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The Columbia Country and the Dissolution of Meriwether Lewis

Speculation and Interpretation

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Few aspects of the Lewis and Clark expedition elicit as much debate and discussion as the 1
circumstances surrounding the death of Meriwether Lewis in October 1809, a little more than three
years after the conclusion of his voyage to the Pacific. While the discussion has raged with some
passion over whether Lewis was murdered or committed suicide, most scholars have concluded that
the troubled explorer killed himself. Both Thomas Jefferson and William Clark, who knew Lewis
better than anyone did, never said or did anything that would lead to a conclusion that their friend
and colleague had met with foul play. Both men would have been in a position to track down a
murderer or commission an investigation into a crime. Neither did. Still, it is unlikely that there will
ever be conclusive proof on the matter unless Lewis's remains are exhumed — something the
National Park Service, which oversees Lewis's grave on the Natchez Trace, has refused to do.
Inevitably, the subject will be shaped by speculation and informed interpretation.¹

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Captain Meriwether Lewis, by Charles (Balthazar Fevret de) Saint-Memin, 1807. This famous portrait of Lewis in buckskins and wearing the ermine tippet given him by Shoshone chief Cameahwait is emblematic of Lewis's identification with the trappings of Native American culture.

Presuming that Lewis did commit suicide, then, the question turns to a quest for intimations of 2

Lewis's mortality. A recent study by humanities scholar Clay Jenkinson is a formidable example of this new search for an understanding of Lewis's character, particularly in how the expedition to the Pacific may have played a role in his decision to shoot himself in a cabin at Grinder's Stand when he was only thirty-five years old. The reasons for Lewis's death also form one of the principal subtexts of Stephen Ambrose's wildly popular *Undaunted Courage*. In Ambrose's estimation, Lewis was "a good man in a crisis," an able frontiersman, intellectually curious about the natural world, and a capable commander of men. At the same time, however, Lewis had a "short temper" and could be impetuous. He also developed a "swelled head as a result of the adulation he had received," took drugs, and drank a lot of alcohol.²

The success of *Undaunted Courage* has made Lewis's death a somewhat fashionable topic in our own time, but speculations about his psychological condition go back to the fall of 1809. One of the earliest press reports on the explorer's demise noted that Lewis was rumored to have incurred expenses for which no appropriations had been made. The U.S. government had rejected a voucher he had proffered for reimbursement, a loss that, when added to similar objections to expenses Lewis had obligated, threatened to bankrupt him. Still, the anonymous correspondent wrote, "We can hardly suppose" that Lewis's financial travail "alone, could have produced such deplorable consequences" that he would kill himself. Today, postmodernist studies of Lewis and Clark, which deconstruct the various literary texts associated with the expedition, have begun to create an interpretive theory substantiating "the notion of exploration as an interior voyage" — that is, exploration as a discovery of self as much as a discovery of nature.³ In this essay, I am suggesting that the first cracks in Lewis's psyche occurred in the Pacific Northwest.

From his first few days west of the Continental Divide in the summer of 1805 until he re-crossed the Bitterroot Mountains in June 1806, Meriwether Lewis was confounded by the country drained by the Great River of the West. On August 12, 1805, Lewis and a handful of men descended Lemhi Pass "to a handsome bold running Creek of cold Clear water. [H]ere I first tasted the water of the great Columbia river." His exhilaration was short lived. The next day, he learned "unwelcome information" from Shoshone Chief Cameahwait about the difficulty of following the Columbian headwaters "to the great lake where the white men lived." Lewis inscribed in his journal for August 14 that the Shoshonean account of lands and rivers to the west "fell far short of my expectation or wishes." This sentiment could well serve as the epigraph for the western third of the trail traversed by President Jefferson's Expedition for Northwestern Discovery.⁴

The physical challenges and privations experienced by Lewis and Clark as they crossed the Bitterroot Mountains, coursed through the numerous rapids of the Snake and Columbia rivers, and were pummeled by oceanic storms and near-constant rain have been well chronicled. The psychological toll exacted by the harsh geographic extremes of the Columbia's country, however, has rarely been analyzed. William L. Lang, in a recent pathfinding essay, addresses the effects of the Columbian environment on William Clark during the trip down the river in the fall of 1805. In a key passage, Lang asserts that, for Clark, "the experience on the Columbia could well have begun to take its toll on him" and uses as an example an incident that occurred below Wallula Gap when the captain recorded that he had been in a position where he could have tomahawked every Indian in a lodge he was visiting. I am suggesting here that coping with a stressful geography had a considerably more forceful effect on Meriwether Lewis on the return trip *up* the Columbia in the spring of 1806 than it did on Clark at any time during the voyage.⁵



This gloomy scene in the Columbia River Gorge between Cascade Rapids and The Dalles is in the vicinity of Meriwether Lewis's difficulties with the Watlala Chinookans in the spring of 1806. The view is of the Oregon side above Bonneville Dam.

Courtesy Carlos Schwantes, photographer

Lewis's most reflective moments typically occurred when the expedition paused for logistical reasons, such as during winter encampments and when the group was staging portages, recuperating from particularly difficult traverses, and suffering bad weather conditions. Because we have little in the documentary record from Lewis's pen west of the Divide in 1805, insights into his thinking about the geography of the Columbia country must emerge from journal entries made during the expedition's extended stopovers during the winter and spring of 1806. Fort Clatsop, Rock Fort at The Dalles, and Camp Choppunish among the Nez Percés constitute a serial set of observation points — west, central, and east — from which Lewis rendered his reflections. Though the climate and topography of each place was markedly different from the others, Lewis's outlook on the entirety of the Columbian world was decidedly unfavorable. 6

The expedition's frame of reference for the Columbia was the Missouri River, which drained a vast open country that was a hunters' paradise. After only nine days of managing the Lemhi Pass portage and the reconnaissance of the Salmon River, Clark recorded that the men were already concerned about "Starveing in a Countrey where no game of any kind except a few fish can be found." The salmon were "pleasent eateing" but did not have the caloric value of the large game of the Missouri plains. To Lewis, the Missouri watershed was a cornucopia of riches. His favored metaphor for the Columbia country was a prison.⁶ 7

Lewis was quite explicit on this point at the Rock Fort on their way up the river on April 17, 1806. Gazing out on the wide-open vista, Lewis wrote of the "plains of the Columbia" being "covered with a rich virdure of grass and herbs." The air was "dryer and more pure." Lewis mused 8

that this landscape stood in contrast to "having been so long *imprisoned* in mountains and those almost impenetrably thick forrests of the seacoast" [emphasis added]. The heavily timbered Cascade Mountains were west of this desert and, though plentiful with game, not fit for agrarian pursuits. In discussing Lewis's perceptions, historical geographer John Logan Allen concluded that, for Lewis, the northern West as garden "stopped at the Rockies; beyond the mountains, themselves not much good for anything, were the treeless and barren plains of the Columbia." In Allen's estimation, Lewis saw the Columbia lowlands and coastal districts as "dank and choked with timber and underbrush." The cumulative effect of the litany of complaints about straitened diets and oppressive weather in the Columbia country, according to Allen, led to it being presented "least favorably of all western regions in the official reports of the expedition."⁷

During the return trip, at the eastern end of the Columbia Plateau, a definite sense of confinement informed Lewis's outlook. In May 1806, the Bitterroot Mountains presented themselves, the captain wrote, as an "icy barrier which seperates me from my friends and Country, from all which makes life esteemable." This lament evokes the same sentiment and psychological significance Lewis had felt at Fort Clatsop a few months before. On New Year's Day, Lewis had imagined being "in the bosom of our friends ... when with the zest given by the recollection of the present, we shall completely, both *mentally* and corporally, enjoy the repast which the hand of civilization has prepared for us" [emphasis added].⁸

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William Clark called the head of Cascade Rapids, shown here at full flood, the "Great Rapids of the Columbia." Clark's use of the term "cascades" was meant to refer to the waterfalls of the Gorge, such as Multnomah or Bridal Veil. The rapids were created by the famed Bonneville Landslide, which sloughed into the river from the Washington side, seen in the background. This geologic event was the root of the "Bridge of the Gods" mythology.

OHS neg., OrHi 105344

The Bitterroots had become Lewis's last hurdle for escape from his western cell, and a sense of dread infused his outlook. On May 21, 1806, anticipating the trek through the mountains that had endangered the expedition with an early snowstorm and scarce game the previous September, he wrote of the need to lay in provisions "for that dreary wilderness" ahead. The delay at Camp Choppunish on the Clearwater River because of unexpectedly deep snows on the Lolo Trail gave ample time for Lewis to churn over the "wretched portion of our journey, the Rocky Mountain...." Once the Bitterroot traverse finally commenced on June 15, Lewis, fearful of becoming "bewildered in these mountains," turned back because snow hindered progress and made way-finding difficult. On the second attempt, starting June 24, now guided by several helpful Nez Perce youths, the expedition made it over Lolo Pass and Lewis was free of his Columbian captivity. Lewis reflected on June 27 that "we were entirely surrounded by those mountains from which to one unacquainted with them it would have seemed impossible ever to have *escaped*" [emphasis added].⁹ 10



Members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition safely navigated this portion of the rock-strewn Columbia River in the fall of 1805. On the return trip the following spring the captains determined to transition to an overland caravan near The Dalles, thereby obviating the effects of having to go against an enlarged and colder current because of the spring freshet.

OHS neg., OrHi 92212

With relief, Meriwether Lewis "bid adieu to the snow" on June 29. Having eluded the clutches of the Columbia, he now faced the pleasant prospect of returning to the Missouri River. By July 11, Lewis was back in the vicinity of the Great Falls in present-day Montana, where "the air was 11

pleasant and a vast assemblage of little birds which croud to the groves on the river sung most enchantingly."¹⁰

Enchantment is not a word generally associated with Lewis's reactions to the Columbia country. It is a word, however, that Lewis previously used to describe his encounter with the White Cliffs of the Missouri, where he enjoyed "seens of visionary inchantment" — an expression that is emblematic of his Missourian experience. Nevertheless, Lewis's penchant for enchantment begs for analysis beyond the allusion to poetical delights, the usage to which the term is normally tied. The idea of enchantment in Lewis's expeditionary experience is a key to understanding his eventual undoing. The word *enchant* is related etymologically to incant, which means to bewitch or come under a spell. Certainly Lewis only used the word in circumstances that gave him pleasure; but if nature has sufficient agency to serve as an active element and is not a mere backdrop to human activity, then it also has the opposite power — to haunt. For Lewis, nature as enchantress is a sorcerer possessing powers for good or ill.¹¹

Lewis and Clark scholarship has begun to investigate this rich vein of inquiry. Thomas Slaughter, though generally critical of the worldview of Lewis and Clark, describes the captains' appreciation of nature's ability to bestow benefits to humans as a "profound insight" for men of their time and place. Over a hundred years ago, Elliott Coues also may have seen nature as an active force in the story of the expedition. In a provocative footnote to the original paraphrase of the journals prepared by Nicholas Biddle in 1814, Coues made this observation about Lewis's psychological difficulties on the return trip up the Columbia in the spring of 1806: "It has always seemed to me there was some natural demoralizing agency at the Dalles and Cascades of the Columbia." The circumstances at The Dalles that led Lewis to commit "assault and battery," as Coues characterizes it, are well worth investigating because they provide insight into the darkness that pervaded Lewis's view of the Columbian world.¹²

The Columbia River from the Cascades, past the Long and Short Narrows, to above Celilo Falls was Meriwether Lewis's private hell. For several weeks, as the expedition moved upstream over difficult landscapes and riverscapes, the Upper Chinookan and Sahaptin tribes hounded them. As Coues phrased it, certain Indians took advantage of the slow-moving, vulnerable explorers, "as bandits do mountain passes." In recognition of precisely this hazard, Northwest Company fur trader and explorer David Thompson later described making friends with riverside Indians going downstream even when circumstances did not dictate the necessity of doing so: "[I]n descending the current of a large River, we might pass on without much attention to them [people who lived and worked on the river]; but in returning against the current, our progress will be slow and close along the shore, and consequently very much in their power." This was precisely the predicament Lewis and Clark faced.¹³

Heading up the Columbia, at their tidewater provisioning camp of March 31 to April 5 near present-day Washougal, Washington, Lewis gave every appearance of normalcy and calm, confident command — catching up on journal entries and making botanical observations. Shortly thereafter, on April 10, the expedition re-encountered the Cascades, and the tumult began. In the spring, the "Great Rapids of the Columbia," as Clark called them, were far more turbulent than they had been during the portage of the previous fall. The water was now twenty feet higher; and whereas westbound only three spots in three miles had been a challenge, now, as Lewis wrote, "the whole distance is extremely difficult of ascent." Compounding the situation, during the portage several Indians pushed Pvt. John Shields off the trail and stole Lewis's dog and an axe. Provoked by this harassment, Lewis gave his men authority to shoot the villagers if the dog was not returned. The Indians were warned of this eventuality in sign language, and Lewis fumed in his journal that if there were any more incidents or if the Indians "insulted our men we should put them to instant death."¹⁴

This kind of explicit threat was rare, and nothing quite this contentious had occurred since the expedition's test of wills with the Sioux on the Missouri River nearly two years before. A little more than a week later, the expedition began the transition from a river expedition to an overland caravan. At The Dalles, Lewis supervised the portage around The Narrows while Clark proceeded farther upstream to the Wishram village near Celilo Falls to negotiate for horses. Having Clark take on this duty was a wise division of labor. Lewis's nerves were becoming frayed, so much so that he became agitated with Pvt. Alexander Willard, who had let wander some of the small herd of horses already secured. "I reprimanded him more severely for this peice of negligence than had been usual with me," Lewis confessed in his journal on April 19.¹⁵ 16

Even though the more even-tempered William Clark was conducting the tedious bargaining for horses upriver at Wishram, Lewis's journal for April 1806 is replete with rants against the Native inhabitants. On April 20, Lewis described the Tenino villagers at the head of the Long Narrows as "poor, dirty, proud, haughty, inhospitable, parsimonious and faithless in every respect, nothing but our numbers I beleive prevents their attempting to murder us at this moment." Among other passages Lewis later complained about "repeated acts of villainy" and expressed annoyance at getting "pased and repassed" by natives who "behaved themselves with distant respect towards us" on a trail that, it must be said, ran through their homeland, not his.¹⁶ 17

It might be asked what Clark thought of his co-captain's comportment. A popular axiom about the expedition is that the captains shared a mutual, cooperative outlook, and it would be wrong to conclude that William Clark ever held Meriwether Lewis in anything but a brotherly regard. The familial characterization is no stretch of the imagination, since Clark named his first son after Lewis. Still, it is naïve to suggest that Clark always agreed with Lewis, and a careful reading of the journals suggests a number of times when Clark seemed perturbed by Lewis's behavior. The most important instance of Clark's disquiet occurred in the years following their return to St. Louis, when Clark was working with Nicholas Biddle on the preparation of the first official account of the expedition. Clark corrected Lewis's journal where it gave a geography lesson on the country west of Lemhi Pass, editorially objecting to Lewis's appropriation of Clark's insights about that complicated intermontane topography. In the field, however, Clark chose more discreet methods for expressing his divergent opinions and never directly challenged Lewis. Doing so would constitute a breach in the command structure, and Clark was too good a soldier for that.¹⁷ 18

In the instance of Lewis's acidic characterization of the Tenino villagers, Clark, instead of making his customary verbatim copy of Lewis's remarks, did not include Lewis's characterizations of those people as "inhospitable, parsimonious or faithless" in his own account. Nor did he recite Lewis's observation about the expedition's size staving off "those attempting to murder us at this moment." To the contrary, Clark said the Teninos, the people who so irked Lewis, "appear entirely harmless." On April 20, Lewis reported: "I ordered the Indians from our camp this evening and informed them that if I caught them attempting to perloin any article from us I would beat them severely." When a tomahawk was subsequently stolen, Lewis ratcheted up the tension. Not being able to find the pilfered item after searching the Indians, in a fit of pique Lewis "ordered all the spare poles, paddles and the ballance of our canoe put on the fire as the morning was cold and also that not a particle should be left for the benefit of the indians." It is not hard to discern from this scene, one of Lewis's own self-incriminating construction, which of these motives — warmth or spite — was primary.¹⁸ 19

The scene worsened. Seeing this wasteful destruction taking place, one Indian attempted to retrieve an oarlock from the bonfire, an act the obstreperous Lewis characterized as "stealing." Lewis gave the man "several severe blows and mad[e] the men kick him out of camp. I now informed the indians that I would shoot the first of them that attempted to steal an article from us." He warned the Teninos "that I had it in my power at that moment to kill them all and set fire to their 20

houses." Sgt. Patrick Gass, seeing Lewis lose his composure and strike the Indian, wrote that this "was the first act of the kind, that had happened during the expedition."¹⁹

Clay Jenkinson, a close student of Lewis's personality, suggests that it is not a coincidence that the foregoing transpired in the absence of William Clark, who was at a village farther upstream near Celilo Falls. Later that summer, the only fatal encounter with Indians during the expedition — Lewis's fracas with the Blackfeet — occurred when Clark was on the Yellowstone hundreds of miles away. In both of these encounters, Lewis was without his emotional and diplomatic balance wheel.²⁰

Lewis was reunited with Clark above Celilo, but his troubles on the Columbia were far from over. Except for a few men in canoes, the expedition had become an overland party. Progress was disrupted when Toussaint Charbonneau's horse bolted and returned to the village of its purchase, opposite the Deschutes River on the north shore of the Columbia. Lewis assigned two men to accompany Charbonneau back to the village to secure the horse and riding gear — a saddle and a robe. When they returned with the horse and saddle but not the robe, Lewis exploded. He ordered Sacagawea forward to tell Clark to halt the vanguard while he went back to the village, "being determined either to make the indians deliver the robe or burn their houses." Being "disposed to treat them with every severity," Lewis wrote, he galloped to the village himself with a few men. Just as Lewis arrived, Francois Labiche found the robe hidden in one of the lodges and the situation was defused.²¹

Consider the situation. The expedition had finally secured enough horses to be able to march to the Nez Perce villages with dispatch. Charbonneau, who Lewis would later say he had the least regard for among the men of the detachment because of his missteps and gaffes, loses his horse blanket. The loss prompts Lewis to conduct a partial retrograde movement. All the while, Clark productively occupies the time now on his hands "waiting for Cap Lewis" by climbing Haystack Butte to view the range of peaks in the Cascade chain.²²

A few days later, Lewis's Columbia River troubles concluded with an episode precipitated by the decision to abandon the last of the canoes still being used to convey some of the heavier articles upriver. When the residents of the Wahowpum village — who Lewis reported had "tantalized" the men "with an exchange of horses for our canoes" — discovered that "we had made our arrangements to travel by land they would give us nothing for them [the canoes]," Lewis "determined to cut them in pieces sooner than leave them on those terms."²³

What are we to make of this? Jenkinson, in his profile of the personality of Meriwether Lewis, writes that what he calls Lewis's "fatal disorganization" did not simply fall on the captain during the last year of his life. That is, Lewis's psychological difficulties and descent into suicide had a longer history than the threat of financial setbacks and a loss of political stature in 1809. "Did anything happen 'out there,'" Jenkinson asks, "to bring on Lewis's mental collapse?"²⁴

Surely Lewis's behavior on the Columbia in April 1806 represents a man stressed to his limit and seemingly just short of a nervous breakdown. It is here that we find the onset of a troubled trajectory that terminated at Grinder's Stand just over three years later. Just two weeks after Lewis's ill-tempered flare-ups described above, he flew into another temperamental rage when a Nez Perce mocked his penchant for eating dog meat by throwing a live puppy on his plate. "I was so provoked at his insolence," Lewis reported on May 5, "that I caught the puppy and threw it with great violence at him and ... siezed my tomahawk and shewed him by signs if he repeated his insolence I would tommahawk him." Though using a phrase similar to the one William Clark used at the village of the "Fritened Indians" below Wallula the previous October — "I could have tomahawked every Indian here" — in this instance, Lewis intended real violence. Three days later, Lewis chided the expedition's hunters "severely for their indolence and inattention" to orders. He was clearly in a frazzled state. Clark makes no mention of these outbursts, yet another instance of his demurrals in

the face of Lewis's tempermentalism.²⁵

Lewis and Clark lore celebrates the expedition's salutary relationship with the Nez Perce Tribe, and so the incident with the puppy is a distinct anomaly. Both Stephen Dow Beckham and Thomas Slaughter have suggested that the rigors of trail life and the scarcity of provisions contributed to the deterioration of Lewis's relations with the Nez Perce. No doubt this is true to an extent, but over the long course of the expedition there had been equal, if not far greater, challenges presented to Lewis that did not bring about this kind of reaction. In the same place where Lewis suffered the "puppy incident," he would remark: "nobody seems much concerned about the state of provision." Lewis had, after all, judged this as a place where "nature seems to have dealt with a liberal hand."²⁶

What, then, was the "demoralizing agency," as Coues phrased it, that led to Lewis's dissolution? Recent studies suggest consideration of a different, darker source for Lewis's nightmare. Clay Jenkinson concludes that Lewis was "not altogether comfortable in a zone of ... great medicine," notwithstanding his adherence to the principles of the Enlightenment's secular empiricism. "For a Jeffersonian rationalist," Jenkinson writes, "Lewis at times seems surprisingly mystical." He cites Lewis's references to an "evil gennii" plaguing one of the pirogues and his inclination to fall under spells of enchantment.²⁷

Lewis's close contemporaries in western travel, the Astorians, who came West over the same terrain in 1810 and returned in 1812, were always circumspect around places Indians considered sacred. It might be asked whether Meriwether Lewis was circumspect enough. Here we enter a realm that is speculative in nature, but that should not prevent us from trying to make sense of Meriwether Lewis by asking some probing questions.²⁸ Was the "great medicine" of Indian culture the "demoralizing agency" that Coues first detected? If so, then what happened to Lewis "out there" is "out here" in the Columbia country. The psychology of belief tells us that some element or force can be perceived as effective in the mind of a person if that individual is convinced of the agent's efficacy. If a person believes in the "evil eye" or casting of spells, for example, then he can be susceptible to those influences.²⁹

Perhaps we can see this principle at work with the occasion of and short- and long-term consequences from Lewis's encounters with Indian burial grounds on the Columbia. On March 31, 1806, at their provisioning camp on the approach to the Cascades, Lewis describes the burial vaults on the river and the Native practice of interring the dead.³⁰ On April 11, during the difficult portage of the Great Rapids, Lewis left the lower camp and walked downstream "to observe the manner in which these people inter their dead." Inspecting one of the eight sepulchers, each of which measured about eighty square feet, Lewis observed "that the human bones filled it perfectly to the hight of about three feet." This was the burial ground of the Watlala Chinookans, who populated many villages from near the provisioning camp to the Cascades. This is the same day that John Shields was set upon on the trail, that Indians threw stones on members of the party, and that Lewis's dog was stolen. The inescapable conclusion is that Lewis did not make a connection between the "seenes of outradge" visited upon the party and his visit to the burial places of the Indians near the provision camp and the one near Beacon Rock just below the Cascades.³¹



Memaloose Island, a basalt outcropping in the middle of the main channel of the Columbia River below The Dalles, was used for centuries by the tribes in this region as a cemetery. The name translates to "Place of the Dead."

OHS neg., OrHi 92304

On April 15, Lewis called for a stop at Lower Memaloose Island, near present-day Hood River, Oregon, so he could examine "the deposits of the ded at that place." The island was a burial ground for Indians who lived near The Dalles, the same people who would shortly provoke Lewis. The burial vaults were similar to those he had seen below the rapids, Lewis wrote, and some were "more than half filled with dead bodies." That same day, Lewis reported that none of the tribes would trade for horses. Two days later, at Rock Fort, he complained that "few of the natives visited my camp today and those only remained a few hours." Becoming suspicious, Lewis began to speculate that the residents of what had been described the previous year as a "Friendly Village" had a "hostile design." Clark, who was trading for horses in a far more exposed position on the north bank of the river, did not express similar concerns.³²

If Lewis's contemporaries can be believed, his visit to the burial island was viewed as a sacrilege by the tribes whose ancestors were buried there. A close reading of Mackenzie's *Voyages* would have instructed Lewis that an unceremonious visit to an Indian graveyard was something done only to an enemy. David Thompson, following Lewis, also wanted to visit the burial vaults on the Columbia, but his Indian guide "begged of me not to do it, as the relations of the dead would be very angry." In short, at this point on the Columbia, Lewis became a pariah among the Natives, and perhaps in their eyes someone who needed to be punished for his effrontery, as his subsequent torment shortly proved.³³

In much the same way, Lewis's most fractious time with the Nez Percés — the so-called puppy incident — occurred near the time when he observed their burial sites. On May 7, 1806, Lewis describes how "the Chopunnish bury ther dead," although it is not certain that he visited a Nez Perce graveyard on that date. On the previous day, Clark cites information about Nez Perce funeral practices. Bracketing these references is the May 5 episode with the puppy and the odd temperament of a previously friendly and enormously helpful Nez Perce chief. On May 8, Lewis

wrote that "Twisted hair received us very coolly an occurrence as unexpected as it was unaccountable to us." Lewis interprets Twisted Hair's indifference as a consequence of a quarrel between Twisted Hair and Cut Nose, ostensibly over the handling of the expedition's horses the preceding winter. Clark seems less certain of this explanation than Lewis but is in general concurrence with it. While Cut Nose may have been critical of Twisted Hair's handling of the horses, there is no plausible reason why that should have made Twisted Hair speak to Lewis and Clark "in an angry manner." There is also no explanation for the comportment of a relation of Twisted Hair's, whom Lewis found to be "an impertinent proud supercilious fellow," an observation made on the same day that Cut Nose and Twisted Hair became "good friends again." All of this suggests that some other factor was at work here.³⁴

Once back across the Continental Divide, a fatalistic outlook occasioned Lewis's account of events. At the Great Falls of the Missouri, ruminating on the delay of one of his favored men, George Drouillard, Lewis had "settled it in my mind that a whitebear had killed him." When Lewis learned of Pvt. Hugh McNeal's encounter with the same species, he observed: "there seems to be a certain fatality attached to the neighbourhood of these falls." This perspective was no doubt informed by Lewis's own encounter with a grizzly bear the previous year and seems also to form a premonition of the difficulty about to arise on the Marias River two days later. On July 25, the day before the shoot-out with the Blackfeet, Lewis was frustrated by cloudy weather, which obviated his ability to make the astronomical observations necessary to fix latitude and longitude. This was compounded by the fact that his chronometer stopped, "as if the fates were against me."³⁵

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*Lewis's Encounter with the Blackfeet Indians on the Marias River, July 1806, from Patrick Gass's *A Journal of the Voyages and Travels of a Corps of Discovery*, published in 1810. This rustic and fanciful print shows Lewis at the nadir of his relations with Native Americans. The incident belies one of the favored notions of Lewis and Clark lore — that "only one man died."*

Lewis & Clark College Special Collections

If Lewis was metamorphosed on his tour of the West, these episodes form merely the *exterior* facets 35

of the devolved personality — an exhibition of nervous exhaustion all the more stark in contrast to the calmer and frequently more enlightened behavior of William Clark. By journey's end, Thomas Slaughter writes, "Lewis was already dead; only his body was still alive."³⁶ Left unanswered is what the *interior* of Lewis's mentality looked like.

The experience of Alexander Mackenzie may prove instructive in this regard. Lewis emulated the Scot frequently, up to and including plagiarizing Mackenzie's narrative. Though Lewis could not have deduced it, Mackenzie also suffered from writer's block at the end of his second voyage, taking eight years to get the account of his exploration into print. Scholars who have addressed Mackenzie's career refer to a Lewis-like post-expeditionary depression as a possible cause, but they ignore or explain away Mackenzie's benighted state by attributing it to exhaustion or troubling business concerns.³⁷

Mackenzie himself was more straightforward in explaining his mental condition. In a private letter to his cousin, Roderick Mackenzie, written in the spring of 1794, Alexander Mackenzie laid out a scenario that Meriwether Lewis may have lived through as well. In the fall of 1793, Mackenzie had intended to start copying his journal, but

the greatest part of my time was taken up in vain Speculations. I got into such a habit of thinking that I was often lost in thoughts nor could I ever write to the purpose. What I was thinking of, would often occur to me instead of that which I ought to do. I never passed so much of my time insignificantly, nor so uneasy. Although I am not superstitious, dreams amongst other things, caused me much annoyance. I could not close my eyes without finding myself in company with the Dead. I had some visions of late which almost convinced me that I lost a near relation or a friend.³⁸

Were these the types of dreams, visions, and morbid thoughts that Lewis had in the spring and summer of 1806 or, more intensely, in the fall of 1809? Might they have been prompted by his wilderness experiences? Did they lead to his suicide? There is, of course, no way to be sure, but there is one aspect of Lewis's death that is strongly, strangely reminiscent of yet another trail incident in Columbia country.

On October 9, 1805, during the expedition's westbound journey to the Pacific, the evening encampment on the Clearwater River was the scene of a riveting and mysterious incident. That night, among the many Nez Perce at the fire, a woman "began Singing Indian" and then proceeded to distribute camas root. She expected that each person to whom she made an offering would take it; but, as Pvt. Joseph Whitehouse reported, events took a dramatic turn when "one of our men refused to take them from hir, at which she grew angry and hove them in the fire, and took a Sharp flint from hir husband, and cut hir arms in sundry places." Patrick Gass said she "cut her arms from the wrists to the shoulders." With her blood gushing out, as Whitehouse described it, the Nez Perce woman tore off her beads and copper necklace and gave some of them to the assembly, singing all the while and sometimes making a hissing noise. She then ran toward the river, only to be retrieved by relatives. She fell into a speechless, paralyzed state, revived at last by water thrown on her face. Coming to consciousness, a sympathetic William Clark presented her a few small items. The whole episode lasted thirty minutes.³⁹



At Mitchell Point, below The Dalles, the river — even in its pre-engineered state — turned languid as a function of the backed-up flow created by the Bonneville Landslide and the so-called Cascades of the Columbia.

Carleton Watkins, photographer, OHS neg., CN 21633

Of the several journalists who recorded the incident, Clark has the least to say about it, referring 39 only to the "Singular acts of this woman" and that she scarified herself "in a horid manner." That Clark wrote so little may suggest that the person who declined the offering and inadvertently precipitated the woman's response was Meriwether Lewis. After all, Lewis, as Clark reported that day, was beginning to recover from severe intestinal distress brought on in no small measure by an over-ingestion of the same foodstuff the woman was offering.⁴⁰

What members of the expedition referred to as "madness" or a "fit" was almost certainly an 40 exercise in Native American spirituality. In the Indian world, illness could be caused by possession by evil spirits or an abandonment by guardian allies. In either case, disease was viewed as a symptom of a deep spiritual conflict. The disconcerting episode Lewis and Clark became a part of may have been an instance of a tradition on the Columbia Plateau of those haunted by roaming spirits mutilating themselves. There was also a tradition among men in the Nez Perce culture fasting and purging themselves before important undertakings such as hunting trips. That could be the reason Twisted Hair and Tetoharsky stayed away from the Americans on October 7, 1805, when they set out from Canoe Camp, even though the chiefs had "promised to accompany us." The Nez Perce men rejoined the expedition at the end of the following day.⁴¹

In this context, Lewis's weakened physical state after emerging from the Bitterroot Mountains 41 takes on additional meaning. Ill since arriving at the Nez Perce villages on Weippe Prairie, Lewis had been forced to forsake virtually all responsibility for the expedition for many days. Beginning on September 23 and for most of the ensuing twelve days, Clark made note in his log about Lewis's debilitated state. Lewis was so weak he could barely walk or ride a horse. On October 7, the day they left Canoe Camp, Clark complained that he was still "obliged to attend every thing."

Witnessing this, the Nez Perces may have interpreted Lewis's near-continuous purging and avoidance of food as a cleansing ritual similar to their own. In the Native world, plants were known to have curative powers, and the Nez Perce woman may have been trying to impart magical power to those who ate the camas root she offered.⁴²

The Nez Perce woman's bloodletting, like her offering of roots, may itself have been an attempt at a curative effect on Lewis. David Thompson witnessed several incidents reminiscent of the Clearwater episode. In 1801, his Indian guide, not feeling well, called his wife near and asked if she had a flint. When she responded in the negative, the guide made a lancet out of his own flint, "opened a Vein in her Arm,... [and] having drawn about 3/4 pint of Blood" in a bowl, drank it. When Thompson and his men reacted with revulsion, the guide asked:

have I done wrong? — when I find my Stomach out of order, the warm Blood of my Wife in good Health refreshes the whole of my Body & puts me to rights; in return, when she is not well I draw Blood from my Arm, she drinks it, it invigorates & gives her Life. All our Nations do this, and all of us know it to be good Medicine.⁴³

After setting out from Kettle Falls on another trip in 1811, Thompson stopped at a Native village at the mouth of the San Poil River where it flows into the Columbia. The chief told the people to dance, so "that we might be preserved in the strong Rapids we had to run down our way to the Sea." The ceremony was frequented by the singular acts of one woman, "who always danced out of the Crowd & kept a line close along us, & always left the others far behind." This behavior was "noticed by the chief who at length called her to order" by directing that she dance with the other Indians or get a partner. She did both, Thompson wrote, "but still kept close to us." Two days later, as Thompson stopped on his approach to the Okanogan River, where another dance was conducted "for our good voyage & preservation to the Sea & back again, & that they might see us as well in every way as at present."⁴⁴ All of Thompson's experiences with ceremonialized departures, bloodletting, and the "singular" cuts of a woman seem to be the formative elements of Lewis and Clark's mysterious night on the Clearwater.

Meriwether Lewis pulled into Grinder's Stand on the Natchez Trace four years and a day after the incident with the Nez Perce woman on the Clearwater. We know he had his journals with him. Stephen Ambrose, in his biography of Lewis, asks over two dozen rhetorical questions speculating on what might have been going through the troubled mind of Captain Lewis that night. Were his thoughts, Ambrose mused, about "the rivers, the Missouri and the Columbia and others? ... of those remarkable white cliffs along the Missouri, the Gates of the Rocky Mountains, the Columbia gorge.... Did he recall the Nez Perce and their fabulous ponies and generosity?"⁴⁵

We can add a few more. Because Lewis had his journals with him, did he look for entries in early October from previous years? Did he recollect the vivid incident on the Clearwater? When Mrs. Grinder and others entered Lewis's room, they reportedly found him cutting his limbs with a razor. When Lewis asked, rather oddly, for water to "heal his wounds," was he envisioning a re-enactment of the revivification of the Nez Perce woman? Carolyn Gilman has argued, and congenially so, that Lewis occasionally lost himself in his Indian identity. Perhaps this theory should be extended to the means of his death as well. There are no answers to these speculations. We only know that at his end Lewis was a tormented soul. As for why, as Clay Jenkinson suggests, each of us is free to dismiss what is not persuasive.⁴⁶

A popular modern explanation for this denouement comes in the form of what Jenkinson derides as the "new orthodoxy": Lewis was manic-depressive, suffering from bipolar disorder. This theory, popularized by Ambrose, apparently without foundation in the scholarly literature, is the equivalent of the Warren Commission's "single bullet theory." Whereas the Warren Commission concluded that one of Lee Harvey Oswald's shots hit both President John F. Kennedy and Governor John

Connally, the Ambrosian paradigm has Lewis's manic-depression explaining the two great mysteries surrounding Lewis — why he did not always keep a journal and why he committed suicide.⁴⁷

That Lewis was suffering from significant psychological imbalances at the end of his life seems ⁴⁷ beyond dispute. In itself, however, that does not mean he was bipolar. Little critical analysis has been applied to Lewis's behavior as correlated to the literature of mental illness. Manic-depression is a serious disorder that involves more than just occasionally feeling blue. Those who suffer from the condition exhibit pronounced, nearly debilitating swings in mood, behavior, and energy, alternating between expansive thinking and self-image and activity levels in the manic phase and the lethargy, impaired mental acuity, and lack of feelings of pleasure during the depressive phase. (The latter characteristics also define unipolar depression.) Ambrose himself notes that, except for his time with the Nez Perces in 1805 when he suffered from intense gastrointestinal distress, Lewis was physically active throughout the expedition. He was fully involved in facing the challenges of the venture. Absent the physical manifestations of recurring bipolarity, then, the burden of the manic-depression thesis falls to Lewis's sporadic journal-keeping.⁴⁸

In the famed birthday rumination at Shoshone Cove near Lemhi Pass, Lewis attributed the gaps ⁴⁸ in his journals to his own laziness. "I viewed with regret," Lewis wrote, "the many hours I have spent in *indolence*, and now soarly feel the want of that information which those hours would have given me had they been judiciously expended" [emphasis added]. This statement alone could provide a sufficient explanation for the many days when Lewis did not write in his journal. After all, the only "information" succeeding generations would likely want from Lewis was his account of western exploration. This statement, though self-critical, is hardly enough to diagnose the psychological precariousness that has been attributed to it.⁴⁹

Relatedly, it is also instructive that the gaps in Lewis's journal come not at the most stressful ⁴⁹ times on the journey but, rather, at the least. From April through September 1805, Lewis describes heading up the Missouri where no whites had been before, finding the Continental Divide, and crossing the Bitterroots. From January through April 1806, he writes extensively about waiting out a miserable winter at Fort Clatsop and traveling against the spring freshet on the Columbia River. He omits the long summer of exploration up the Missouri in 1804, on a river often traveled by white traders, and the languid float to St. Louis from the Mandan villages in the summer of 1806. The only anomaly is the final push to the Pacific from the Nez Perce homelands in the fall of 1805. Even in that instance, however, Lewis, in effect, prefaced the void in his journal by writing about "having triumphed over the rocky Mountains and ... the flattering prospect of the final success of the expedition." In that respect, Lewis may have seen the last phase of the westward voyage as anticlimactic, especially since other Euro-American explorers had been on the Columbia River before him.⁵⁰



The Corps of Discovery passed this vicinity on or near October 27, 1805. Here, William Clark first discerned the western limit of the "Great Plain of the Columbia" — a term he coined — as trees became evident on the landscape for the first time since the expedition left the Nez Perce Villages on the Clearwater River on October 9.

Carleton Watkins, photographer, OHS neg., CN 21638

There are other reasons to doubt the theory Ambrose put forth. Manic-depression is on the severe end of a range of mood disorders in which "significant interference with the normal functioning of life" occurs. Students of the expedition have been frustrated by the lack of diligence in Lewis's journaling; but by itself or combined with Lewis's competency over the span of the voyage, there is not sufficient evidence to conclude that Lewis was in the recurringly debilitated state required to meet the clinical definition of manic-depression. People suffering from bipolar disorder also tend to be obsessively organized, which would not seem to apply to Lewis's comportment in regard to the journals. Furthermore, depressive phases are frequently seasonal in nature, and there is no correlation of this syndrome and the times when Lewis stopped writing.⁵¹

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Lewis *may* have suffered from the mild disorder known as cyclothymia, which causes far less pronounced mood swings than manic-depression and brings on other minor symptoms such as vague medical complaints. President Jefferson characterized Lewis as a man "much afflicted & habitually so with hypochondria," which is consistent with the symptoms of this syndrome. Jefferson determined that Lewis's "affections" were a "constitutional disposition in all the nearer branches of the family of his name, & was more immediately inherited by him from his father." It is interesting to note that some modern diagnosticians refer to this disorder as "constitutional cyclothymic."⁵²

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Though cyclothymia is distinguishable from manic-depression and unipolar depression (which may have been Lewis's end-state), it is nevertheless on the same spectrum as these more extreme illnesses and can sometimes lead to them. Frequently, cyclothymia precedes an overt clinical illness by a number of years, as would have been the case with Meriwether Lewis's fatal depression. Stressful events — job setbacks, romantic failures, reversal of financial fortunes — can lead to

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suicide, and all of those cascaded down on Lewis in the last years of his life. Since everyone is subject to personal crises and strains during their lives yet few actually commit suicide, however, stress alone is not a sufficient explanation for Lewis's state of mind. An underlying predisposition such as a mild mood disorder — the mental health equivalent of a weakened immune system — can make an individual vulnerable to an "opportunistic infection." Absent treatment, the descent into psychosis, as Kate Jamison describes it, "is gradual, then utter."⁵³

Suicide is more common in people suffering from unipolar depression than bipolar manic-depression. Morbid thoughts, fitful sleep, heavy drinking, constant pacing — all behaviors exhibited by Lewis during his last days — are many of the classic symptoms found at the nadir of depression. Those, like Lewis, who think alcohol will deaden the pain end up making their mental illness worse. It is also instructive that symbolism and the power of suggestion play a formidable role in how a person constructs his suicidal tableaux, something worth noting given the incident on the Clearwater and the manner by which Lewis killed himself. A memory or the awareness of the suicidal attempts of others can establish a stylistic context — an aesthetic — for one's own suicide.⁵⁴

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On the westbound trip, William Clark referred to an "agitated gut" — a narrowing of the river to a few dozen yards — which the expedition ran in its haste to get to the Pacific Ocean. Indians stood on the rocks and watched, amazed and bemused, as the expedition passed.

OHS neg., OrHi 92215

There is another possibility — Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD — a condition that often occurs in conjunction with alcohol and drug abuse, that can affect a person's ability to function, and that can precipitate depressive episodes — is the probable bridge between Lewis's innate cyclothymic predisposition and his fatal depression. Occupational instability — that is, the avoidance of work, interpersonal conflicts, and a failure to perform duties — is a common outcome for those with PTSD and was the hallmark of Lewis's post-expeditionary life. Lewis had at least two traumatic experiences, defined diagnostically as the actuality or threat of physical injury or death or other similarly horrifying circumstances, during the expedition. The first was when he stared down a grizzly that attacked him near the Great Falls of the Missouri on June 14, 1805; the second was the

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fatal skirmish with the Blackfeet on July 27, 1806. In regard to the bears, Lewis once wrote, their "being so hard to die reather intimatedates us all." On the night of his death, Lewis is reputed to have said to his servant who found him mortally wounded: "I am no coward; but I am so strong, [it is] so hard to die."⁵⁵

Individuals in even more ambiguous situations, such as journalists or peacekeepers, can also suffer from PTSD. In situations where life and limb may not be at immediate risk, stressors common to war zone experiences may have a cumulative effect and result in PTSD. Those stresses might be "changes in lifestyle, separation from family, exhaustion, unfavorable climatic conditions, uncertainty about the length of the mission, and demoralization about the efficacy of the mission." Lewis's longing for home, his behavioral aggression, an exaggeration of threats, the avoidance of writing the expeditionary narrative, his problematic interpersonal relationships, and other personality abnormalities such as excessive drinking and verbal boisterousness — all seen in the captain's behavior from the spring of 1806 forward — seem to point to PTSD symptomatology.⁵⁶

Complex PTSD, a relatively new diagnosis, may also be applicable to Lewis's case. With this syndrome, a chronic or long-term trauma occurs. People who are held in captivity, such as prisoners of war, are victimized because they are unable to flee. Individuals suffering from Complex PTSD exhibit alterations in emotional regulation, such as explosive anger, avoid thinking about trauma-related topics, abuse alcohol and drugs to numb their feelings, and engage in self-mutilation and other forms of self-inflicted harm.⁵⁷

Writing only a few decades after Lewis's demise, Francis Parkman, the great scholar of the Oregon Trail experience, described what can happen to those who stride into an unknown country: ⁵⁷

To him who has once tasted the reckless independence,... the haughty self-reliance, the sense of irresponsible freedom, which the forest life engenders, civilization thenceforth seems flat and stale.... The wilderness, rough, harsh, and inexorable, has charms more potent in their seductive influence than all the lures of luxury and sloth. And often he on whom it has cast its magic finds no heart to dissolve the spell, and remains a wanderer and an Ishmaelite to the hour of its death.⁵⁸

If Meriwether Lewis killed himself, as was commonly believed in his time and in our own, then his death was, as Kate Jamison phrases it, "a final gathering of unknown motives, complex psychologies, and uncertain circumstances." Troubling it is that a capable person would take his own life; it is no less troubling for those who face the void created by the absence. As Jamison suggests, the suicide's death "insinuates itself far too corrosively" into the dreams, expectations, and fears of those left behind.⁵⁹

Here, it seems, we have an intimation of why Lewis's self-destruction draws scholarly interest and public fascination nearly two hundred years after his death. Lewis was the protégé of Thomas Jefferson, who was arguably the most influential American in history. He was an accomplished figure in one of the most highly regarded fields of human endeavor — exploration. He was widely admired and feted and, as the poet Edwin Arlington Robinson phrased it, had "everything to make us wish that we were in his place," including the opportunity to see the American West in its near-primal state.⁶⁰

All of this may not have been enough for Lewis, and even if he did not kill himself his life had become a shambles, having lost or squandered schooling, social standing, fame, and potential riches. Nevertheless it is almost certain that the turning point in his life occurred during his "darling project" — the expedition to the Pacific — and that it became manifest in the Columbia country. Lewis's experiences in the Northwest, through what proved for him to be a series of troublesome landscapes, form a catalogue of disappointments, tensions, and confrontations. In the end, the Columbia country not only failed to meet Lewis's expectations or wishes, it led to his undoing. ⁶⁰

Notes

¹ See, for example, Stephen Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 467. See also Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents, 1783–1854*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 2:574–5; Paul R. Cutright, "Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit," *We Proceeded On* 12:1 (March 1986); Dawson A. Phelps, "The Tragic Death of Meriwether Lewis," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3:13 (July 1956): 305–18. Among those who subscribe to the view that Lewis was murdered are Vardis Fisher, *Suicide or Murder? The Strange Death of Governor Meriwether Lewis* (Chicago: A. Swallow, 1962); Eldon G. Chuinard, "How Did Meriwether Lewis Die? It Was Murder," pts. 1–3, *We Proceeded On* 17:3 (August 1991): 4–12; 17:4 (November 1991): 4–10; 18:1 (January 1992): 4–10; and most recently J. Frederick Fausz and Michael A. Gavin, "The Death of Meriwether Lewis: An Unsolved Mystery," *Gateway Heritage* 24:2–3 (Fall 2003/Winter 2004): 66–79.

² Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 471–3. See Clay S. Jenkinson, *The Character of Meriwether Lewis: "Completely Metamorphosed" in the American West* (Reno: Marmarth Press, 2000).

³ *Norfolk Gazette & Public Ledger* (Virginia), November 20, 1809, 3. I am indebted to Eb Geisecke for bringing this account to my attention. The most celebrated postmodernist account is Thomas P. Slaughter, *Exploring Lewis and Clark: Reflections on Men and Wilderness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003). The quotation is from James P. Ronda, "'So Vast an Enterprise': Thoughts on the Lewis and Clark Expedition," in *Voyages of Discovery: Essays on the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. James P. Ronda (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1998), 22.

⁴ Gary E. Moulton, ed., *Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, 13 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983–2001), 5:74, 81, 88 [hereafter JLCE]. The term "Corps of Discovery" never appears in the primary documentary record but was a part of the subtitle to Patrick Gass's unauthorized account of the expedition in 1807. See Stephen Dow Beckham et al., *The Literature of the Lewis and Clark Expedition: A Bibliography and Essays* (Portland, Ore.: Lewis and Clark College, 2003), 105. The term "Expedition for Northwestern Discovery" (or its variants) is hardly ubiquitous, but it has the merit of authenticity. See, for example, Jackson, ed., *Letters*, 1:113, 210; 2:549; and JLCE, 3:14, 153, 170, 172n10; 9:231–2.

⁵ William L. Lang, "Lewis and Clark on the Columbia River: The Power of Landscape in the Exploration Experience," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 87:3 (Summer 1996): 146. See also Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 284–312; Stephen Dow Beckham, *Lewis & Clark from the Rockies to the Pacific* (Portland, Ore.: Graphics Arts, 2002), 13–55; Rex Ziak, *In Full View* (Astoria, Ore.: Moffitt House Press, 2002), 29–49.

⁶ JLCE, 5:175, 177; Jenkinson, *Lewis*, 14.

⁷ JLCE, 5:339; 7:131; John Logan Allen, *Lewis and Clark and the Image of the American Northwest* (New York: Dover, 1991), 326, 397–8.

⁸ JLCE, 7:267; 6:151–2.

⁹ JLCE, 7:275, 325; 8:31, 56.

¹⁰ JLCE, 8:61, 104

¹¹ JLCE, 4:226. See Dayton Duncan, *Scenes of Visionary Enchantment* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

¹² Jenkinson, *Lewis*, 65–95. With some fanfare, Thomas Slaughter credits Clark with the observation that, relative to the Nez Percés, "nature seems to have dealt with a liberal hand." In his interpretation that favors Clark over Lewis, Slaughter overlooks that it was Meriwether Lewis who made this observation, on May 9, 1806. JLCE, 7:234. In their description of "prodegies," such as the giant fountain near the Great Falls of the Missouri or the "Snowey Mountains," the captains also warranted nature at work. See Slaughter, *Exploring Lewis and Clark*, 10; JLCE, 4:339–40, 351; 7:234; Elliot Coues, ed.,

History of the Expedition under the Command of Lewis and Clark, 4 vols. (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1893), 3:959n.

¹³ Coues, ed., *History*, 3:959n; Jack Nisbet, *Sources of the River: Tracking David Thompson across Western North America* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1994), 189.

¹⁴ JLCE, 5:372; 7:79–88, 90–1, 94, 105.

¹⁵ JLCE, 7:143–4.

¹⁶ JLCE, 7:146, 156, 163.

¹⁷ JLCE, 5: 88–92, 94n2, 95n16

¹⁸ JLCE, 7:146, 151–2, 148. When David Thompson reached this same juncture in 1811, having read a transcript of Lewis's summary letter about the expedition and Patrick Gass's published account, he wrote: "Saw nothing of the reported bad Indians." See Barbara Belyea, ed., *Columbia Journals: David Thompson* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 154, 274.

¹⁹ JLCE, 7:151–2; 10:213.

²⁰ Jenkinson, *Lewis*, 78. Thomas Slaughter says Clark defused the situation at the Long Narrows and the captain exercised discretion about the incident in his journal. In fact, Lewis simply left the scene and joined Clark upriver. Clark actually recounted the incriminating tale of Lewis's loss of composure. Slaughter, *Exploring Lewis and Clark*, 179–80. JLCE, 7:154.

²¹ JLCE, 7:155–6.

²² Jackson, ed., *Letters*, 1:369; JLCE, 7:157.

²³ JLCE, 7:163. Wahowpum was four miles east and on the opposite side of the river from today's Blalock, Oregon.

²⁴ Jenkinson, *Lewis*, 42, 102.

²⁵ JLCE, 5:301, 303 (Clark's qtn); 7:210, 226.

²⁶ Beckham, *Rockies to the Pacific*, 120; Slaughter, *Exploring Lewis and Clark*, 141; JLCE, 7:275, 234.

²⁷ Jenkinson, *Lewis*, 41, 67, 73. See also Slaughter, *Exploring Lewis and Clark*, 72.

²⁸ Laton McCartney, *Across the Great Divide: Robert Stuart and the Discovery of the Oregon Trail* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 219; Jenkinson, *Lewis*, 109.

²⁹ Albert Pepitone, "Beliefs and Cultural Social Psychology," in *Cross-Cultural Topics in Psychology*, ed. Leonore Loeb Adler and Uwe P. Gielen (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994), 139–47.

³⁰ JLCE, 7:38–9. Clark, interestingly, makes no mention of such matters, being more concerned with the geography of the region, specifically the location of what came to be known as the Willamette River. Still, this was not the first time one of the captains had seen or visited Indian burials along Columbia. On the westbound trip Clark made several oblique references to Indian graveyards, but in only two instances did he frequent them for the purpose of examination — one below the Pelican rapids on October 20, 1805, and then again near Beacon Rock on October 31, 1805. JLCE, 5: 263, 268–9, 281–2, 309, 311, 325, 349, 358–61, 380.

³¹ JLCE, 7: 107–8

- ³². JLCE 7: 123, 131–4. When in this vicinity the previous fall, the expedition had noted but did not examine Indian tombs on the island — or, at least, Clark didn't. JLCE, 5:325, 349, 353n5.
- ³³. Lamb, *Mackenzie Journals*, 359; Nisbet, *David Thompson*, 225. Lewis visited Indian burial sites, at least in part, in response to Jefferson's direction that the expedition become "acquainted" with the customs of encountered tribes. See Jackson, ed., *Letters*, 1:32–6, 62–3. In consultation before the expedition left St. Louis, Dr. Benjamin Rush prepared for Lewis's "abstract queries under the several heads of *Physical History, medicine, Morals and Religeon* of the Indians, which I will have no doubt will be servicable in directing my inquiries among that people." Two of the questions Rush posed were: "Is Suicide common among them?" and "How do they dispose of their dead, and with what Ceremonies do they inter them." *Ibid.*, 16–19, 21, 50, 52.
- ³⁴. JLCE, 7:222, 228, 232, 235.
- ³⁵. JLCE, 8:109–10, 127.
- ³⁶. Slaughter, *Exploring Lewis and Clark*, 20. See also Jenkinson, *Lewis*.
- ³⁷. Barbara Belyea, "Heroes and Hero Worship: Alexander Mackenzie's Influence on the Lewis and Clark Expedition Journals," *Oregon Humanities* (Spring 2004): 38–43; David L. Nicandri, "Lewis and Clark: Exploring under the Influence of Alexander Mackenzie," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 95:4 (Fall 2004): 171–81; Lamb, *Mackenzie Journals*, 23; Barry Gough, *First across the Continent: Sir Alexander Mackenzie* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 169; Hayes, *First Crossing*, 236.
- ³⁸. Lamb, *Mackenzie Journals*, 454. Mackenzie seems not to have visited gravesites as much as Lewis did, but he did from time to time. See *ibid.*, 310, 347, 353–4.
- ³⁹. JLCE, 9:235; 10:152; 11:344–5.
- ⁴⁰. JLCE, 5: 253; Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 295. Curiously, the same evening as the incident on the Clearwater, Old Toby, the expedition's Shoshone guide, left abruptly at dark. Clark wrote: "we Could not account for the Cause of his leaveing us at this time." Patrick Gass attributed Old Toby's departure to a reluctance to run the river's rapids. JLCE, 5:252; 10:152.
- ⁴¹. JLCE, 5:249, 252–3; 9:235; 10:152; 11:344; James Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 162; Carolyn Gilman, *Lewis and Clark: Across the Divide* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 2003), 269–71.
- ⁴². JLCE, 5:232–6, 243, 245–6, 249; Gilman, *Across the Divide*, 271, 278.
- ⁴³. Belyea, *Columbia Journals*, 26. For Thompson to consider this "so savage an Action" is no small irony considering how common bloodletting was as a medicinal cure in Euroamerican society. See *ibid.*, 204n. Lewis and Clark often bled those under their care. See JLCE, 2:356; 3:278–9; 4:276–7, 279, 334; 6:429.
- ⁴⁴. Belyea, *Columbia Journals*, 144, 146, 265n. During these dances, Thompson wrote that the Indians often exhibited "a trait of enthusiasm," what Belyea tells us is a nineteenth-century euphemism for fanatical excitement. *Ibid.*, 267n.
- ⁴⁵. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 464.
- ⁴⁶. Gilman, *Across the Divide*, 202; Jenkinson, *Lewis*, 110. Maj. Gilbert Russell, commander of the fort at Chickasaw Bluffs where Lewis stayed in the days just before his death, described the manner of Lewis's suicide as occurring in a "Barbarian-like manner." Jackson, ed., *Letters*, 2:573.
- ⁴⁷. Jenkinson, *Lewis*, 97; Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 306–7, 430–1, 461–5. On the Warren Commission's "single-bullet

theory," see Gerald Posner, *Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK* (New York: Random House, 1993), 327, 410–11.

⁴⁸. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 306; Jenkinson, *Lewis*, 98; Dr. David Musto, personal communications, April 17, 19, 2004; Kate Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 13. I am indebted to Dr. Edward Birochak for introducing me to Jamison's work.

⁴⁹. JLCE, 5:118; Jenkinson, *Lewis*, 102–3.

⁵⁰. JLCE, 5:229.

⁵¹. Jamison, *Touched with Fire*, 13, 16, 98, 132

⁵². Jackson, ed., *Letters*, 2:575n., 591–2; Jamison, *Touched with Fire*, 13–15.

⁵³. Jamison, *Touched with Fire*, 14–15; Kate Redfield Jamison, *Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 19, 87, 91–2, 104, 199.

⁵⁴. Jamison, *Night Falls Fast*, 111–12, 127, 142.

⁵⁵. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 238, 380–4, 437–46, 450–65. See information on PTSD posted by the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, at www.ncptsd.org/facts/general (accessed February 25, 2005); JLCE, 4:141; 8:133–6; Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 465.

⁵⁶. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, "PTSD in Journalists," "Traumatic Stress and Peacekeepers," "Forensic Validity of a PTSD Diagnosis," and "Anger and Trauma," www.ncptsd.org/facts/specific (accessed February 25, 2005). For a detailed study on the causative correlation between PTSD and depression, see Darin J. Jackson et al., "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Depression Symptomatology in a Sample of Gulf War Veterans: A Prospective Analysis," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 69:1 (2001): 41–9.

⁵⁷. See U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, "Complex PTSD," www.ncptsd.org/facts/specific/ (accessed February 25, 2005).

⁵⁸. Jenkinson, *Lewis*, 97, 115; E.N. Feltskog, ed., *Parkman: The Oregon Trail* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 27a, 51a.

⁵⁹. Jamison, *Night Falls Fast*, 26.

⁶⁰. Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869–1935), "Richard Cory," at the website of the Academy of American Poets, www.poets.org.

⁶¹. JLCE, 4:10.

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