "Trees." This short poem attempts to inspire that awareness by involving the reader with a

question.

“Mesa Moon” also attempts to spark environmental awareness by highlighting the way two groups of people treat their surroundings with varying levels of respect:

The Shoshone named the sego lily  
and ate the bulbs. Hungry Mormons  
ate the bulbs and the moon. (12)

The Shoshone and the Mormons both eat the bulbs of the sego lily, but while the Shoshone name the bulbs, the Mormons go on to eat the moon. Naming is a significant act, and in this poem the Shoshone, by naming the sego lily, acknowledge the presence of the plant and its importance in their life ways. The Mormons of the poem, on the other hand, consume not only the bulbs but the moon. Since the physical moon is an impossibly large object to eat the imagery, like in “Trees,” emphasizes consumption. The fact that the moon is so large indicates a kind of ravenous consumption unmitigated by thoughtful awareness on the part of the Mormons. Again, as in “Trees,” readers are led to reflect on the limits of natural resources and the importance of protecting the environment.

#### A Breach with Nature: The Bomb

Promoting ethical attitudes about the environment is a key aspect of geospirituality, and this includes highlighting unethical environmental practices and developments, specifically the advent of nuclear testing. Many major Southwestern literary works grapple with the issue of the atom bomb as a breach of human beings against other humans and, significantly, against nature. At a crucial moment near the end

of Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony, Tayo comes to the realization that the atom bomb is at the center of evil. In a place only three hundred miles from White Sands where the first atomic bomb was detonated and a hundred miles from Los Alamos where the bomb was created, Tayo reflects on the way nuclear testing has negatively altered nature:

He walked to the mine shaft slowly, and the feeling became overwhelming: the pattern of the ceremony was completed there. He knelt and found an ore rock. The gray stone was streaked with powdery yellow uranium, bright and alive as pollen; veins of sooty black formed lines with the yellow, making mountain ranges and rivers across the stone. But they had taken these beautiful rocks from deep within the earth and they had laid them in a monstrous design, realizing destruction on a scale only *they* could have dreamed. (246)

Tayo sees the intrinsic beauty of the rock streaked with uranium ore and laments what the whites, as puppets of witchery, have done with them. Tayo recognizes that the atom bomb constitutes the ultimate in witchery's evil design to tear the geospiritual community apart, "witchery's final ceremonial sand painting" (246).

Like Silko, Terry Tempest Williams is concerned with the devastating effects of nuclear testing on the environment and on the human family. Some of the repercussions of nuclear testing are treated in the "Epilogue" to Refuge entitled "The Clan of One-Breasted Women." This segment of Williams's text is a key piece of literature in ecofeminist writing because in it Williams shows the relationship between the abuse of the land through nuclear testing and the abuse specifically of women who fall victims to cancer as a result of living "downwind" of the nuclear test sites. Williams expresses her

frustration at having so many of the women in her family die in part because of people's misconception of deserts as dumping and bombing territory. She states:

I cannot prove that my mother, Diane Dixon Tempest, or my grandmothers, Lettie Romney Dixon and Kathryn Blackett Tempest, along with my aunts developed cancer from nuclear fallout in Utah. But I can't prove they didn't. . . . The flash of light in the night in the desert, which I had always thought was a dream, developed into a family nightmare. It took fourteen years, from 1957 to 1971, for cancer to manifest in my mother—the same time, Howard L. Andrews, an authority in radioactive fallout at the National Institutes of Health, says radiation cancer requires to become evident. The more I learn about what it means to be a "downwinder," the more questions I drown in. . . . When the Atomic Energy Commission described the country north of the Nevada Test Site as "virtually uninhabited desert terrain," my family and the birds of Great Salt Lake were some of the "virtual uninhabitants." (286-87)

One can sense Williams's rage at the injustice and disharmony the nuclear testing in Nevada has created for her family and for her beloved birds. She is frustrated in part because people have failed to recognize the life that exists in the desert, a landscape that for Williams is sacred.

For Williams, by detonating nuclear bombs on the Nevada test site, humanity violently disrupts the connection it has with the natural world. Anaya states in his introduction to Writing the Southwest, "one theme explored in Southwestern literature is the conflict we have created with the fragile earth of the region" (xiv). Nuclear testing

makes up part of that conflict, and the rupture it creates is a particularly Southwestern theme because, as previously mentioned, it was at the Trinity Site at White Sands, New Mexico, that the first atomic bomb was detonated. Hence, the Southwest's relationship to uranium mining and atomic testing surfaces in its literature again and again like a haunting, guilty conscience that needs to be resolved; it is part of the spirit of the place.

Ken Brewer's poetry also addresses the conflict of nuclear testing and the plight of downwinders, although he was not affected as personally as was Williams since he was something of a newcomer, like Edward Abbey, to the state of Utah. Brewer's poetry is particularly sensitive when it comes to the issue of downwinders. Similar to Williams in Refuge, Brewer captures the emotional aspect of losing loved ones because of nuclear fallout. In both "Growing Old Together" and "The Widower's Lament," a widower grieves the loss of his wife due to breast cancer. In "Growing Old Together," the "Old Man" reminisces about his wife:

All the photos of her  
show smooth skin, slim waist,  
breasts that point like fins  
and pin-up legs.

She died at thirty-five,  
both breasts gone,  
but a closet of blond wigs  
and two children left.

. . .



She has grown old  
 in his dream—wrinkled face,  
 blue-veined legs,  
 arthritic fingers.

But her voice stayed young  
 like a bird—even old sparrows  
 have a young song to sing—  
 and her breasts grew back. (5-12, 21-28)

Although it is not stated explicitly in the poem that the young wife's breast cancer was caused by nuclear fallout, it can be inferred since Brewer was very interested in downwinders and did a lot of research into the lives of those who were and are affected. As a Utah resident of 32 years, and as a significant voice in Utah, he allowed himself to become in tune with the spirit of the place and the agony caused by above ground nuclear testing for many Utahns. The young wife's story in "Growing Old Together" mirrors that of Terry Tempest William's mother and other female relatives and downwinders who died from breast cancer. In "The Widower's Lament," Jakob thinks about his wife's scars, "the flaps / of skin / where breasts / and nipples / had been," and "wakes to sorrow" (16-20, 30). Both poems sensitively reflect the pain that widowers endure as a result of nuclear fallout. The last stanza of the poem cited above ends on a very hopeful note, "her breasts grew back" (28). Perhaps this is Brewer's way of saying it is not too late to heal the rupture caused by the atom bomb. The old sparrows of the Southwest may yet learn to sing a new song and move towards regeneration and healing.

Brewer treats the subject of downwinders even more explicitly in his poems entitled "Goat's Milk" and "Pink Clouds." In the first poem, the first stanza describes the goat milking business in Pine Valley, Utah. In the second stanza, the atomic blast occurs:

Then one sunrise the southern sky  
burst into light like a match  
and slowly darkened to pink haze.

Eleven million curies of iodine-131  
caught the winds at detonation  
then sprinkled it back to earth  
like salt over the horizon's shoulder,  
like small angels of death  
the color of goats' milk. (7-15)

In "Pink Clouds," nuclear fallout also takes the form of pink haze, but in this poem the reader sees some of the effects of those "small angels of death" (14). It is a narrative poem in which Adah, the main character, thinks back to her childhood and remembers how her family watched "the pink clouds / that floated over the Lake / like large balloons" (3-5). The radio announcer declares that pink clouds are "harmless," but soon Adah and her family begin to notice problems:

the animals began to die.  
Two foals were stillborn,  
all the lambs but two  
came out dead, one

with two heads, one  
 with no legs, one  
 like a half-chewed Milky Way. (13-19)

Nuclear fallout manifests itself to the downwinders in the form of pink clouds. It is implied that the pink clouds are the source of the problems with the animals. Adah herself does not breathe well during the summers and has never bothered to find out why, indicating that she, like the animals, has been affected by the pink haze. The poem ends with Adah reflecting that she prefers winter with its gray or black stormclouds and “nothing that floats, / nothing pink” (100). Government officials, as in Williams’ “Clan of One-Breasted Women,” or radio announcers, like in “Pink Clouds,” declare that the stuff is harmless, but what the people see with their eyes and what the people hear from public officials is contradictory. Like the Mormons described in Williams’ “Epilogue” to Refuge, the people affected in Brewer’s poem (Adah and her family) take an unquestioning attitude towards their victimization.

The unnaturalness of the situation is emphasized by the way Brewer breaks the lines in the stanza describing the way the animals are affected. Rather than grouping phrases together in each line, such as “two came out dead, / one with two heads, / one with no legs,” etc., the enjambment of the lines is irregular: “two / came out dead, one / with two heads, one / with no legs” (14-17). This irregularity underscores, like the subtitle of Williams’s Refuge, the unnatural situation that downwinders are forced to deal with because of nuclear testing.<sup>7</sup> This unnaturalness makes up a crucial part of the conscience of the Southwest and is just as much a part of the spirit of the place as the

---

<sup>7</sup> Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place.

evocation of desert. These selected poems by Brewer, as well as writings by other Utah authors, treat the important theme of nuclear testing in the Southwest and its aftermath, adding to the complexity of the geospiritual element in Southwestern literature.

### Desert Landscape, Minimalist Style

When people think about a Southwestern landscape, the desert will often feature prominently. While the terrain of the Southwest includes much more than desert alone, still the desert has managed to make a strong impression on people's minds. For this reason, the desert surfaces frequently as a very real presence in many Southwestern literary works, including Williams' Refuge, Silko's Ceremony, and Abbey's Desert Solitaire, to name a few.

A Southwestern author's inclusion or invocation of desert landscapes reflects a geospiritual awareness of his or her surroundings. Brewer takes this awareness a step further by not only incorporating desert landscapes in his poetry, but by allowing the sparseness of the desert to influence his poetic style. Brewer's writing evokes the desert in its minimalist qualities even in poems where the desert is not a part of the poem's content. Brewer attributes his minimalism in part to his eight years in New Mexico, which for him were transition years from his Indiana roots to becoming a westerner (Watanabe 3).

One particularly beautiful example of Brewer's work wherein desert landscape and desert-inspired minimalism are combined is "The Scarlet Penstemon." Brewer describes the genesis of the poem:

That is a Southern Utah poem. I've spent a lot of time in Southern Utah.

Not too long ago, when I wrote this poem (2002, the Olympics year), I was teaching for a semester at Southern Utah University, in Cedar City, at the invitation of the English Department. I lived in St. George. David Lee was the department head and lived in St. George, too. I'd ride over with him to teach classes. We had a great time. But I spent a lot of time out in the desert, especially the Joshua Forest. Forest is a hard word to use with joshua trees—they don't get very close to each other—but that's what it's called. It's just out of St. George, through Santa Clara, and then over the mountains—not on the new highway but on the old one, past the Shivwits Reservation—then you head up the mountain, and just as you start to break over, there are these giant joshuas as far as you can see. I spent a lot of time there. So that's where some of these newer desert poems come from. (Watanabe 3-4)

Brewer was a strong advocate of regionalism and enjoyed allowing place to influence his work. Indeed, according to Brewer, a poet can hardly live in a place for very long without part of that place being absorbed by the poet, which in turn affects the poet's work. For Brewer, his early years in New Mexico and his later years in Utah are reflected in the minimalism of his poetry. "The Scarlet Penstemon" reads:

Bees can't see red  
 but hummingbirds can  
 so the scarlet penstemon  
 curls its lower lip,  
 picks its lover as certain

as Cleopatra picked Caesar.

In the Southern Utah summer,  
in the late afternoon  
of long shadows, shimmering,  
the scarlet penstemon pouts,  
and, oh, sweet Jesus, to be  
a broad-tailed hummingbird then.

Brewer delivers the sparse, vivid detail in this desert poem with an acute economy of words that reflects the desert landscape itself.

But Southwestern literature is more than an awareness of landscape. It involves more than evoking place by imaginatively recreating the desert in a given text, for there is more to the Southwest than just desert. David Dunaway and Sara Spurgeon, in Writing the Southwest, state that “Boiling Southwestern literature down to a series of central themes risks reductionism and overgeneralization” (xxxvii). Aridity is certainly an important theme in Southwestern literature, but that is not to say that a text that does not deal with these themes cannot be considered Southwestern. However, an awareness of landscape is important in achieving a geospiritual sensitivity, whether or not that landscape is an arid one. The influence of the desert on Brewer’s writing represents one more token of a geospiritual element in his poetry.

## Conclusion

How well, then, does Brewer's work fit the first part of Paula Gunn Allen's tri-cultural model for Southwestern literature? While his poetry does not seem to be directly influenced by the specific Native American groups that Allen lists in connection with the concept of geospiritual community, there are certainly many aspects of Kenneth Brewer's work that illustrate geospirituality, and only a few have been discussed here. Nature and man's place as a part of the earth is an integral theme that resurfaces throughout Brewer's poetry. Through repeated imagery involving cycles, seasons, life, death and renewal, Brewer emphasizes how human beings are intimately woven into the fabric of the natural world. The geospirituality of Brewer's work is further demonstrated in the poet's efforts to increase environmental awareness, even when it involves exposing some of the devastating outcomes of nuclear testing in the Southwest. Finally, by embracing regionalism, Brewer's poems reflect how landscape helps to shape the poet and his work.

With writers like Brewer, Terry Tempest Williams, and others in mind, restricting the concept of geospirituality to specific Southwestern Native American groups unnecessarily narrows this concept's scope of influence. In attempting to define Southwestern literature, focusing on specific groups of people, as with focusing on certain states, artificially limits and excludes writers and works that might otherwise be considered Southwestern. With regards to the first aspect of Allen's tri-cultural model, the focus should be applied to the concept of geospirituality itself and whether or not the artist's work reflects that concept. Brewer's poetry demonstrates an acute awareness of and respect for geospiritual community, and his work therefore adds to the diversity of Southwestern literature.

## CHAPTER III

### BREWER AND MAGICAL REALISM

The second dimension of Allen's tri-cultural model, as mentioned in the introduction, centers on the colonial experience of the Spanish and Portuguese as they settled in the Southwest. With Native American geospirituality forming the bedrock, Allen further describes what she calls the "second layer" of literary influence in the Southwest:

The Spanish colonial presence in the narrative tradition of the Southwest is as tightly interconnected to the Native ground as the grass, junipers, sage, mesquite, cottonwoods, and arroyos are to the basic terrain. It is because of this tight connection of the Maya-Aztec Spanish narrative tradition to the modern American's sense of place that locations from Monterrey to central Mexico can be seen as fundamentally Southwestern. Certainly their narrative tradition bears many of the characteristics of Pueblo/Maya thought, although there are a number of dimensions of that narrative that remain distinct from that of the core Southwest. The heritage—that of the Spanish colonial built upon and tightly bonded to the Pueblo/Maya cultures that both precede and presently inform it—gives its



particular quality to the work of Hispanic Southwestern writers. Of late, that quality has been defined as magical realism by the literati, but that is, of course, the translation of a complex psycho-cultural phenomenon rendered for intellectual consumption of the intelligentsia, much as Ceasar Vallejo's bicultural Portuguese Colonial-Mapuche articulations of Peruvian worldview were designated "surreal" at an earlier period. This literature is characterized primarily by the active and compelling presence of the dead—as living—and the legendary quality of most Hispanic literature of the Southwest. . . . [It involves] a complex of . . . characteristics within which the powerfully Spanish/Portuguese colonial experience is rendered into contemporary literature. (xviii-xix)

Thus, for Allen, the colonization of the Southwest by the Spanish and Portuguese and the effects of that colonization are an important influence in Southwestern literature.

Of the three aspects that make up Allen's tri-cultural model, the Spanish/Portuguese colonial aspect is certainly the most difficult to align with Utah literature in general and Brewer's poetry in particular. A simple reason for this lack of colonial influence exists: Spanish and Portuguese explorers did not colonize Utah; only a few expeditions ventured that far north, the first being the Dominguez-Escalante (a.k.a. Rivera) expedition of 1776. The purpose of this expedition was to establish overland communications with Monterrey in California. The expedition went as far north as Utah Valley near present day Sandy. Thomas Alexander, in Utah, the Right Place, describes what the explorers encountered as they reached Utah Valley:

Here they found a terrestrial paradise inviting Spanish settlement. Abundant water, pasturage, croplands, game, fish, fowl, and friendly Timpanogots greeted them. They found ample timber and firewood in the surrounding mountains, and they found the Timpanogots, thriving on fishing, hunting, and gathering. Anticipating that the valley could hold a population as large as that currently living in New Mexico, they promised the Timpanogots, then the largest concentration of people in Utah, that they would return, possibly within a year. . . . In spite of the padres' glowing description of Utah Valley, Utah remained on the northern fringes of the Spanish and Mexican Empires, unsettled by these Hispanic peoples. After the missionaries had returned, however, traders benefited from the trails they and Rivera had discovered. (pars. 12, 16)

As Alexander explains, even though this expedition showed that Utah had potential as a site for colonization, that colonization did not occur.

Just as Utah remained on the fringes of Spanish and Mexican Empires, Spanish colonial references remain on the fringes in Utah literature. In Williams' Refuge, the author makes a brief sojourn to Mexico for the Day of the Dead celebration shortly after her mother passes away. And in Edward Abbey's Desert Solitaire, there is one Basque ranch hand, Viviano, who accompanies Abbey on a round up. While these plot elements are important in different ways, they do little to "render into contemporary literature" the Spanish/Portuguese colonial experience (Allen xix). On the other hand, Williams' Refuge and Abbey's Desert Solitaire are frequently cited as Southwestern texts. Williams' stories appear in both volumes of Wilder's Walking the Twilight: Women Writers of the

Southwest. Additionally, in Writing the Southwest, the very book that contains Allen's "Preface," the first Southwest author mentioned and discussed is Edward Abbey. There is an apparent contradiction between the labeling of these writers and their works as Southwestern and Allen's insistence that Southwestern literature translates the Spanish/Portuguese colonial experience. Are these texts, then, not "truly Southwestern" according to Allen's terms because they are deficient with regards to one third of her tri-cultural model? It is not that the texts are deficient, but that the definition Allen gives is too narrow. Texts like Refuge and Desert Solitaire will continue to inform notions about the Southwest, as will the poetry of Ken Brewer.

Allen mentions in her preface that one significant characteristic of Southwestern literature that has been influenced by the Spanish/Portuguese colonial experience is magical realism, although she acknowledges that not all authors who employ this narrative technique can be considered Southwestern (xix). Allen writes:

It is not the marked presence of Spanish or Portuguese language, Catholicism, violent revolution, and magical realism or surrealism that characterizes certain writers as southwestern of Hispanic ambiance or descent, but a complex of other characteristics within which the powerfully Spanish/Portuguese colonial experience is rendered into contemporary literature. (xix)

The presence or absence of magical realism alone, among other characteristics, cannot be the final indicator of Southwestern literature. If it were, works by writers such as Allende and García Márquez would be erroneously included. Today, magical realism is recognized as an international literary trend ranging from Günter Grass' The Tin Drum

(1959) to Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1980) to Toni Morrison's Beloved (1987) (Faris 2). Despite the fact that it has become an international trend, many important Southwest writers, such as Ana Castillo in So Far From God (1993), continue to infuse their work with this narrative style to achieve various ends. Magical realism, then, can be considered one of many markers that may be present in a Southwestern text.

Magical realism is an important element in the poetry of Kenneth Brewer on several different levels, but before examining how this narrative strategy functions in his work it is important to consider what constitutes magical realism. Allen gives a very simple, straightforward definition in her preface. She writes, "This literature is characterized primarily by the active and compelling presence of the dead—as living" (xviii-xix). This is certainly true of Brewer's collection The Place in Between in which the main character of the poems, the Old Man, converses with his deceased wife.

Wendy B. Faris, in her book Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative, gives further clarification on the subject. She states, "Very briefly defined, magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them" (1). She goes on to suggest five primary characteristics that describe the mode of writing:

First, the text contains an "irreducible element" of magic; second, the descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; and, finally, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity. (7)

A text that contains elements of magical realism may include all or some of these characteristics depending on the writer for, as Faris points out, there are different levels of magical realism from one text to another, including texts by a single author (27).

I will examine each of Faris' five characteristics of magical realism as they apply to Brewer's work in the remainder of this chapter. In doing so, I will demonstrate how magical realism is an important aspect of his poetry and how its presence helps to identify his writing as Southwestern despite the absence of a more direct Spanish/Portuguese colonial influence.

#### The Irreducible Element and the Nasty Shock of Reality

Faris describes the "irreducible element" as "something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as they have been formulated in Western empirically based discourse, that is according to 'logic, familiar knowledge, or received belief'" (7). Readers are supposed to ingest these extraordinary incidents without explanation (7). The effect of the "irreducible element," Faris explains, is that

reality's outrageousness is often underscored because ordinary people react to magical events in recognizable and sometimes also in disturbing ways, a circumstance that normalizes the magical event but also defamiliarizes, underlines, or critiques extraordinary aspects of the real. . . . The magic grows almost imperceptibly out of the real, and the narrator registers no surprise, with the result that the element of surprise is redirected onto the history we are about to witness, which constitutes the nasty shock. (13-14).

The "irreducible element" that Faris describes is evident in several of Brewer's poems, particularly his collection entitled The Place in Between. The collection follows the relationship of a couple, Old Man and Old Woman, from their first meeting in "How He Met Her" and beyond her death from breast cancer in "Growing Old Together." In "At the Supermarket," the Old Man stands in the check out line trying to remember if he is left-brained or right-brained; the eighth and ninth stanzas read:

And the Old Woman  
 would stand next to him,  
 back from her grave,  
  
 and talk to him,  
 and he could touch her  
 same as always. (22-27)

The Old Man's relationship with the Old Woman continues after she is dead, contrary to logic, and he reacts to her in recognizable ways.

The ordinariness of their remarkable relationship offsets the "nasty shock" of reality, in this case the manner in which the Old Woman dies. In "Growing Old Together," readers receive subtle clues that her death is untimely:

When a young wife dies,  
 the man's dream changes.  
 So the Old Man learned  
 twenty years ago.

All the photos of her  
 show smooth skin, slim waist,  
 breasts that point like fins  
 and pin-up legs.

She died at thirty-five,  
 both breasts gone . . . [.] (1-10)

Thirty-five is a very young age for someone to die of breast cancer, but considering the geographical and historical context in which this poem takes place, nuclear fallout clearly constitutes the "nasty shock" of reality. Utah writers and Southwestern authors continue to grapple with this shock as part of their historical and literary heritage. Brewer's use of magical realism in relation to the theme of nuclear testing helps to underscore its brutal aftermath.

Another example of the irreducible element is apparent in Brewer's poem "How to Train a Horse to Burn." The poem's tone is very factual and precise as the speaker instructs the reader in the ridiculous enterprise of training a horse to burn. Because the tone of the poem is so factual, it makes the extraordinary appear ordinary. It begins:

One method always works.  
 Tie the horse in its stall  
 and pile the old straw high.

Douse the straw, the stall,  
 all the wood, all the tack.

Open all the windows for a draft.

Stuff cigarettes up your nostrils,  
 cram cotton in your ears,  
 light a match and run. (1-9)

The amount of detail the speaker gives in explaining how to get started is ludicrous, since no one in his or her right mind would ever desire to teach a horse to burn. The factual manner in which the details are delivered, however, lends a strange sense of reality to the process.

The last stanza of the poem produces the nasty historical shock that highlights one of many human atrocities that has occurred in history:

No record exists  
 of one horse  
 burning another. (22-24)

The fictional account of training a horse to burn contrasts with the reality that many human beings have indeed burned one another. Brewer's use of magical realism underscores this harsh reality.

### The Phenomenal World: Flying Dogs

Faris explains that a second characteristic of magical realism, "a strong presence of the phenomenal world," is the "realism in magical realism" (14). She states that this realism is manifest by "extensive use of detail" and often these details are given in a



"traditionally realistic, even an explicitly factual manner" (14-15). One of Brewer's poems that demonstrates this aspect of magical realism in particular is "Why Dogs Stopped Flying."

In this poem, readers are given the details of the transformation of dogs from winged creatures to man's four-legged companions:

Before humans,  
dogs flew everywhere.  
Their wings of silky fur  
wrapped hollow bones.  
Their tails wagged  
like rudders through wind,  
their stomachs bare  
to the sullen earth.

Out of sorrow  
for the first humans—  
stumbling, crawling,  
helpless and cold—  
dogs folded their  
great wings into paws  
soft enough to walk  
beside us forever. (1-16)

In the first stanza in particular, readers are given a clear picture of what dogs were like, according to a phenomenal worldview, before their transformation. Their bones were "hollow" so they would be light enough to fly, which mimics the actual construction of bird bones; their tails acted like "rudders" in the wind allowing them to steer; and their stomachs were "bare" to the earth. The precision of these details help to create "a strong presence of the phenomenal world" in the poem (Faris 14).

### Unsettling Doubts: Hallucination or Reality?

The third characteristic of magical realism that Faris highlights is that the reader may experience unsettling doubts. She writes:

[B]efore categorizing the irreducible element as irreducible, the reader may hesitate between two contradictory understandings of events, and hence experience some unsettling doubts. . . . The contemporary Western reader's primary doubt is most often between understanding an event as a character's dream or hallucination and, alternatively, understanding it as a miracle. (17)

Faris goes on to explain that while magical realism in a text may seem dreamlike, the author will often insert statements to the contrary and insist on the reality of what is described, which gives way for further unsettling doubts in the reader.

One of Brewer's poems that exemplifies this characteristic of magical realism is "Centre for the Confused." In the poem, a man is speaking to an unknown audience describing a strange occurrence in his home. He describes how "Every time I'd turn on the television / one or two of them would step out from channel 8 / right into the living

room" (10-12). The reader never finds out who "they" are, leaving the reader in a quandary. Soon the situation escalates: the man becomes afraid that they will use the telephone wires to transport themselves to important government buildings, so he stops using his telephone. He worries that his wife will somehow let them out, so he forces her to leave. He realizes he can see them and others cannot because he wears special prescription glasses. Finally, he decides to take control of the situation and force them to leave:

At first I thought all I had to do  
was turn off the television and they'd  
not be able to come, but they could.  
They kept stepping from the screen  
even after I turned it off.  
They were arriving at about two per hour.  
I loaded my shotgun and waited  
behind the basement door until  
I couldn't hear any of them moving.  
Then I burst into the living room  
and fired both barrels into the screen.  
I caught two of them just as they were arriving  
and blasted them into bits of sparkling  
dust-like atoms that floated around the room. (37-50)

Since the reader never learns who "they" are, the reader is left with unsettling doubts as to whether the speaker in the poem is merely hallucinating or whether he did have a kind of

miraculous experience. Is the speaker at an asylum, a "Centre for the Confused," because he is mentally disturbed? Or is he gifted in some way with a kind of magical perspective that allows him to perceive an invasive quality about television? These questions remain unanswered. The reader is left with unsettling doubts and is led to draw his or her own conclusions about the speaker's sanity.

### Merging Realms: Two Worlds in One

Faris describes the fourth characteristic of magical realism, merging realms, as "the closeness or near-merging of two realms, two worlds" (21). Often, the two worlds that merge are those of the living and the dead (Faris 21). This echoes Allen's brief description of magical realism as being characterized by the active presence of the dead as living (xviii-xix).

As previously mentioned, most of the poems in Brewer's collection The Place in Between demonstrate this aspect because the world of the living and the dead merge in the Old Man's continued relationship with his wife after she dies. At one point in "Growing Old Together," the children of Old Man and Old Woman express their consternation about the Old Man's "dream":

His children worry about his dream,  
 fret about his mumbling.  
 They mean well, he knows,  
 but their dreams aren't his.

"Why shouldn't I talk to her."

*Why shouldn't he talk to me,*

she says. *Do you think I'm dead?*

"She's not dead, you know." (29-36)

The world of the living and the dead merge together for the Old Man. This passage also gives rise to unsettling doubts in the reader because one moment the Old Man talks about his "dreams" but then he and his wife insist she is not dead. The reader hesitates between thinking that the Old Man is dreaming and believing that she really is speaking.

"The Flood," another poem by Brewer, merges the worlds of the domestic and the riparian. It begins simply and humorously by describing through a man's perspective the flooding of his house:

4:00 a.m.

The Oregon surf pounds  
against the heating ducts  
in his basement bedroom,  
except he lives in Utah.

...

He stands ankle-deep  
at the urinal  
such a long time  
he thinks he's pumping floodwater  
up through the soles  
of his bare feet. (1-4, 13-18)

The merging of realms takes place in the seventh stanza of the poem wherein the boundaries between domestic and riparian space are washed away:

Outside, rain continues  
dimpling the backyard lake  
like thousands of trout  
rising to mosquitoes.  
He feels trout under his feet,  
crawdads scuttling through the carpet.  
He grabs his fly rod from the storage room,  
casts into a riffle at the edge of his desk  
where an enormous German brown lies  
just behind the waste basket.  
It hits the fly  
and they battle down the hallway  
crashing from wall to wall.  
It tries to snag the line  
under the bathroom door,  
wraps it around the toilet.  
But he has it,  
grabs it by the gills  
and runs shouting and splashing  
through the basement  
holding it above his head

calling "Wife! Wife!

Look what I caught!" (42-64)

In this stanza, the house and the river become one. Faris writes that the "magical realist vision . . . exists at the intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions" (21). In "The Flood," the speaker's living space reflects both the qualities of a home and of a river, imaginatively capturing the intersection of two worlds.

### Disruptions of Time, Space, and Identity

The final characteristic of magical realism that Faris discusses is fairly self-explanatory. She states that "in addition to merging realms, these fictions disturb received ideas about time, space, and identity" (23). In relation to time, Faris uses the example of how there is a room in García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude where it is always March and always Monday (23). For space, she notes Grenouille's ability to smell virgins across town in Süskind's Perfume (23). And, finally, with regards to disturbing ideas about identity, she draws on the example of Rushdie's Midnight's Children and asks "With over five hundred children of midnight talking through his head . . . is Saleem himself anymore?" (25). These disruptions in time, space, and identity add to the magical quality of the narrative.

Brewer's poems often contain these disruptions in time, space, and identity. Rather than give an example of each, however, I will simply discuss one example of a disruption of identity that occurs in Brewer's poem "In-House." In it, the speaker is left

alone in the house as the wife and children head out for their daily errands and activities.

As the poem progresses, the speaker's identity melds with that of the house:

So the house and I collaborate  
 until you and the children return.  
 We become husband, father, house again.  
 And you use us as you will.  
 And you attend us as we need.

Late into the darkness together  
 I watch you undress slowly.  
 All the life that is me  
 embraces you, flows through you,  
 and every creaking wooden joint.

The personal and the domestic blend together in this poem, a merging of realms that calls into question the identity of the speaker. The speaker's life embraces and flows through not only the wife, but "every creaking wooden joint" of the house as well. Readers are left to wonder at what level the "husband, father, house" have melded together, thereby disturbing received ideas about identity.

### Conclusion

Magical realism has become an international literary trend, but, as Allen asserts, it is an especially important narrative technique that helps define Southwestern literature. Allen ties the importance of magical realism to the Spanish/Portuguese colonial



experience in the Southwest, but, as with the concept of geospirituality, it cannot be limited to certain groups of people. The creation and influence of magical realism moves beyond Spanish/Portuguese colonial boundaries. Brewer's poetry demonstrates this as I have shown using Faris's criteria. The elements of magical realism in Brewer's work help to identify it as Southwestern.

## CHAPTER IV

### UTAH LITERATURE AND THE "AMERICAN" ELEMENT

According to Allen's definition of Southwestern literature, on top of the "bedrock" of ancient Native American influence followed by a "second layer" of medieval Spanish/Portuguese colonial presence rests a third layer, one that Allen identifies with the relatively contemporary movement of "Americans" into the Southwest and Mexico (xviii-xix). By "Americans," Allen focuses on Anglo Americans with connections to the British Empire, but she also includes African, Lebanese, Syrian, Greek, Chinese, Japanese, and Jewish Americans (xvi). She writes:

The third dimension of the psycho-spiritual ambiance, the distinguishing aesthetic ambiance of the Southwest, is the Anglo pioneer, cowboy, prospector, U.S. Army, forts, ranges, mesquite and cattle, "blue shadows" on the Santa Fe Trail, tumbling tumbleweeds, rangy, tough cowboy ponies and gentle cowboy humor, gunslinging outlaws, sheriffs and marshals, careful, seamed Anglo ranchers, livestock growers, traders, railroad magnates, priests, preachers, bureaucrats, and shopkeepers. These are the characters who people the modern American myth of the West, a modern narrative whose roots lie deep in the Celtic wanderer cum knight-and-lord

who anciently peopled and wandered from Anatolia, moving into the Iberian peninsula and along the trans-Alpine range in Western Europe. Those people migrated over the millennia into the British Isles and finally came to rest in the American Southwest/Mexico. (xix)

This wave of American immigrants and their influence in the Southwest complete Allen's tri-cultural definition of Southwestern literature.

Much of Utah literature, including Brewer's poetry, decidedly reflects Allen's "American" element of Southwestern literature. This aspect results from Utah history and the legacy of the Mormon pioneers, the majority of whom were Anglos:

On 21 July 1847, Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow of the first pioneer company preceded the emigrants into the Salt Lake Valley. They saw grass so deep that a person could wade through it, promising land for farming, and several creeks that wandered through the valley. Three days later, President Brigham Young, who was ill with mountain fever, was driven in his carriage to the mouth of a canyon that opened onto the valley. As President Young looked over the scene, he gave his prophetic benediction to their travels: "It is enough. This is the right place." As the Saints who followed emerged from the mountains, they, too, gazed at their promised land! This valley with its salty lake gleaming in the western sun was the object of vision and prophecy, the land of which they and thousands after them dreamed. This was their land of refuge . . . . (Our Heritage 76)

Mormons were the first Americans to colonize the Indian Territory that, decades later, would be named Utah after the Ute Indians who occupied part of the land. By the time Brigham Young died in 1877, more than 350 colonies had been established ranging from as far north as present day Alberta, Canada,<sup>8</sup> to as far south as modern northern Mexico<sup>9</sup> (Our Heritage 88).

Many Utah writers have been unable to avoid coming to terms with this early group of Mormon settlers that have had—and continue to have—an enormous influence on the spiritual, social, psychological, political, and geographical aspects of the state. Whether the writer is a newcomer, a Mormon (by culture or creed or both),<sup>10</sup> or an anti-Mormon, many of these writers who are sensitive to their surroundings eventually grapple with the interesting and sometimes perplexing heritage left by Mormon pioneers.

Often the writing of many Utahns reflects an attitude of ambivalence toward the Mormon pioneer heritage. These writers both praise and lambaste, painting early and modern Mormons as heroes and/or villains, or a little of both. Ambivalence, in general, is an important theme in Southwestern literature. In a lecture, Dr. Mark Busby, Director of Southwest Studies at Texas State University-San Marcos, noted that ambivalence, among other themes such as primitivism, racism, and sexism, is a major theme in Southwestern

---

<sup>8</sup> Within the current LDS community, the province of Alberta, Canada, is often referred to as the "Utah of Canada."

<sup>9</sup> Some of these colonies still exist today, including Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublán.

<sup>10</sup> There is a difference between identifying oneself as a Mormon and actually being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who are commonly referred to as Mormons. An individual may rarely, or perhaps never, attend church and still consider himself or herself a Mormon through cultural affiliation. As of this writing Mormonism has come under increased national scrutiny because of the presidential candidacy of Mitt Romney.

literature. It involves perceiving a double or conflicting value in a specific entity, such as an arid landscape that on the one hand provides solitude and on the other threatens existence. Utah writers often approach the subject of Mormon pioneers and their legacy with this double-sided view, which enriches and adds to the diversity of Southwestern literature. I will draw on examples from several of these writers, including Zane Grey, Edward Abbey, Wallace Stegner, Terry Tempest Williams, May Swenson, John Sterling Harris, and, finally, Ken Brewer. This list represents a range of writers, including fiction writers and poets, newcomers, anti-Mormons, believers, and cultural Mormons, all of whom write about Mormon pioneers and their modern descendants with a measure of ambivalence.

#### Zane Grey's Fascination/Repulsion

Grey's works set in Southern Utah, such as his popular Riders of the Purple Sage, contain some of the most blatantly anti-Mormon elements compared to other Utah writers. The hero of the novel, Lassiter, is a gun-slinging Mormon-killer while the Mormon men of the story, like Elder Tull, are little better than vigilantes who take the law into their own hands. When the heroine, Mormon-born Jane Withersteen, befriends a Gentile (non-Mormon) named Venters, the Mormon men of the community threaten to whip him in order to force him to leave.

These anti-Mormon elements are tempered with mixed praise for the Mormon woman, personified by Jane. Venters declares to her, "Jane, you're a wonderful woman. Never was there a woman so unselfish and good. Only you're blind in one way" (18). The blindness he refers to is her religious devotion. Grey's ambivalent attitude toward

Mormon women is reflected in an exchange between Jane and Lassiter. When Jane asks Lassiter if his hatred of Mormons extends to Mormon women, he replies, "No. I believe Mormon women are the best and noblest, the most long-sufferin', and the blindest, unhappiest women on earth" (14).

Grey, born Pearl Zane Gray<sup>11</sup> on January 31, 1872, in Zanesville, Ohio, came across Mormons for the first time in 1907 when he crossed the Colorado river with a party of Mormons on the way to Lee's Ferry. It was then he met Jim Emmett, a Mormon leader from Lee's Ferry. Grey later used Emmett as a model for August Naab in The Heritage of the Desert (Powell 205-6). Grey describes the impact this meeting had in fostering his love of the Southwest:

I can easily see how [Emmett] took powerful hold of my imagination and fixed for me an ideal which has never changed. My debt to him is incalculable. No doubt he exerted more influence over my development, creating an all-absorbing love for the Southwest, than any other westerner. I was singularly young and boyish in impressionable receptiveness. The romance of the West dominated me, though fortunately I did not wholly escape the realism. (qtd. in Powell 206)

Perhaps it is partly due to Emmett's influence, and others like him, that Grey refrains from fully condemning Mormons in his writing.

What is certain is that Grey found plenty of material for his novels as he traveled through Southern Utah. The Heritage of the Desert, published in 1909, is what might be called Grey's first Southwestern novel, and it was also his first success (Powell 210).

---

<sup>11</sup> Later in life, Grey changed the spelling of his last name from Gray to Grey and dropped Pearl.

Lawrence Clark Powell, in his Southwest Classics, describes the work as "an attempt to depict the Mormons as both heroes and villains" (210). He continues:

These strong people in that great landscape were what had stirred Grey so deeply. He had seen them at their oases on the river and in their remote villages where Utah and Arizona merged. The authority of church dogma, the absolute power of men over women, and the practice of polygamy were the tenets of Mormonism that both repelled and attracted Grey.

His feelings were violently ambivalent. In a conventional sense he was outraged by the ruthlessness of male dominance. At the same time he was excited by the vision of secret villages of young "sealed wives," visited in the dark of night by husbands whose faces they never saw.

These people in that setting proved to be pure gold to the writer. (210)

Grey's ambivalent feelings toward Mormons add depth to his novels, such as The Heritage of the Desert, Riders of the Purple Sage, and its sequel, The Rainbow Trail. These works also add to the diversity of Southwestern literature in general because of Grey's fascination with and repulsion to his perception of early Mormon culture.

#### Edward Abbey and the Mormon Paradox

Like Grey, Abbey's writing about Mormons, particularly in Desert Solitaire, swings like a pendulum between praise and sharp criticism. Readers of Abbey know that his work is often riddled with this kind of paradox; in one paragraph he will boldly argue a certain point of view only to reverse the argument in the next. The ambivalence introduced by these conflicting viewpoints encourages readers to respond with critical

awareness and draw their own conclusions. Abbey writes about Mormons through this same paradoxical lens, forcing readers to make their own opinions.

A prime example of Abbey's paradoxical treatment of Mormons comes towards the end of Desert Solitaire when Abbey comments that among the weekend's visitors to Arches National Park there were many Latter-day Saints. Abbey then distances himself from some of the harsher criticism aimed at Mormons in the text by attributing the criticism to his friends:

Some of my liberalized friends regard the LDS with disdain; they see in the Church only a bastion of sectarian foolishness and political reaction and in its adherents a voting bloc of Know-Nothings, racially prejudiced, religiously bigoted, opposed alike to the graduated income tax, the United Nations, urban renewal, foreign aid, legislative reapportionment, public welfare, Medicare and even free lunches for schoolchildren—actually or potentially a rabble of John Birchers. (294)

This criticism continues in a similar vein for another paragraph while still couched in the mouths of Abbey's anonymous friends.

In the next paragraph, however, in a neutralizing third-person approach, Abbey launches into a defense of Mormons on the grounds that their doctrines are not more whimsical than those of other organized religions (294). And finally, in the following paragraph, still using neutral third-person pronouns, Abbey discusses some of the praiseworthy aspects of the Mormon pioneers:

Leaving aside the comical aspects of their creed, one can argue that the Mormons in practice achieved a way of life in which there was much to



admire, much worth saving. In addition to their pioneering migrations, full of unusual heroism and examples of fortitude (e.g., Brigham Young and his seventeen wives),<sup>12</sup> the Mormons deserve respect for settling the most rugged, difficult as well as spectacular, terrain in the West. (295)

Thus within a few paragraphs, the text turns from criticism to praise (tempered by the humorous dig about Young's plural wives). Abbey's largely positive assessment of early Mormon settlers reflects an earlier passage in Desert Solitaire in which he comments on the "undaunted" spirit of the pioneers as they carved out a difficult passage through the rim of a canyon, later called the Hole in the Rock (228-9).

Abbey's unique style, his mixture of praise and criticism of Mormons and their heritage creates a paradox for readers and is similar to the effect of Grey's Mormon heroes and villains. It creates a perplexing and liberating ambivalence, a key feature of Southwestern literature. This gray space between the black and white of conflicting viewpoints allows readers to come to their own conclusions.

#### Wallace Stegner: A Gentile among Saints

When asked where he was from, Stegner might very well have said, "Salt Lake City," although the Iowa-born Pulitzer Prize winner lived in dozens of cities throughout the United States and Canada, both as a boy and as an adult.<sup>13</sup> In an essay entitled "At Home in the Fields of the Lord," he describes his relative rootlessness and his later

---

<sup>12</sup> The actual number of Brigham Young's wives at his death, according to LDS Church records, is twenty-seven, sixteen of whom bore him fifty-seven children (Porter and Rex).

<sup>13</sup> Stegner (1909-1993) won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1972 for his novel Angle of Repose.

realization that Salt Lake City constitutes a hometown for him because of the fifteen years of experience he gained there as an adolescent and an adult. In writing about Salt Lake City, Stegner conveys the ambivalence of his sentiments towards a place where he would always partly feel like an outsider:

A Gentile in the New Jerusalem: certainly I was. Salt Lake City is a divided concept, a complex idea. To the devout it is more than a place; it is a way of life, a corner of the materially realizable heaven; its soil is held together by the roots of the family and the cornerstones of the temple. In this sense Salt Lake City is forever foreign to me, as to any non-Mormon. But in spite of being a Gentile I discover that much of my youth is there, and a surprising lot of my heart. Having blown tumbleweed-fashion around the continent so that I am forced to *select* a hometown, I find myself selecting the City of the Saints, and for what seems to me cause.  
(Lyon and Williams 230)

As a non-Mormon, or "Gentile," Stegner feels both connected to and forever separated from Salt Lake City and the complex ideology that informs it. The ambivalence of Stegner's feelings for his hometown carries to his writing about Mormon pioneers and the aftermath of their settlement. Stegner both criticizes and admires aspects of Mormon history and culture.

In Stegner's first novel, Remembering Laughter, published in 1937, the characters play out a sort of parody of Mormon polygamous life. Alec and Margaret Stuart, a young, childless married couple, live in rural Iowa. Margaret's sister, Elspeth MacLeod, travels from their native Scotland to live with the Stuarts. Alec and Elspeth calamitously fall in

love, attempting to hide their sexual encounters from Elspeth's sister. Eventually, Elspeth becomes pregnant and they are unable to hide their love affair any longer. Because of their financial circumstances and relative isolation from family and friends, Elspeth has no way to escape. She gives birth to Malcolm, and the four of them continue to live together in silent, bitter tension and lovelessness. Pain rends the family apart, but they are unable to get away from each other. They are like shards of glass trapped in a bag; they can only continue to hurt each other.

Obviously, the family members do not foresee the polygamous aspect of the relationship in which they find themselves. They simply become ensnared in the situation. However, Stegner drops clues in the text that allude to and critique polygamy, specifically the Mormon variety. Early in the text, Elspeth observes the chickens while out for a walk:

Inside the pen the aimless search for bugs and grain was broken suddenly by the amorous rush of a rooster. Hens scattered and flew. The selected victim ducked and scuttled, but at last submitted meekly to her lover, enduring him with a placidity that was almost insulting. Although the rooster pranced a little higher and more pompously for a few minutes, the hen apparently thought no more of it than she did of pecking up a worm.

Elspeth, fresh, high-colored, stood watching, and when it was over she hissed through the wire at the degraded hen.

"You're a disgrace to your sex, you vixen. You've laid too many eggs. Let that pompous dandy treat you so! S-s-s-s-s-s-s!" And to the

smug rooster: "S-s-s-s-s-s-s-s! You Mormon, you. You Brigham Young!  
And *so* proud of yoursel'! So ver-ry *ver-r-ry* proud of yoursel'!" (35-6)

The comparison of the rooster to a Mormon, Brigham Young in particular, invites other comparisons. The rooster is described as selecting a "victim" then afterwards strutting "pompously." He is also a "pompous dandy," a "smug" rooster, and very "proud" of himself. By having Elspeth call the rooster Mormon and Brigham Young, the negative diction Stegner uses to describe the rooster also transfers by association back to Mormons and to Young. Thus Mormons and Young are labeled pompous, smug, proud, etc.

In the same way the negative diction applied to the rooster transfers to Mormon men, the hen becomes representative of Mormon women who submit themselves to polygamy. The hen is a "victim" who submits "meekly" after some attempt at evasion; she "endures" the rooster with a "placidity" that is almost "insulting"; she is a "degraded" hen. Elspeth calls her a "disgrace" to women, a "vixen" who has laid too many eggs, a reference, perhaps, to overly abundant offspring. Stegner seems simultaneously to excuse and condemn Mormon women in this passage by labeling them victims while blasting their perceived placidity. It is one of the great ironies of the book that Elspeth allows herself, by accepting Alec's advances, to become the hen.

While Stegner finds much to criticize about Mormons, he also gives deliberate, thoughtful praise to many aspects of Mormon culture. An example can be found in one of Stegner's works of nonfiction, The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail, published in 1964. In the introduction, Stegner admires the courage of Mormon pioneers, particularly the women. He writes: "That I do not accept the faith that possessed them does not mean I doubt their frequent devotion and heroism in its service. Especially their

women. Their women were incredible" (13). Also, in Mormon Country, published in 1942, Stegner comments favorably on many aspects of Mormon life and history. He describes how the first party of scouts to the Salt Lake Valley planted potatoes the morning after they arrived, even before Brigham Young's group saw the valley (62). He adds:

These were the people who first settled the Mormon Country, and though they have been called many things, many hard things, they have never been called bad settlers. They were as indefatigable, obedient, stalwart, and united a people as the world ever saw. Their record in the intermountain region is a record of group living, completely at variance with the normal history of the West. . . . After the gold strike at Sutter's Fort in 1848 there were so many scramblers to the West that the population of California jumped one hundred thousand in a year. But the dream that pulled those adventurers across the Great American Desert and around the Horn, though it was a potent dream, was totally different from the Mormon dream. Even the Indians caught onto the difference fast: they knew two races of white men, the Mericats and the Mormonee. (62)

In these brief examples from Remembering Laughter, The Gathering of Zion, and Mormon Country, it is evident that Stegner saw both value and dross in Mormon history and culture. His views and works add to the rich ambivalence that surrounds Mormon pioneers and their heritage in the Southwest and its literature.

### Terry Tempest Williams: Mormons and Nuclear Fallout

Williams brings a unique perspective to the topic of Mormon pioneers and their heritage in Utah literature because she herself is a fifth generation descendant of Latter-day Saints. Her most widely known work, Refuge, in part represents Williams' attempt to reconcile her individual beliefs and the Mormon culture in which she grew up. Because of her unique perspective, the depth of her critical insight takes on new proportions. She both appreciates aspects of Mormonism that are foreign to authors like Grey, Abbey, and Stegner and is able to criticize her culture from the stance of an insider.

Some of Williams' clearest sympathy as well as starkest criticism for Mormons can be found in her epilogue to Refuge, "The Clan of One-Breasted Women." In this essay, Williams recognizes that many Utahns, including Mormons, have become victims of nuclear fallout due to indiscriminate atomic testing in Nevada by the United States Government. Upon making the connection between fallout and generations of cancer in her family, she writes:

I realized the deceit I had been living under. Children growing up in the American Southwest, drinking contaminated milk from contaminated cows, even from the contaminated breasts of their mothers, my mother—members, years later, of the Clan of One-Breasted Women.

It is a well-known story in the Desert West, "The Day We Bombed Utah," or more accurately, the years we bombed Utah: above ground atomic testing in Nevada took place from January 27, 1951 through July 11, 1962. Not only were the winds blowing north covering "low-use segments of the population" with fallout and leaving sheep dead in their

tracks, but the climate was right. The United States of the 1950s was red, white, and blue. The Korean War was raging. McCarthyism was rampant. Ike was it, and the cold war was hot. If you were against nuclear testing, you were for a communist regime. (283-4)

Williams excoriates the government for treating her family and other Utahns as "virtual uninhabitants," recognizing that her people have been horribly mistreated.

But the criticism does not end with the government. While acknowledging their role as victims, Williams sharply criticizes Mormons for being too willing to suffer and not protest this gross violation of human rights. She is baffled and angry at the complacency of many Utahns, which she attributes to the influence of Mormonism:

In Mormon culture, authority is respected, obedience is revered, and independent thinking is not. I was taught as a young girl not to "make waves" or "rock the boat."

"Just let it go," Mother would say. "You know how you feel, that's what counts."

For many years I have done just that—listened, observed, and quietly formed my own opinions, in a culture that rarely asks questions because it has all the answers. But one by one, I have watched the women in my family die common, heroic deaths. . . .

The price of obedience has become too high. (285-6)

Thus for Williams, Mormons are both victims and all-too-willing human sacrifices. This ambivalence, added to the important theme of atomic testing, is an important aspect of Southwestern literature.

### May Swenson's "Summerfall"

Anna Thilda May Swenson was born in Logan, Utah, in 1913 as the oldest of ten children in a Mormon household that spoke mostly Swedish. Like Williams, she grew up immersed in Mormon culture. Certainly Swenson's religious background would have been a source of some ambivalence to the poet because of her homosexuality. She offers a unique perspective to the ambivalence of Mormons in her poetry.

One such poem is Swenson's "Summerfall" which describes the demolition of an old hotel in Salt Lake City. In this poem, the ambivalence surrounding Mormons in Utah literature falls into a time split where the virtues of the past (industrious pioneers) are extolled over the vices of the present (fat, lazy descendants). The old building is equated with "an early, honest, work-proud era," the time of the Mormon settlers (18). The hotel they built is "Graciousness, out of date" (11). The modern Mormons come and tear down these structures: "Prompt to come, ye Saints, / your condominiums, high-rise business, boosted / economy, new cash flow" (19-21). The speaker makes it clear that to her these new developments are unwelcome; the demolition of the hotel produces a "murky haze," which in turn causes a "sick acrylic sunset" (23). The final line of the poem predicts the increasingly rapid reoccurrence of more evenings like this one: "The sequence of such evenings will be speeding up" (24).

The time split between the valued early era of Mormon pioneers and the perceived threat of their descendants is underscored by the summer/fall imagery throughout the poem. The early era and its architecture are associated with summer, the height of seasons in its warmth and productivity, while the demolition of the old hotel is



linked to autumn, the season of decay and sickness. As the dynamite explodes the hotel, "the whole west side of summer shears away" (6). What remains are "autumn's avalanches" (9). Even the colors of the sunset sicken in the haze left by particles of dust (23).

The speaker tries to slow down the decay she sees by playing the demolition slowly, reluctantly in her mind:

But Mind projects it slow,  
stretching movement out, each flung chunk floating  
awhile, weightless, and with no noise.

Mind reluctantly unbuilds summer. (13-16)

The speaker wants to work against what she feels will be the speeding up of the sequence of similar evenings, and the mind is her only recourse. Thus the tension of the poem turns on the axis of desire to halt the present in order to preserve the values of the past. A "work-proud era" is favored over a new era of Saints with their "high-rise business" (18, 20). Swenson's "Summerfall" conveys ambivalence concerning the sacrifice of the past to make way for modern industry.

#### John Sterling Harris: Pioneer Graveyards and Tacky Chapels

Of the Utah writers and poets discussed in this chapter so far, Harris stands apart in that he is Mormon by both culture and creed. In the foreword to Harris's collection Second Crop, Richard Cracroft, a professor of English and Western American Studies at Brigham Young University, writes that the "metaphysical dynamic of Harris's poetry

reflects the analogical world view of his Latter-day Saint faith, which proclaims that 'all things . . . are spiritual'" (vii). Harris himself taught literature and technical writing at BYU from 1962 to 1993 and has published two volumes of poetry: Barbed Wire (1974; reprinted in 1993) and Second Crop (1996).

In this believer's poetry there is still a measure of ambivalence about Mormons and their heritage. Harris's admiration for the early pioneers and their legacy is clearly identifiable, such as in "Pioneer Graveyard," while criticism is cushioned by humor, as in "Bless Our Tacky Chapel."

In "Pioneer Graveyard," the speaker begins by contrasting the graveyard with its modern counterparts:

This is not the new cemetery on the hill  
 With flush markers the mower  
 Can roll over without pause  
 In perpetual care. (1-4)

Just as the modern mower is out of place in this graveyard, so is the modern propensity to "roll over without pause" the histories behind the headstones. The mower, as well as the reader of the poem, is invited from the beginning to proceed slowly and thoughtfully through the headstones whose names are recorded "in long books / Shown by proud descendants" (9-10).

The speaker notes that the sandstone markers are "Cut with more sincerity than art" (12) and proceeds to read some of the names and inscriptions, which allow readers a glimpse into the stories of these pioneers:

Names out of the past:

Artha, Ezekiel, Serepta, Preserved—

And inscriptions:

"Cavalry Private, Territorial Militia

During the Indian Wars."

"His toils are past, his work is done."

"She's gone but not forgotten."

"Death is but another birth."

"Planted on earth to bloom in Heaven." (13-21)

The names and inscriptions speak for another time and for a people of hopeful faith, a people whose descendants are proud of them and feel there is something about their names and stories that is worth preserving. The poem itself reinforces the importance of that preservation.

In contrast to the reverent tone of "Pioneer Graveyard," "Bless Our Tacky Chapel" humorously describes a modern Mormon chapel that sacrifices tastefulness for functionality:

In subdivision you can search

For our prefabricated church—

Asphalt roofing, plywood walls,

Nylon carpet in the halls. (1-4)

In addition to these features, the poem mentions the chapel's beech pulpit, Lennox air conditioners, Crane plumbing, astroturf, amplifier, "molded pews of fiberglass," "classroom bells that can be rung / By buttons on the podium," and, finally, a bell-less aluminum steeple. (5-22). The humor of the poem is heightened by the ludicrous

invocations of Deity to bless certain parts of the chapel: "Bless the pulpit made of beech / With clock therein for timing speech" and "Bless the amplifier, Lord, / Socket, plug and tangled cord" (5-6, 11-12).

Harris's criticism of modern Mormon functionality is subtly veiled by the humorous tone of the poem, but it is there nonetheless. The jocular style of "Tacky Chapel" contrasts sharply to the paced, thoughtful tone of "Pioneer Graveyard." Perhaps Harris, like Swenson in "Summerfall," sees a kind of breakdown between the carefully carved sandstone markers of the graveyard and the tackiness of the Saints' prefabricated church. The comparison of Harris's two poems reveals ambivalence concerning Mormons and their heritage.

#### Ken Brewer: Semblance and Polygamy

Brewer, like Abbey and others, came to Utah later in life and writes about Mormon culture from a non-Mormon perspective. He has several poems that refer to Mormons, among them "Mesa Moon," "The Old Man Orders His Tombstone," "Bones," and "The Persistence of Memory." The references to Mormons in the first three poems are largely negative while the references in the last are positive. The contrast demonstrates ambivalence towards the history and contemporary manifestations of this distinct religious group.

The Mormon settlers as depicted in "Mesa Moon" leave a negative impression on the reader. As previously mentioned in Chapter I, this poem contrasts the way two different groups of people interact with their environment.<sup>14</sup> The Shoshone show respect

---

<sup>14</sup> See page 26.

for the sego lily through the act of naming it, acknowledging through the act of naming the importance of the plant in sustaining life. The Mormons, on the other hand, are described as "hungry;" they eat "the bulbs and the moon" (2-3).<sup>15</sup> In Chapter I, I gave one possible interpretation to this passage: since the moon is too large to actually eat, the emphasis is on the Mormons' thoughtless consumption. Another possible interpretation is that by consuming the moon, a symbol of cycles and harmonious balance, the Mormons in the poem are interfering with that balance. There are other ways to interpret this poem, but it would be difficult to render an interpretation in which Mormon pioneers are depicted favorably.

In "The Old Man Orders His Tombstone," there is a brief negative reference to Mormon architecture. As the Old Man looks over a brochure of tombstones, he sees "one duplicate of a Mormon Temple / jutting skyward like a praying mantis" (8-9). The comparison of a Mormon Temple to a praying mantis is not a positive one because the insect is notoriously predatory. Its seeming stance of prayer with its forelegs close to its body is a semblance only; these same legs strike out at its prey before devouring it. The comparison of the temple to a mantis, then, implies that the temple, a symbol of Mormonism in general, also represents only a semblance of piety masking the predatory.

This same negativity towards Mormonism is also apparent in "Bones," one of the poems in Brewer's murder mystery in verse, Chiaroscuro. In the poem, one of the main characters in the cycle, Maizie, discovers human looking foot bones near her front door.

---

<sup>15</sup> It is true that in Utah history, by the time Mormons arrived in the Salt Lake Valley they had few food supplies left to eat. They depended on the bulbs of sego lilies to help sustain them until they could begin to grow crops. Today, the state flower of Utah is the sego lily because of the role it played in sustaining the "hungry" Mormons.

She calls the police, who call a professor, who in turn identifies the bones as belonging to a bear.

The cops watched the cats  
 for two days and nights  
 drag bones from the Bishop's yard.  
 They arrested the Bishop's son  
 for poaching. (15-19)

Because this poem is set in northern Utah near the Idaho border, readers are safe in assuming that the bishop spoken of is a Mormon bishop and that the poacher is the son of a Mormon bishop. Bishops in Mormon communities are ecclesiastical leaders that preside over a ward, a group ranging in numbers that meets together for worship and other activities. A bishop is supposed to set a good example for the members of his ward and help them keep not only the laws of the church but also the laws of the land. In the case of the bishop in "Bones," he falls short of these duties with his own son. The son flaunts the law and shows disrespect for life by poaching. The bishop and his family are thus cast in a negative light, along with Mormonism in general.

It is interesting that in the poem the son of the bishop goes on to become a taxidermist stuffing all manner of wildlife as well as domesticated pets. The last stanza reads: "He could make the dead look alive, / could put a glint in their glass eyes / and bend their bones to eternity" (30-32). Just as the praying mantis only seems to be praying in "Tombstone," the bishop's son can only bestow a semblance of life on these dead animals. Mormons believe that eternal life is possible for all forms of life, but the final

lines of "Bones" contradict that belief by emphasizing that these animals are only made to look alive; their liveliness is semblance only.

Not all of Brewer's poems that refer to Mormonism do so negatively. In "The Persistence of Memory," which was written for the opening of the Museum of Utah Art and History on June 25, 2004, Brewer treats one of the most controversial aspects of early Mormonism—polygamy—in a tenderly nostalgic manner. The fourth stanza reads, "We see the archived Probate of Brigham Young's Estate, / and in each wife's signature a story, different / as each touch to cheek, each kiss goodbye" (10-12). While many writers and critics find Young and polygamy an easy target for aspersion, this poem acknowledges the stories and the relationships behind the signature of each wife. The mention of touching cheeks and kisses goodbye in line 12 lends a rosy glow to the issue of polygamy. Perhaps this positive perspective of Young and his wives was influenced by the audience Brewer must have known would be present for the opening of the Museum of Utah Art and History; certainly several Mormons were there, perhaps even some high-ranking ecclesiastical leaders who would want Young, the second President of the LDS Church, to be spoken of positively. Whether or not audience influenced this stanza, it contrasts with the negativity towards aspects of Mormonism found in some of Brewer's other poems. The contrast lends ambivalence to Brewer's work, an important theme in Southwestern literature.

### Conclusion

The third part of Allen's tri-cultural model for Southwestern literature is very apparent in the literature of Utah, from the works of writers like Zane Grey to the poetry

of Ken Brewer. This is in part because Utah history is rich in stories shaped by and steeped in the culture of Mormon settlers. These pioneers left a goldmine of ambivalence for writers to wrestle with, and many Utah writers have done just that. Mormon pioneers help to, in Allen's words, "people the modern American myth of the West" (xix). Their heritage has inspired many writers, and the works of these writers help to enrich the body of Southwestern literature.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION: THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

Allen's tri-cultural definition of Southwestern literature involves a complex combination of Native American geospirituality, Spanish/Portuguese colonial experience, and American influence. It is this combination that she sees as integral to the literature of the Southwest (xx). "A truly Southwestern work," she asserts, "almost inevitably combines the ancient, the medieval, and the contemporary in ways that yield maximal meaning comprehensible within several contexts" (xx). Although Allen leaves readers and critics with some wiggle room in the phrase "almost inevitably," still her definition is unnecessarily procrustean. Allen's definition has much merit—she clearly identifies some of the major influential themes in Southwestern literature and some of the peoples who have helped to shape the region's creative output. However, by insisting on a combination of these three elements in a "truly Southwestern work," she excludes works that may focus on only one or two of these elements. Also, by declaring the importance of specific Native civilizations and Spanish/Portuguese colonization as integral to Southwestern literature, valuable writers and their work, like Brewer and his poetry, fall outside the boundaries of her definition.

Often, people define spaces or concepts according to their own backgrounds, and this is true of Allen's definition of the Southwest and its literature. In the same preface in

which Allen outlines her tri-cultural definition of Southwestern literature, she also identifies herself as tri-cultural. She describes herself as a "tri-cultural daughter of the tri-cultural and ancient Southwest . . . born and raised in the central mountains of New Mexico by parents who were themselves native New Mexicans," and as "a contemporary mixed-blood descendant of the Keres Pueblo peoples who have lived in this region literally since time immemorial" (xv-xvi). It is no wonder, in light of how Allen views herself, that she defines Southwestern literature as tri-cultural, privileging, as she does, the ancient over the medieval and the medieval over the contemporary.

Fortunately, Allen's definition of Southwestern literature, while helping to shed light on important Southwestern themes, is only one of many. Readers can get a sense of Southwestern literature's diversity by looking at several. Naturally, different critics and writers have varying views about what constitutes Southwestern literature, and many of their definitions are much broader than Allen's. While Lawrence Clark Powell, like Allen, states that it involves a "tri-cultural fusion" of Indian, Hispano, and Anglo, he also declares that the greatest shaping force in Southwestern literature is the Southwest itself, "the land and its climate and configurations of desert, mountains, rivers and skies, as well as its history and culture" (3). Brewer's poetry, as well as the literature of many Utah writers, certainly reflects the landscape, history, and culture of the Southwest. Powell also admits that his definition of Southwestern literature is not flawless, but rather his own personal delimitation, which is an important recognition when dealing with such a diverse body of work (4).

David W. Teague, in his book The Southwest in American Literature and Art, uses the terms "Southwest" and "desert" almost synonymously. Rather than giving a

detailed definition of the Southwest, he instead focuses on desert landscapes and insists on a conceptual rather than a geographic definition of deserts. While his definition of the Southwest remains rather vague, he does, however, pinpoint the contemporary American writers that he feels have been influenced by the development of a desert aesthetic in literature, namely "Edward Abbey, N. Scott Momaday, Rudolfo Anaya, Leslie Marmon Silko, Charles Bowden, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Terry Tempest Williams" (3). Abbey and Williams are like bookends to this list of writers of the desert, and it is true that the desert figures prominently in the writing of both. I would add Brewer to this list and argue that he not only writes about the desert, but, as I discuss in Chapter II, his minimalist style reflects the sparseness of much of the arid Southwest landscape.

If aridity is indeed a key characteristic of Southwestern literature, as David Dunaway confirms in his introduction to Writing the Southwest, then many Utah writers, including Abbey, Williams, and Brewer, exemplify this characteristic in their writing. Abbey writes in the introduction to Desert Solitaire that one of the main objectives of the text is not to write a "book about the desert" but rather to evoke the desert through language (x). He goes on to explain:

In recording my impressions of the natural scene I have striven above all for accuracy, since I believe that there is a kind of poetry, even a kind of truth, in simple fact. But the desert is a vast world, an oceanic world, as deep in its way and complex and various as the sea. Language makes a mighty loose net with which to go fishing for simple facts, when facts are infinite. . . . What I have tried to do then is something a bit different. Since you cannot get the desert into a book any more than a fisherman can haul

up the sea with his nets, I have tried to create a world of words in which the desert figures more as medium than material. Not imitation but evocation has been the goal. (x)

What Ernest Hemingway does for the ocean in Old Man and the Sea, Abbey does for the desert in Desert Solitaire: they both evoke the spirit of place. The word evocation literally means “the summoning of a spirit” or “imaginative recreation.” Abbey seeks not just to describe the desert landscape, but to go beyond that by bringing the spirit of the place into the text. He uses language to imaginatively recreate the desert in the text.

Rudolfo Anaya, in his foreword to Writing the Southwest, describes the importance of writing while influenced by the spirit of place:

Reflecting one’s sense of place in one’s stories has at times been construed as regionalism. Critics often take it upon themselves to decide for us what constitutes universal literature, and they have decided that allowing the sense of place to be an essential part of the story lessens it. I take the opposite view. By sense of place I mean the “spirit of the place,” and I know that sensitive writers respond to that spirit as they write their stories. So for me the spirit of the place is an integral part of the story. . . . Writers from all regions have allowed the spirit of the place to permeate their works. (viii-ix)

Having the ability to evoke the spirit of the Southwest in one’s writing is one of the most important aspects of Southwestern literature. And because the spirit of the Southwest is composed of so many elements, works may focus on one or more of those aspects, such as deserts and aridity, and still be considered Southwestern.

Williams's Refuge is somewhat atypical in regards to writing about deserts and aridity because one of its central themes is the flooding of Great Salt Lake. However, despite rising lake levels, Williams still spends a good amount of time in the surrounding desert regions (the salt flats), and the desert becomes an essential landscape in the author's search for refuge in change. She writes:

There is something unnerving about my solitary travels around the northern stretches of Great Salt Lake. I am never entirely at ease because I am aware of its will. Its mood can change in minutes. The heat alone reflecting off the salt is enough to drive me mad, but it is the glare that immobilizes me. . . . The understanding that I could die on the salt flats is no great epiphany. I could die anywhere. It's just that in the forsaken corners of Great Salt Lake there is no illusion of being safe. You stand in the throbbing silence of the Great Basin, exposed and alone. . . . Only the land's mercy and a calm mind can save my soul. And it is here I find grace. It's strange how deserts turn us into believers. I believe in walking in a landscape of mirages, because you learn humility. I believe in living in a land of little water because life is drawn together. . . . If the desert is holy, it is because it is a forgotten place that allows us to remember the sacred. Perhaps that is why every pilgrimage to the desert is a pilgrimage to the self. There is no place to hide, and so we are found. (148)

Towards the beginning of this passage, the desert is almost personified; it has moods and a will. An initial reading of this passage may lead one to think it is the lake that is personified, but the lake also takes in the surrounding salt flats, the desert terrain.

Then Williams discusses the desert as a space where she is confronted with the stark inevitability of her death and the possibility that it may come right there on the salt flats. This confrontation constitutes another important characteristic of Southwestern literature. According to Dunaway, in Southwestern literature the often inhospitable environment forces a perspective of human insignificance compared to the land (xxxvii). Rather than being disturbed by the thought that she could die on the salt flats, Williams finds comfort in having distractions stripped away. Like the speaker in Brewer's "Rainwash," Williams recognizes that the desert forces one to confront the reality that humans are insignificant compared to the land. The desert, for her, is an ideal place to search one's soul and remember what is holy because, as she says, in the desert "there is no place to hide" (148).

Invoking the desert is certainly an important theme in Southwestern literature, as Teague asserts. However, one must be careful not to oversimplify this complex body of work. David Dunaway, in Writing the Southwest, states "Boiling Southwestern literature down to a series of central themes risks reductionism and overgeneralization" (xxxvii). It is possible to oversimplify Southwestern literature by concentrating on narrow themes. Aridity as a theme cannot be the final indicator of Southwestern literature; neither can the presence of geospirituality in a text, or magical realism, or ambivalence. Just as Anaya chooses to emphasize the spirit of place, Dunaway also asserts that a sense of place is a vital aspect of Southwestern literature and that the Southwest is a very diverse place:

If there is one topic to which the writers in this book [Writing the Southwest] return—Indian, Hispanic, African American, and Anglo—it is the importance of being rooted and of the landscape. . . . [I]t is hard to

convey the spaciousness of the southwestern ecoscape. We can mention that . . . there is no single “desert,” but rather a half dozen recognized biobotanical regions of arid and semi-arid land ranging in elevation from sea level to eight thousand feet; that because of high elevations, southwesterners can drive in a few hours from foot-deep snow cover in dense pine forests to treeless, sun-baked desert plains. Such contrasts illustrate the diversity of a region which shares only a few central characteristics: the presence of sun and the absence of water; large areas of unspoiled (or at least undeveloped) wilderness; the effects of altitude; and the peculiarly intense quality of the region’s light, due in part to the absence of industrialization, urban sprawl, pollutants, and humidity in the atmosphere” (xxxvii).

While probably no flawless definition of Southwestern literature exists, just as no perfect definition of the Southwest exists, Dunaway’s description of Southwestern literature captures its essence: a sense of place. Mabel Major and T. M. Pearce insightfully state that the Southwest is “a term more easily felt and understood than defined” (1). Brewer’s poetry demonstrates an understanding of the uniqueness of the Southwest region. Because the Southwest is such a diverse place, it has and continues to produce a diverse literature. Works by Utah writers like Ken Brewer add to that diversity and help to convey the spirit of the place.

## WORKS CITED

- Abbey, Edward. Desert Solitaire. New York: Ballantine Books, 1968.
- Alexander, Thomas G. "Dominguez-Escalante Expedition." Utah, the Right Place. 29 Nov. 2006.  
<[http://historyto.go.utah.gov/utah\\_chapters/trappers,\\_traders,\\_and\\_explorers/dominguez-escalanteexpedition.html](http://historyto.go.utah.gov/utah_chapters/trappers,_traders,_and_explorers/dominguez-escalanteexpedition.html)>.
- Allen, Paula Gunn. "Preface." Writing the Southwest. New York: Penguin, 1995. xvii-xxiv.
- Anaya, Rudolfo. "Foreword." Writing the Southwest. New York: Penguin, 1995. ix-xvi.
- Barney, Joseph. "Kenneth Wayne Brewer Papers, (1968-2000). 19 Apr. 2007.  
<<http://library.usu.edu/Specol/manuscript/collms275.html>>.
- Brewer, Kenneth W. Chiaroscuro: A Mystery. Salt Lake City: Elik P, 2005.
- . Small Scenes. Royden Card, Illus. Boise, ID: Limberlost P, 2006.
- . Sum of Accidents: New and Selected Poems. Salt Lake City: City Art, 2003.
- . Whale Song: A Poet's Journey Into Cancer. Salt Lake City: Dream Garden P, 2007.
- . Why Dogs Stopped Flying. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2006.
- Busby, Mark. "I Don't Know But I Ain't Lost: Defining the Southwest." Lecture. Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas. 29 Aug. 2006.
- Busby, Mark. "Themes in Southwestern literature." Lecture. Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas. 18 Oct. 2006.
- Dunaway, David King. "Introduction." Writing the Southwest. New York: Penguin, 1995. xxv-xxvii.
- Education Update Online. "Ken Brewer, Utah." Apr. 2005. 19 Apr. 2007.  
<<http://www.educationupdate.com/archives/2005/April/html/Poet-Brewer.html>>.
- "Evocation." Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1981.
- Faris, Wendy B. Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2004.



- Grey, Zane. Riders of the Purple Sage. Roslyn, NY: Walter J. Black, Inc., 1940.
- Harris, John Sterling. Second Crop. Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1996.
- KUTV. "Utah's Poet Laureate Has Pancreatic Cancer." 11 Nov. 2005. 7 Nov. 2006.  
<[http://kutv.com/topstories/local\\_story331144717.html](http://kutv.com/topstories/local_story331144717.html)>.
- Lyon, Thomas, and Terry Tempest Williams, eds. Great and Peculiar Beauty: A Utah Reader. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1995.
- Madsen, David B. Exploring the Fremont. 1989. 29 Nov. 2006.  
<<http://www.media.utah.edu/UHE/f/FREMONT,THE.html>>.
- Major, Mabel, and T. M. Pearce. Southwest Heritage: A Literary History with Bibliographies. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1972.
- Marion, Linda. "Confronting the Cosmos." Continuum: The Magazine of the University of Utah. 15.2 (2005). 19 Apr. 2007.  
<<http://www.alumni.utah.edu/continuum/fall05/brewer.htm>>.
- Naparsteck, Martin. "A Rich Discourse of Poetry and Place: The West Under Cover." Salt Lake City Tribune. 11 Sept. 2005. 19 Apr. 2007. <<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=267661126549051>>.
- Our Heritage: A Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996.
- Porter, Larry C., and Janet Rex, eds. Brigham Young Biography—Facts of Faith. Apr. 2001. BYU. 12 Oct. 2007.  
<<http://unicomm.byu.edu/about/brigham.aspx?content=brigham7>>.
- Powell, Lawrence Clark. Southwest Classics: the Creative Literature of the Arid Lands: Essays on the Books and Their Writers. Pasadena: Ward Ritchie P, 1974.
- Seitz, Laura, and Dennis Lythgoe. "Utah Poet Writes at a Fever Pitch." Deseret Morning News. 7 Nov. 2006.  
<<http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,635169291,00.html>>.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. Ceremony. New York: Penguin, 1986.
- Sontag, Susan. Illness and Its Metaphors. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001.
- Stegner, Wallace. Remembering Laughter. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1937.
- . Mormon Country. New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1942.

- . The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail. ed. A. B. Guthrie, Jr. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
- Swenson, May. "Summerfall." Great and Peculiar Beauty: A Utah Reader. Eds. Thomas Lyon and Terry Tempest Williams. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1995. 413-14.
- "Unnerve." Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1981.
- Watanabe, Sundy. "An Authentic Voice: A Conversation with Ken Brewer." Weber Studies: Conversation 22.1 (2004). 7 Nov. 2006.  
<<http://weberstudies.weber.edu/archive/archive%20E%20Vol.%2021.2-24.1/Vol.%2022.1/Ken%20Brewer%20Conv.htm>>.
- Wilder, Kathryn. Walking the Twilight: Women Writers of the Southwest. Flagstaff: Northland Publishing, 1994.
- . Walking the Twilight II: Women Writers of the Southwest. Flagstaff: Northland Publishing, 1994.
- Williams, Terry Tempest. Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place. New York: Vintage Books, 2001.

## VITA

Dayna Ellen Kidd Patterson was born in Logan, Utah, on May 22, 1980, the daughter of David Barrett Kidd, Nancy Ellen Page, and Cherie Ellen Beckmann. After completing her degree at Logan High School, Logan, Utah, in 1998, she entered Utah State University. She spent her sophomore year as an undergraduate studying abroad at the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland. She also lived for 16 months (January 2002 to May 2003) in Quebec and Ontario, Canada, serving as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In May 2004, she obtained her Bachelor of Arts in English with an emphasis in teaching and a French minor. After working for a year in Albuquerque, New Mexico, she entered the Graduate College of the University of New Mexico in September 2005. She transferred to the Graduate College of Texas State University-San Marcos in September 2006.

Permanent Address: 44 South 300 West

Logan, Utah 84321

This thesis was typed by Dayna E. Patterson