

the tumbling water washes bones

Jordan Abel

A deep, narrow chasm. Black rocks. The river lies still on those black rocks. A mile above there is a tumbling; there is a moment. At this very moment there is a tumbling in the air a mile above us that runs straight through the open heavens and into some other place. A deep hollow. No shape. No consistency. No breaking some hundred feet in the air. Some places are softer than others. Some hundred feet up in the air. Some right angles enter into narrow passageways and some right angles break off a mile in the air above us. These rocks are full of cracks. Water has worked through some deep hollows. Breaking here. Wearing there. Breaking and wearing. Breaking and wearing until the chasm separates into two caverns. Some hundred feet in the air there is no danger. There is scattered driftwood and the scent of roses. There are glimpses of roses and rocks and shrubs. There is a steep, rugged ascent. A path that winds among the black rocks and trees. Somewhere in the air there is the scent of roses. Somewhere out there is the wilderness.

A reasonable distance through scenes of greenery and nature and glimpses of mountain ranges that disappear just as suddenly as they appear. Among the rocks and trees there are mounds of earth and other rocks and other driftwood. Somewhere there is an islet and another islet and a clear sheet of water and bald rocks just beneath the surface. There are forests and straits and islets and rocks and somewhere in the air is the scent of roses. There are crevices and fissures and rocks. The rocks surround themselves in other rocks. Although there are sometimes mounds of earth in between. On the shore, there are fragments of rocks. In the deeper parts of the river, there is more tumbling. At this very moment, the river pours into a wide fissure where it just becomes more water between rocks. Between the broken rocks and the deep, roaring cavern there is the scent of roses and driftwood and trees. There is light and straight, naked rocks and immovable trees. There are woods and rivers. And the bed of that river is ragged with rocks and intersecting ravines that cut silently across the water above where somewhere in the air is the scent of roses. The woods are full of sounds and rocks. The woods are full. The upper air, where it drifts over the tops of trees, is full of sounds. Just where it breaks over the tops of trees there are slow, intermingling drifts of sounds and scents that brush over the clearing some fifty or sixty feet up in the air. Rocks and

logs and mounds of earth and narrow fissures and bottom land and little ponds and a brook that shoots through the narrow fissures, spreading through moment after moment of stretched light. There is a bellowing in the passageways between the rocks. There are moments of admonished madness. There are moments spreading over the acres of bottom land. There are precipices and adjacent lakes and head waters. There is a fierceness here that floats through the waters. These rivers are full to the brim. These waters stream down to our feet. In six hours these waters will rush in. And in another six hours these waters will rush out. Salt grows in this water. The water in the woods and on the great lakes and in the higher parts of the sea. Stretching out horizontally until the current flows upward like blood at the throat. On these waters the edges touch the shores and the deerpaths trace back to the streams. In the short distance in between the water and the black rocks is a deep shadow. The breath of the stream. The glancing waters. The throat of the river. These woods are full. Gliding above somewhere up in the impenetrable darkness is the scent of roses. Somewhere there is the sound of rushing waters ringing through the deep stillness of the night. The moon rises and the light glances here and there on the water and down to the river bed. At times, the light hangs in the air on the breath of the river. There are dark waters; there is night. This is the unmingled sweetness of air that sinks into the foaming waters. These are the vaults of forest. There is a stillness here somewhere in the wilderness. There is lightning and then there is stillness. There are echoes that rush through the forest until they disappear. A mile above there is a tumbling. In the foaming waters, there is the colour of blood gushed from some other place. Some other throat. Some other, softer place. Some waters carry the dead. Somewhere up in the air there is the scent of roses. Some flames last forever. Some waters thicken with limbs and bodies and trembling voices. Some waters are still. Somewhere in the velocity of the uproar there is a current of air. An unmingled sweetness that sinks in to the forest. The narrow path adjacent to the brook is full of bodies. The blood as natural as water. Glassy mirrors. The sunken hillsides. The shores. The black rocks between the mounds of earth. The glittering stars. The open air floating over the forest. In the valley, the stream overflows onto the banks. Here, the tumbling water washes bones and the waters of the river go in to the salt lake. There is a canopy from the woods spreading over the lake, shadowing a dark current with a deep hue. When the sun is setting, these waters become healing waters. But the sun is not setting and the current branches silently into the dark parts of the lake. Somewhere in the forest, bark is peeled from a tree. Branches break. For many minutes there is a struggle and a deep, cool wind. There is a current of air. There is silent motion plunging

and glancing and sweeping over the broken branches. The sound from the rushing waters drifts through the air. There are words and yells and cries. As the air flows up from somewhere in the deep, narrow ravine, there is silence again. With the exception of the sounds that come from the rushing water.

This piece is an excerpt from an ongoing (and largely unfinished) project of mine tentatively titled Timeless American Classic. The pieces in this project are all derivations, reinterpretations, and creative distant readings of James Fenimore Cooper's novel The Last of the Mohicans, and are inspired in part by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's argument (in An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States) that Cooper's novel played a role in reinventing the colonial origins of the United States and in creating a narrative that was "instrumental in nullifying guilt related to genocide." My project seeks to disrupt the colonial logic in the novel by displacing and reorienting the text itself in order expose the problematic representation of Indigenous peoples. This particular piece responds to (and perhaps reflects) the deeply troubling fascination the novel has with the concept of terra nullius and empty, uninhabited land. As such, "the tumbling water washes bones" is an impurely conceptual piece that draws heavily from Cooper's descriptions of blank land but also includes many of my own translations and reinterpretations.