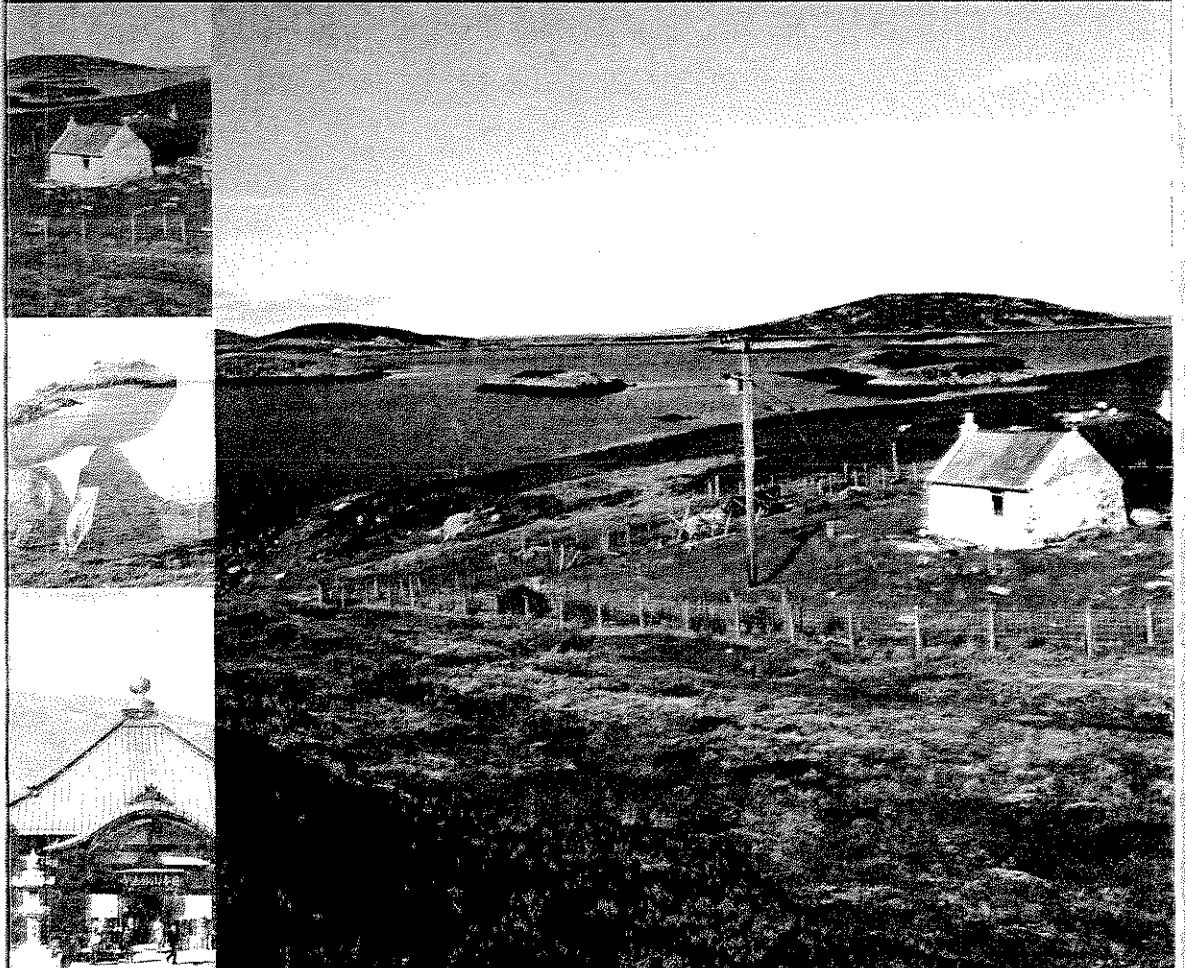# Studying
CULTURAL
LANDSCAPES

EDITED BY

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Studying Cultural Landscapes

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Landscapes of memorialisation

W. Scott Howard

> O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
> And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
> To adorn the burial-house of him I love?
> > Walt Whitman, *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* (in Whitman, 1973)

> Nature repeats herself, or almost does:
> *repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise.*
> > Elizabeth Bishop, *North Haven* (in Bishop, 1994)

This chapter examines relationships between works of art, mourning and memory.[1] Our primary concerns here, to be more specific, address the pivotal role of landscape in artistic creations that strive to transform loss (either personal or public in magnitude) into gain, sorrow into consolation and the tragic past into redemptive visions of the present and/or future. Such imaginative reconfigurations of the natural world thus may serve as vehicles for the expression of grief, the construction of memory and the writing of historical narratives either subjective or cultural in scope.[2] Land is transfigured into landscape by the artist's shaping intention to create an ideal world of harmonious interaction between nature and culture wherein mortality and human corruptibility may be mitigated by the vitality of life forms that change and regenerate. Landscapes of memorialisation are therefore, by virtue of these factors, idealised other places – visions (and versions) of Arcadia – that exist apart from this place of human suffering, yet which, precisely because of their experiential and ontological differences, provide regions that we may visit (if only briefly) and where we may place our sorrow in order to return with renewed strength to the known, imperfect world. Just as our journey, within such a work of art, to that other place enacts a mourning process, our path back from that devised utopian space involves a corresponding reflection upon how the landscape has received and responded to our expression of grief.

The poems quoted at the start of this chapter each illustrate the pivotal role that nature may play in that work of mourning and memorialising across a spectrum of artistic compositions, including the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC (Figure 2.1). Walt Whitman's *When Lilacs*

Figure 2.1 Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Photo: Katharyn C. Howard)

Last in the Dooryard Bloom' (1978) are both, in terms of l that craft relationships, within fundamental human modes o tion (Lambert, 1976; Ramaz equation, lamentation (sorro opposed, contrary in their e together would result in stro from a loss. Praise (love) b transformation of loss into g and also – by logical extensio and remembering (the wish natural setting in both of between those conflicting d landscapes, however, respon and memorialising, and the could also be called paradigr tive, interdisciplinary study mythology and commemorat

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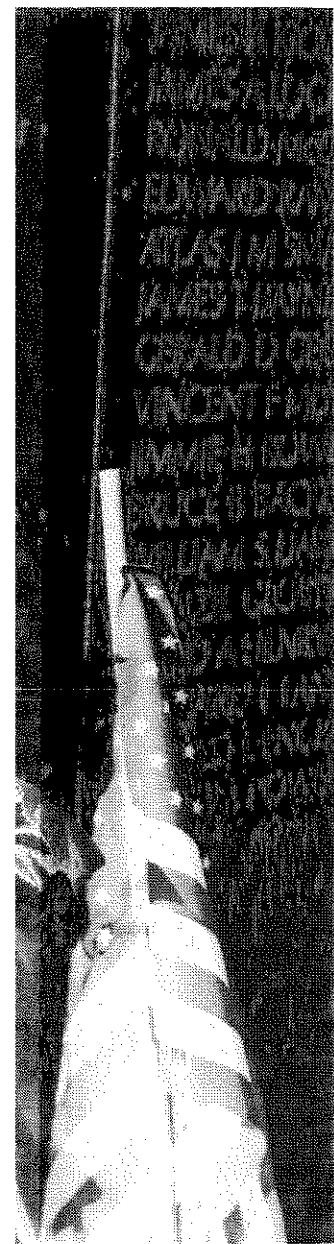cluding the Vietnam Veterans
Walt Whitman's *When Lilacs*

Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd (1881) and Elizabeth Bishop's *North Haven* (1978) are both, in terms of literary genre, pastoral elegies – that is, poems that craft relationships, within an idealised natural landscape, between three fundamental human modes of expression: lamentation, praise and consolation (Lambert, 1976; Ramazani, 1994; Sacks, 1985; Zeiger, 1997). In this equation, lamentation (sorrow) and consolation (solace) are diametrically opposed, contrary in their emotional tenors; a direct experience of both together would result in strong ambivalence for the individual who suffers from a loss. Praise (love) balances the scale, providing a vehicle for the transformation of loss into gain, absence into presence, sorrow into solace and also – by logical extension – forgetting (the tragic past) into envisioning and remembering (the wished-for present and/or future). An imagined, natural setting in both of these pastoral elegies mediates the tensions between those conflicting desires and motives. Whitman's and Bishop's landscapes, however, respond quite differently to that work of mourning and memorialising, and thereby offer two interpretative models, which could also be called paradigms of loss, which will illuminate our comparative, interdisciplinary study in this chapter on pastoral elegies, Greek mythology and commemorative sculpture.

Whitman's poem mourns the death of Abraham Lincoln and was composed during the weeks immediately following the former US President's assassination on 14 April 1865. Bishop's elegy laments the loss of her personal friend, the poet Robert Lowell. Both poems offer subjective expressions of grief for cultural figures, and accordingly combine personal and public contexts of meaning. However, while Whitman uses landscape to memorialise Lincoln's spirit and achieve an unqualified consolation, Bishop undercuts the sympathetic bond between nature and human suffering, playfully resists the hopeful project of preserving the essence of Lowell and thereby shapes an ironic consolation. Whitman's text, in this regard, may be considered a classic elegy – that is, a poem that achieves positive consolation; Bishop's, a modern elegy, or a work that resists or at least strongly qualifies consolation (Ramazani, 1994). These two variations upon the work of mourning – i.e. the tendency toward remembrance and achieving consolation on the one hand, and toward forgetting and resisting consolation on the other – complement two similar paths for the work of memorialising in landscapes fashioned by artists working in other media, as we shall see.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (or VVM) designed by Maya Lin not only commemorates the lives of the nearly 60 000 American men and women killed in the Vietnam War, but also acknowledges the personal and social, traumatic consequences of that conflict between 1959 and 1975 that continue to signify points of cultural and political tension in the United States. Since the VVM's construction in 1982, 'The Wall' (as it is popularly known) has gained an international reputation as an unprecedented memorial that paradoxically facilitates personal mourning and consolation

while also resisting conventional social codes for grieving, remembering and transfiguring the past. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial therefore functions within both paradigms of loss suggested by Whitman's and Bishop's poems. Although not a pastoral elegy in the same sense as either of those texts, The Wall is a pastoral, elegiac work of art, one that, as Lin herself remarks, combines the aesthetics of poetry and sculpture within an idealised landscape (Sturken, 1997). In this regard, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial participates in a long-standing and interdisciplinary artistic tradition of works that refashion land into a landscape of memorialisation – a tradition that begins, in the western literary canon, with the pastoral elegy (the second oldest poetic genre after the epic) where the idea of Arcadia first takes shape (Rosenmeyer, 1969; Ramazani, 1994; Sturken, 1997).

Through comparative studies in poetry, Greek mythology and commemorative architecture, this chapter investigates the central theme of landscape and memorialisation. Works to be examined include, respectively, Whitman's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, Bishop's *North Haven* and Virgil's 'Eclogue 10'; retellings of the Orpheus myth by Ovid (in Ovid, 1958) and Gaiman, as well as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial together with its accompanying memorial-objects. The chapter's individual sections progressively establish an interdisciplinary context for the study of relationships between works of art, private and public expressions of grief, and the role of landscape as mediator in the linked processes of mourning and memorialising. The chapter's 'Conclusion' and 'Further reading' sections provide web links to digital reproductions of each of those poems, myths and commemorative sculptures as resources for further study. In keeping with the guiding principle for this volume on cultural landscapes, this chapter thus constitutes a palimpsest that offers several layers of comparative analysis, each linked to a cluster of key terms, principles and themes:

- the work of mourning
- the work of memorialising
- the idea of Arcadia
- the principles of dialectical temporality and sympathetic nature, and
- the motif of the backward glance.

All of these are addressed in this chapter's following sections and are also defined in the 'Landscape glossary' towards the end of this book.

My central argument will be that landscapes of memorialisation both enact the work of mourning and manifest (in some way) the idea of Arcadia – that is, an imaginary world at the crossroads between nature and culture where loss may be transformed into gain; the tragic past, into the desired present and/or future. Whereas monuments offer a tribute to the departed and strive toward historical closure, memorials concern the ongoing struggles of the living who confront losses that have yet to reach points of resolution. Landscapes of memorialisation therefore reveal continuing

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into landscape that engage with those dynamic tensions thus may perform
the writing of cultural history.

2.1 Whitman and Bishop: two visions/versions of pastoral

In reply to the questions he asks, in the lines quoted above, Whitman states
his choice to adorn President Lincoln's coffin with pictures of an Arcadian
world – that is, an idealised landscape in which nature's regenerative bounty
sympathetically sustains those who live in both country and city: 'Pictures of
growing spring and farms and homes,/With the Fourth-month eve at sun-
down, and the gray smoke lucid and bright' (81–2). Within that imagined
landscape Whitman then places this pastoral elegy's pivotal figure of the
thrush, the 'shy and hidden bird' (19) that sings a dirge, 'Death's outlet song
of life' (24), which the poet later translates in lines 135–62. The thrush's aria
unfolds within the poem's picture of the ideal landscape bestowed upon the
coffin's interior wall; the poet's translation of that song of praise for both
life and death moves the elegy toward consolation and memorialisation:

> Yet each to keep and all, retrievements out of the night,
> The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,
> And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul,
> With the lustrous and drooping star with the countenance full of woe,
> With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the bird,
> Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever to keep, for
> the dead I loved so well . . .
>
> (198–203)

The song of the thrush, the shooting star, the sprig of lilac, all of the elegy's
key images and symbols converge in this imagined portrait of these three
figures – 'the knowledge of death', the poet and 'the thought of death'
(120–1) – walking together within a sympathetic landscape that will receive
Abraham Lincoln's body and preserve his spirit. Through the gift of that
ideal world, Whitman creates a landscape of memorialisation, which
enfolds the departed President within nature's cycles of diurnal and seasonal
change, thereby investing his spirit with principles of regeneration and
transformation. Whitman's consummate pastoral elegy, as a work of
mourning and memorialising, concludes with a vision of redemptive time
poised within the present on the cusp of the future – 'There in the fragrant
pines and the cedars dusk and dim' (206) – that signals the poem's engage-
ment with both personal and public historical discourses.

In *North Haven*, Bishop imaginatively returns, one year later, to a place

she often visited with Lowell and describes the setting, noting in particular the subtle differences in the landscape between the time of her last visit with her friend and her present excursion without him. In the fourth stanza, Bishop introduces a key theme that will return in this pastoral elegy's final stanza to undercut the work's prospect of memorialising Lowell's spirit:

> The Goldfinches are back, or others like them,
> and the White-throated Sparrow's five-note song,
> pleading and pleading, brings tears to the eyes.
> Nature repeats herself, or almost does:
> *repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise.*
>
> (188)

Here Bishop implies a sympathetic bond between landscape and memory, but gently questions that link between the past (as shared by two friends) and the present (as observed by one): 'The Goldfinches are back, *or others like them*' (188; my emphasis). Nature gives signs of repetition, renewal and change just as the poet's memory and imagination negotiate differences between past and present. Through this rhythm of return and departure, disappearance and emergence Bishop alludes early in the elegy to an affinity between the process of writing poetry – *'repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise'* (188) – and the landscape's forces of change and renewal, thereby suggesting that Lowell's spirit, like Lincoln's in Whitman's elegy, might be invested with those regenerative principles. The text's final stanza undercuts that possibility, however, and draws a sharp distinction between past and present:

> You left North Haven, anchored in its rock,
> afloat in mystic blue ... And now – you've left
> for good. You can't derange, or re-arrange,
> your poems again. (But the Sparrows can their song.)
> The words won't change again. Sad friend, you cannot change.
>
> (189)

The dynamics of change – repetition and revision – establish a sympathetic bond between language and nature that is irrevocably broken by mortality. Lowell's death removes him from Bishop's idea of the regenerative potential in both poetry and landscape. Her elegy concludes ironically, qualifying the work of mourning and memorialising by resisting consolation and emphasising not remembrance, but forgetting.

Although Lowell now occupies a realm of relative stasis, Bishop's picture of the landscape bristles with evidence of his departure, suggesting that her friend may now be remembered best through his present absence from both his poetry and this shared, idealised natural setting. *North Haven* thereby raises a difficult question in our examination of relationships between grief expression and landscape: can the resistance to consolation and the forget-

ting of the past paradoxic; memorialising (Howard, 200. earlier, accomplishes exactly – thereby participating in botl Bishop's pastoral elegies. A memorialising also significan those conflicting psychologica fact, since at least the ninth ce only realised the premise tha memorialisation, but have between accepting and re: forgetting the past in order tc

2.2 Arcadia:

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ting of the past paradoxically strengthen the work of mourning and memorialising (Howard, 2002)? The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, as noted earlier, accomplishes exactly that – consolations both positive and resistant – thereby participating in both paradigms of loss set forth by Whitman's and Bishop's pastoral elegies. All three of these works of mourning and memorialising also significantly construct notions of Arcadia as a nexus of those conflicting psychological drives, artistic themes and cultural codes. In fact, since at least the ninth century BCE, representations of Arcadia have not only realised the premise that an ideal landscape may serve as a place of memorialisation, but have also always involved discrete negotiations between accepting and resisting consolation, and remembering and forgetting the past in order to envision the present and future.

2.2 Arcadia: landscape of loss and gain

Arcadia is both a real and an ideal place, at once geographic and symbolic, that signifies not only a mountainous and somewhat inhospitable region in the centre of the Peloponnese peninsula, but also a utopian landscape in which the human and natural worlds are imagined to co-exist harmoniously.[3] For Homer and generations of artists and philosophers since his time, Arcadia represents a vision of perfection – existing in a realm parallel to but separate from our own world – where an idealised rural landscape shelters and provides for the individual who has grown weary of human conflict and corruptibility. The notion of Arcadia therefore pertains not to the terrain of rugged nature, but to a realm of cultivated rusticity that the experience of art makes possible through the work of imagination. In representing Arcadia, though, the artist cannot avoid a fundamental paradox: we only know about that perfect other place from the perspective of our world of human imperfection. Arcadia thus signifies more than just an idealised portrait of the individual existing peaceably in nature, but importantly highlights a veil of worldly complications that we may wish to lose, even if only temporarily, in order to gain experience in a territory that sympathises with our wishes to be elsewhere and other than what we are. More than merely a pleasant or lovely place (i.e. *locus amoenus*) Arcadia is a landscape of and for the mind.[4]

Dialectical temporality

Two principles just mentioned warrant further reflection because they are essential for understanding with greater depth and subtlety the idea of Arcadia. The first is that of contradistinction, or what may also more properly be called dialectical temporality. Because Arcadia exists primarily in an imaginary realm distinct from the everyday world of human activity,

artists tend to portray that idealised landscape in terms of contrasts with our own place in civilisation. Such contradistinctions become dialectical, however, when the artist who wishes to portray Arcadia – the other place – first realises that any utopian vision necessarily embodies some traces of an imperfect world – the 'this place' – and then permits those touches of human complication and conflict to be present and active in the idealised landscape. The contradistinctions of Arcadia are thus not exclusionary and do not deny our entrance into that other world, but they are constructive and relational – that is, dialectical – because they both permit and limit our ability to imagine a more harmonious balance between the human and natural realms. The idea of Arcadia, therefore, involves a deliberately nimble and self-conscious negotiation of that balance and those points of contrast in a work of art concerned not only with a vision of a utopian landscape, but also (and perhaps more importantly) with the various ways in which such a fictive, perfect world both engages with and disengages from the imperfect sphere of human community. Our limitations paradoxically condition the possibilities for Arcadia and also guarantee our return from that other place back to the civilised world. Arcadia exists by virtue of the fact that we simply cannot stay there, but may often visit. Representations of landscape in that more perfect realm therefore reveal much about not only our wishes to live in a more harmonious balance with nature, but also our eventual need to depart from that utopian space and return to a place for human time. Arcadia is a region of many entrances and exits, each bearing the marks of our appearances and disappearances, which together underscore a fundamentally experiential component to this imaginary land. More than a place, Arcadia is an idea; but more than a notion, Arcadia embodies a dialectical experience of our own temporality and necessary erasure from an imagined community where we may wish to remain, but cannot. Indeed, perhaps the most enduring characteristic of the Arcadian landscape – realised either through poetry, sculpture or painting – is a visible sign of some confrontation with mortality as a token of our imminent departure.

Sympathetic nature

The second principle, related to the first, is that of sympathetic nature, or the idea that nature sympathises with the spectrum of human passions, offering gifts that correspond to our emotional and psychological needs (Ruskin, 1971). Because the notion of Arcadia, as addressed above, is dialectical our experience of that perfected, imaginary landscape underscores the human imperfections we may wish to change or lose entirely by way of our journey away from and back to civilisation. However, since we cannot stay in Arcadia the predominant emotion associated with a visit to that ideal place is an ambivalent combination of anxiety, elation and

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sorrow, which can be described more precisely as tragic joy. Just as the perfection of the Arcadian landscape inspires in us feelings of exuberance, that same beauty serves as a bracing reminder that we must eventually depart. Nature in Arcadia often replies accordingly to such ambivalence with gifts and seasons both generous and cruel. The principle of sympathetic nature in Arcadia, like the conflicting emotions and dialectical relationships to which it corresponds, hence turns upon a precarious balance between loss and gain. On the one hand, the individual who visits Arcadia wishes to lose the world of human conflict and corruptibility in order to gain the perfection of a utopian place. On the other hand, gaining entrance into Arcadia also means confronting the fact of our necessary departure from and loss of that idealised landscape. Both the dialectical temporality and sympathetic nature particular to Arcadia are thus fundamentally elegiac principles – each suffused with the individual's struggle to find consolation for the loss of a sustainable vision of perfection; each equally involved with the work of either positive or resistant mourning and memorialising.

2.3 Virgil's Arcadia

We owe most of our contemporary notions about Arcadia to the Roman poet, Publius Vergilius Maro – otherwise known simply as Virgil (70–19 BCE). In 37 BCE Virgil completed a collection of pastoral poems, *The Eclogues*, that has (perhaps more than any single literary work in the western canon) directly shaped our keenest perceptions about the Arcadian landscape. In fact, many scholars argue that the artistic idea of Arcadia begins with Virgil's *Eclogues* (Lee, 1989). Virgil is the first writer explicitly to set a poem, 'Eclogue 10', in a place called Arcadia. In that pastoral elegy, Gallus (Virgil's close friend in life and also a poet) suffers from unrequited love so much that he is near death. Three unsympathetic gods visit him, of which two offer advice. In reply, Gallus first asks the Arcadians to sing about his love, then confesses his desire to live in the woods where he will carve the name of his beloved, Lycoris, on the trees. As soon as he declares those intentions, however, Gallus confronts their impossibility, reflecting that nothing will satisfy Love, the power that indiscriminately rules all. 'Eclogue 10' thus not only enacts the popular Arcadian theme of love melancholy, but intertwines the principles of dialectical temporality and sympathetic nature. Gallus's near-fatal love predicament therefore marks his possible entrance into and necessary exit from the utopian landscape wherein nature both echoes and silences the singer's desires.

The elegy's eight-line introduction accordingly links the contradistinctions of Arcadia to the landscape's indiscriminate power either to mend or mar. The poet begins by requesting permission from Arethusa – a nymph, one of the Nereids, who was changed into a fountain by Artemis – to sing of Gallus's dilemma with love:

Permit me, Arethusa, this last desperate task.
For Gallus mine (but may Lycoris read it too)
A brief song must be told; who'd deny Gallus song?
So, when you slide along below Sicanian waves,
May bitter Doris never taint you with her brine.
Begin then: let us tell of Gallus' troubled love,
While snub-nosed she-goats nibble at the tender shoots.
Not to the deaf we sing; the forests answer all.

(1–8)

Virgil describes his task as 'desperate' (1) because Gallus's insatiable desire necessitates his eventual return from Arcadia to the world of human imperfection and strife. Without hesitation nature 'answers all' (8), offering consolations that ultimately fail to satisfy Gallus because, as Pan chastises, 'Love cares not for such things;/You'll never glut cruel love with tears, nor grass with streams,/Nor worker-bees with clover, nor she-goats with leaves' (28–30). Gallus replies to this rebuke by announcing his wish to remain in Arcadia, proclaiming his love melancholy to nature: 'The choice is made – to suffer in the woods among/The wild beasts' dens, and carve my love into the bark/Of tender trees: as they grow, so my love will grow' (52–4).

Here in particular, dialectical temporality works in tandem with the idea of sympathetic nature to create a landscape of memorialisation. Gallus states his intention to carve his 'love into the bark/Of tender trees' (53–4) – that is, to inscribe not merely the name of his love, Lycoris, upon the living surface of the Arcadian trees, but his elegiac song of longing for and loss of love. In other words, Gallus desires to create a written record, a testimony, of his melancholy predicament in Arcadia where he feels love for Lycoris who loves him not. The landscape may receive his story sympathetically, faithfully representing his sweet agony, but may also indiscriminately pervert Gallus's lamentations, transfiguring his writing upon the tree bark into indecipherable scrawl as the tree grows and matures in this land of altered time. Through this plan to engrave upon the Arcadian landscape a record (i.e. memorial) of his unrequited love, Gallus therefore confronts a paradox: he may only remain in Arcadia through the vehicle of writing, but the record of his love melancholy demands his departure:

Now, once again, we take no joy in Hamadryads,
Nor even in song – again wish even the woods away.
No alteration can our labours make in him,
Not if we drank of Hebrus in the middle frosts
Of watery winter and endured Sithonian snows,
Nor if, when dying bark shrivels on the lofty elm,
Beneath the Crab we herded Ethiopian sheep.
Love conquers all: we also must submit to Love.

(62–9)

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Just as dialectical contradistinctions condition the possibility of both Gallus's entrance into and departure from this ideal land, the principle of sympathetic nature works antithetically, marking his presence in Arcadia through a narrative of his eventual absence, thereby creating a living memorial to his unrequited love and emotional ambivalence.

2.4 The backward glance: Ovid to Gaiman

Our contemporary understanding of an Arcadian landscape also owes much to another Roman poet, Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BCE–18 CE) – otherwise known as Ovid – who, in the year 8 CE, completed a major work in the western literary canon, *The Metamorphoses or Transformations*, that gives us one of the earliest written records of many of the Greek myths, including an extensive treatment of the elegiac Orpheus and Eurydice story, which also follows the paradigms of loss previously addressed by way of Whitman's and Bishop's pastoral elegies. Ovid creates an elaborate narrative about Orpheus, which contributes a significant motif to the working relationships between the principles of dialectical temporality and sympathetic nature within a landscape of memorialisation: the backward glance. As with any of the Greek myths, there are many versions of the Orpheus story; each retelling offers new twists in plot and character development. The following summary primarily follows Ovid's rendition in *Metamorphoses*, Books 10 and 11.

    A son of Calliope and either Oeagrus or Apollo, Orpheus was reputedly the greatest musician and poet of Greek legend. His songs were so magical that they could conjure wild beasts – even rocks and trees – into actions sympathetic with his desires. On his wedding day, just before the marriage ceremony, his bride, Eurydice, was killed by the bite of a serpent. Orpheus 'sang loud his loss/To everyone on earth' (273) before journeying down to the underworld to retrieve his lost love. During his negotiations with King Hades and Queen Persephone, Orpheus sang a beautiful song about his love for his lost bride that moved even the Furies to tears. Hades and Persephone then granted Orpheus's request, but under one condition: that he not look back while making the ascent to the world of mortals. As Orpheus and Eurydice approached the surface of the earth, Orpheus, 'fearful that she'd lost her way,/Glanced backward with a look that spoke his love –/Then saw her gliding into deeper darkness' (275). After this redoubled loss of his true love – 'her second death' (275) – Orpheus goes 'melancholy-mad', as Ovid puts it (275), and grows inconsolable despite his supernatural powers (which seem to become proportionately strengthened by each tragic turn in the story) to charm the landscape into gestures of great sympathy with his plight.

    At the height of that sympathetic magic, when he has conjured an idyllic landscape replete with the signs of consolation for his grief – 'All beasts, all

birds, all stones held in their spell' (299) – Orpheus meets his tragic end at the hands of a group of Ciconian Maenads (female devotees of Dionysus) who attack him with rocks and tree branches. For a time, Orpheus defends himself by singing – his music deflecting the crude weapons they hurl at him. The Maenads, however, drown out his magical voice with their screams and eventually overwhelm Orpheus, tearing him limb from limb. As luck would have it, though, the river Hebrus then carries Orpheus's head to the open sea where it journeys to the shores of Lesbos, near Methymna, inspired melodies murmuring all the while from the mutilated poet's lips. Orpheus's spirit finally descends to the underworld to be reunited with Eurydice, but again only on the condition that, 'as they move, however they may go,/Orpheus may not turn a backward look at her' (301).

The theme of the backward glance, in this particular text's work of mourning and memorialising, signifies Orpheus's heightened self-consciousness of dialectical temporality. Ovid's language tells us that the poet, 'fearful that she'd lost her way,/Glanced backward with a look that spoke his love' (275) – in other words, that Orpheus was moved to look back not only by his love for Eurydice, but also by his fear that she might not be there following his steps. Orpheus's motivation, during the ascent back to earth, is thus complicated by a tangle of contradicting emotions and existential characteristics, all of which augment the contradistinctions of the ideal landscape where he wishes to (but may not) remain either with or without his true love. Orpheus may only regain an Arcadian landscape – one in which nature will hear his lament and reply sympathetically with signs of consolation – on the paradoxical condition that he return alone only to depart soon again. Upon his second farewell from that utopian place, in Ovid's version of the story, nature offers the most elaborate show of sympathy for his tragic life:

> The saddened birds sobbed loud for Orpheus;
> All wept: the multitude of beasts,
> Stones, and trees, all those who came to hear
> The songs he sang, yes, even the charmed trees
> Dropped all their leaves as if they shaved their hair.
> Then it was said the rivers swelled with tears,
> That dryads, naiads draped their nakedness
> In black and shook their hair wild for the world to see.
>
> (300)

Here the bond of sympathetic nature works most powerfully as a sign of Orpheus's final exit, turning the landscape into a habitat of memorialisation. Nature in this state of perfection bears the mark of the inspired poet's presence through his absence, the landscape thus mirroring contradistinctions intrinsic to Arcadian dialectical temporality.

Neil Gaiman's adaptation of the Orpheus and Eurydice story in his comic series, *The Sandman* (1993), emphasises Orpheus's psychological struggle

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with powerful male figures – especially Hades and Apollo – consequently imparting to the backward glance theme a more internalised role in shaping the landscape. Hades and Persephone grant Orpheus's request to return with Eurydice, but they mock him during their bargaining. Thus as Orpheus departs from Gaiman's vision of the underworld 'the dark laughter of Hades [follows] him for many leagues' (Gaiman, 1993: 186). As he progresses on his journey, Gaiman's Orpheus becomes increasingly self-conscious about this humiliation to the extent that, during the key moment of the first backward glance, his internalised anxieties cloud his perceptions and create the impression that Eurydice has abandoned him (Figure 2.2). Orpheus's backward glance in this retelling, as an index of dialectical temporality, therefore signifies a contradiction between his desire to return with Eurydice and his shame for making such an immoderate request from the king and queen of the underworld. On the following page Gaiman accordingly depicts the image of Eurydice fading from sight as Orpheus stumbles along a snow-covered path near the edge of a precipice in a landscape that sympathetically mirrors his anguish and humiliation, yet offers no gesture of recompense.

Gaiman's conclusion to the story is far less optimistic than Ovid's but also employs the backward glance motif to underscore not only Orpheus's ultimate exclusion from an Arcadian landscape, but also his utter alienation from his father, Apollo. In the final scenes on the shore of Lesbos, Apollo appears just in time to prevent a viper from biting Orpheus's head. Ovid tells us that Apollo 'glazed the creature into polished stone,/And there it stayed, smiling wide-opened-jawed' (Ovid, 1958: 301). In other retellings of the myth Apollo turns the viper into stone and then erects a modest temple dedicated to Orpheus. Gaiman's Apollo alludes to that possibility, reassuring Orpheus that he has 'visited certain priests on [the] island, in their dreams [who] will find [him] soon, and care for [him]' (1993: 198). Gaiman's version, though, stresses the inter-personal struggle between father and son and uses the backward glance theme to underscore Orpheus's emotional, physical and psychological isolation (Figure 2.3).

Here the backward glance motif delivers a fatalistic reversal. Just as Eurydice was abandoned, so now is Orpheus left behind as Apollo turns his head to speak, over his right shoulder, his last words to his son: 'We shall not meet again' (Gaiman, 1993: 198). Gaiman's sardonic treatment of the theme, especially in these last three frames, emphasises Orpheus's ultimate exclusion from the Arcadian landscape so commonly associated with his magical gift of inspired poetry and song. This reversal of the backward glance motif importantly recreates for the reader the inner experience of Orpheus. We literally see through his eyes three images of Apollo walking away to the horizon – 'His father never even tried to look back' (Gaiman, 1993: 198) – and thereby experience the impossibility of Orpheus's effort to reconcile his former existence with his present tragic state. Here he suffers, following Eurydice, a second death. The backward glance has thrust upon Orpheus in this instance a staggering self-consciousness of the contradistinctions of
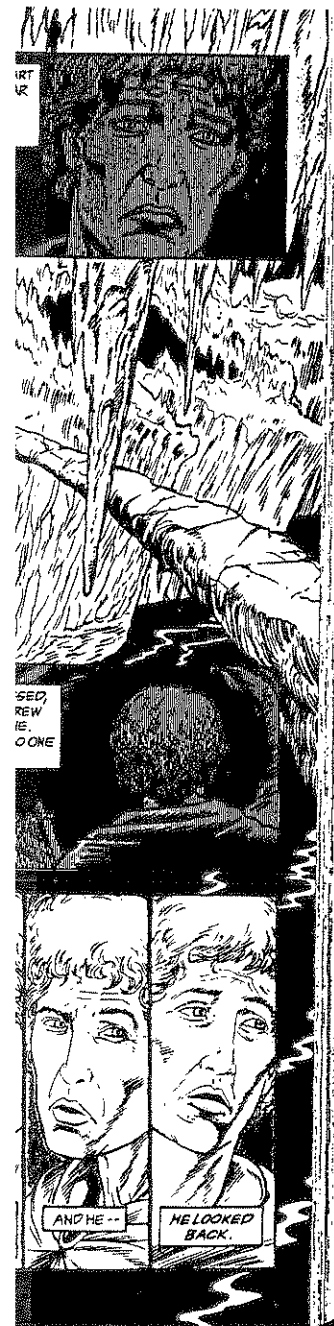
Figure 2.2 'The Song of Orpheus' (Source: Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman*, Vol. 6, Chapter 3, 187)

Figure 2.3 'The Song of Orp
Epilogue, 198)

Gaiman, *The Sandman*, Vol. 6,

Figure 2.3 'The Song of Orpheus' (Source: Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman*, Vol. 6, Epilogue, 198)

Arcadia to the extent that he may now only see an interminable gap between that ideal landscape of memorialisation and his present relegation to oblivion.

For both Ovid and Gaiman the theme of the backward glance thus signifies not only emotional and psychological ambivalence, but, most importantly, a greater self-consciousness of the Arcadian dialectic of temporality and accompanying principle of sympathetic nature. As a visible, externalised sign of that internal effort to comprehend the contradistinctions between utopian and dystopian realms, the backward glance articulates, in a single human gesture, the intersections of an array of contrasting relationships (e.g. presence/absence, life/death, gain/loss, pleasure/pain, etc.) that determine an individual's conditions for embarking upon and struggling through the work of mourning and memorialising. Ovid and Gaiman each significantly place the moment of that recognition within a fallen territory – that is, outside of the idealised landscape – thereby suggesting that such heightened self-consciousness (i.e. the work of memorialising) displaces the individual from either positive consolation or a utopian vision of sympathetic nature. That human gesture of recognition and concomitant displacement, though, complements the tragic history of Orpheus, a character who gains the epitome of the Arcadian landscape only to lose forever his ideal vision of harmony. If, however, a sign of the backward glance were to be placed explicitly within the idealised landscape, then the work of mourning and memorialising would become inextricably bound together with the principles of dialectical temporality and sympathetic nature. As we shall see, this is precisely the case with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in which the dominant and tangible role of the backward glance motif informs both positive and resistant paradigms of loss.

2.5 The Wall as modern Arcadia

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall) is a modern vision of the Arcadian landscape open to all who wish to confront one of the most painful chapters in late twentieth-century US history: the legacy of the Vietnam War (Figure 2.4). More than just a landscape, the memorial site is also a park managed by the National Park Service and located in the northwestern corner of the Constitutional Gardens within the western section of the National Mall in Washington DC. Framed by the Lincoln Memorial to the west, the Washington Monument to the east and the Korean War Veterans Memorial to the south, The Wall was dedicated on 13 November 1982. The VVM consists of two triangular walls of black granite from Bangalore, India – each 246 feet 9 inches (75.21 metres) in length – placed together in the shape of a V set into the earth. The total length of the entire structure is 493 feet 6 inches (150.42 metres). The end tip of the west wall points to the Lincoln Memorial; that of the east, to the Washington

Figure 2.4 Vietnam Vet

Monument. At the central angle is 125 degrees and t memorial sits in a pastoral l by trees to the north. A pe two walls, allowing visitors memorial's V-shape cut in the central hinge. Visitors n of the slope where The Wa

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Figure 2.4 Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Photo: Katharyn C. Howard)

Monument. At the central hinge, where the two granite walls meet, the angle is 125 degrees and the height, 10 feet 3 inches (3.12 metres). The memorial sits in a pastoral landscape, surrounded by a grassy field bordered by trees to the north. A pedestrian path parallels the southern edge of the two walls, allowing visitors gradually to descend into and emerge from the memorial's V-shape cut into the earth, which reaches its lowest point at the central hinge. Visitors may also walk around the VVM to the north side of the slope where The Wall virtually disappears from view.

Each main section of the VVM contains 74 separate panels on which are engraved the names of the 58 196 American men and women killed in the war. These names are listed chronologically by date of death,[5] beginning at the top of the panel on the right-hand side of the central hinge with that of the first US soldier who perished in the Vietnam conflict in 1959. The names progress from there to the low point of the east wall, then continue from the low point of the west wall back to the bottom of the panel on the left-hand side of the central hinge where the chronological listing concludes with the name of the last US soldier killed in the war in 1975. The dates of 1959 and 1975 are the only ones to appear on the panels and frame the progression of names, which are presented both chronologically according to each casualty

day and alphabetically within each day's tally. A diamond shape precedes the name of each soldier whose death is positively known; a small cross, of each of the approximate 1300 MIAs – those missing in action. (Upon the positive identification of a soldier's remains, a cross is changed to a diamond.) At an entrance point to the south of the lawn a podium holds, in a case protected from the elements but open to access, a directory of all of the names included in the memorial, indicating their placement in The Wall according to each specific panel and casualty day.

Since 1993 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has been accompanied by one other memorial-object and two other commemorative sculptures, each located south of The Wall. A bronze flagpole 60 feet (or 18.3 metres) tall was installed in 1983 and bears, around its base, emblems of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard. The second addition, the Three Servicemen Statue – a bronze sculpture 7 feet (2.13 metres) in height – was dedicated on Veterans Day, 11 November 1984. Designed by Frederick Hart, this commemorative work presents a realistic portrait of three soldiers (one black, one Hispanic and one white) who appear to gaze toward The Wall to the north. A second sculpture, the Vietnam Women's Memorial, designed by Glenna Goodacre, was dedicated on Veterans Day, 1993. This work realistically depicts three uniformed women beside a wounded soldier. These three additional commemorative pieces construct a landscape of memorialisation rich in cultural and political complexity.

Maya Lin's winning design for the memorial met fierce criticism long before construction began (Sturken, 1997). A minority of war veterans and an elite group of conservative political insiders perceived her plan as a morbid glorification of defeat emphasising the nation's collective guilt over the controversial war. Lin's model was derided as a 'black gash of shame and sorrow', 'a boomerang' and 'a black flagless pit' that was 'intentionally not meaningful' (Sturken, 1997: 51–2). Defenders argued that Lin's proposed memorial upheld the original conditions set forth for the design contest by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF): 'The memorial will make no political statement regarding the war or its conduct. It will transcend those issues. The hope is that the creation of the memorial will begin a healing process' (Scruggs and Swerdlow, 1985: 53). Debate raged in Washington DC and in the national media with detractors arguing that Lin's plan be thrown out and the contest re-opened. At one crisis point, James Watt, Secretary of the Interior during the Reagan administration, refused to issue a building permit to the VVMF for Lin's design. In order to save The Wall, members of the VVMF struck a compromise with their opponents: the inclusion, within the landscape site, of both the flagpole and Hart's sculpture, which would together emphasise the heroism and patriotism felt to be lacking in Lin's proposal. Glenna Goodacre's design for the Vietnam Women's Memorial was originally rejected from the same competition that Hart won because – according to J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery of Art and Chair of the selection commission – the addition of a

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statue honouring the estimated 11 500 women who served in Vietnam would inappropriately encourage other special interest groups to seek representation within the memorial's widening context of cultural signification (Sturken, 1997).

As this outline of events suggests, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial provoked remarkable controversy, and continues to generate new avenues for debate about private and public practices of mourning and memorialising in the USA.[6] Maya Lin's design has since become world famous as a hallmark of modernist, commemorative architecture, the memorial site in the Constitutional Gardens being the single most heavily visited installation on the Washington Mall as well as one of the most frequented and written about of America's National Parks. The VVM's unprecedented success underscores the dynamic and paradoxical ways in which the site as a whole facilitates a diversity of private expressions of grief within a public context of mourning. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a highly self-conscious work of art in which each of the five themes central to this chapter's investigation (i.e. the work of mourning and memorialising, the principles of dialectical temporality and sympathetic nature, and the motif of the backward glance) are made explicitly tangible by the landscape. Consequently the two paradigms of loss initially suggested by Whitman's and Bishop's pastoral elegies – either working toward or against consolation – converge here on the subjective and cultural levels. At the same time that The Wall invites the individual visitor to achieve positive consolation and remembrance, the memorial also counters conventional social discourses of grief expression and the commemoration of loss, resists narrative closure and thereby performs oppositional cultural work – that is, the work of mourning and memorialising that actively questions traditional customs, thereby engendering new social practices to emerge and contribute to a collective writing and rewriting of cultural history (Ramazani, 1994).

The memorial's explicit manipulation of chronology confronts the visitor with a dialectical experience of the difference between the temporality of official historical discourse and the unusual way time works in this Arcadian landscape. Although the names of the dead, as noted above, are arranged chronologically according to historical record, their alphabetical presentation within each casualty day as well as their continuous unfolding within the context of the whole site articulate a non-linear, fluid and expansive experience of time for the individual mourner. This strategy was important to Lin, who explains that she intended The Wall to read 'like an epic Greek poem' in order to 'return the vets to the time frame of the war' (quoted in Sturken, 1997: 61). The names begin and end at the central hinge, simultaneously radiating outward to the open landscape as well as inward to the memorial's origin. The Wall's dialectical temporality thus simultaneously guides the visitor upwards, into the surrounding landscape as well as downwards, toward the central hinge and into the earth, underscoring the memorial's evocation of sympathetic nature. A walk to The Wall's origin

(where the framing dates of 1959 and 1975 converge) literally involves a descent into the ground where the black granite panels and the names of the dead overwhelm one's sensibilities, as if the earth itself were grieving. Reflections upon the black granite enact, at every step along the path, the motif of the backward glance for each visitor who gazes into the names to recognise their own participation in a collective work of mourning. (The other commemorative objects – i.e. the flagpole and two statues – in this landscape also dramatise the theme of the backward glance, each signifying the changing cultural politics of remembrance associated with the legacy of the Vietnam War as engendered by the VVM.) A journey up and outward
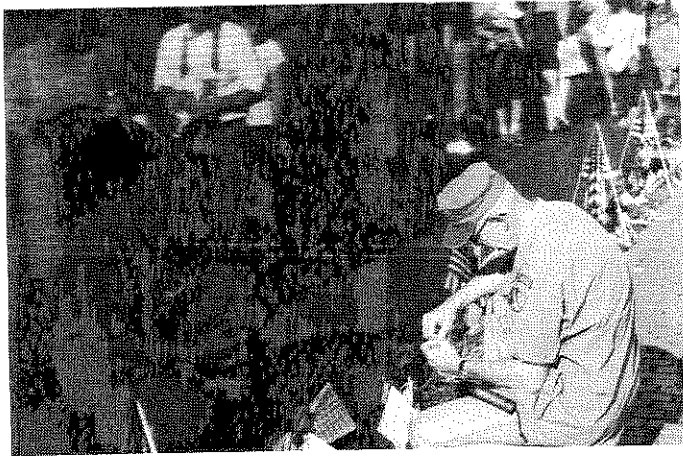
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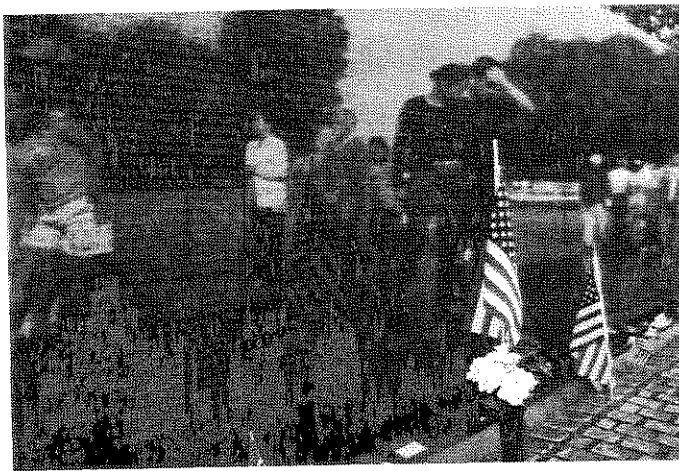
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from the origin takes one back into the light and on to a path toward positive consolation.

On the level of public discourse, however, The Wall resists the conventional work of mourning and memorialising established by other prominent commemorative structures installed on the National Mall, especially the Washington Monument (to the east) and the Lincoln Memorial (to the west) toward which the VVM gestures. Traditional western monuments emulate great achievements in the history of classical architecture. Just as the obelisk of the Washington Monument gains authority from Roman and Egyptian symbols of imperial power, the Lincoln Memorial imitates the form and stature of a Greek temple. The Wall, however, departs from those motifs and strategies. Whereas the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial are constructed from white stone and are designed to rise triumphantly from the ground in order to be seen from great distances, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is fashioned from black stone and sinks defiantly into the earth. Whereas traditional war memorials strive toward narrative closure sanctioned by official historical discourse, The Wall, on the level of public discourse, resists a conclusion to the cultural work of mourning.
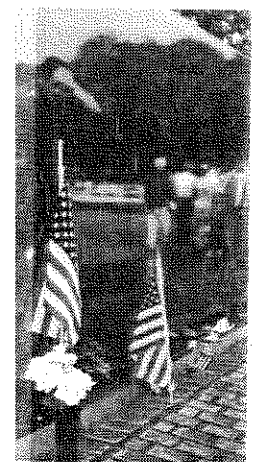
Through such oppositional work, the VVM achieves a living vision of the Arcadian landscape wherein the individual may encounter their active participation in the construction of collective memory and the writing of cultural history. According to the National Park Service, an estimated 30 million people have visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. As a testament to those individual acts of devotion, expressions of grief and contributions to that cultural work of mourning and memorialising, visitors have placed scores of offerings beside the wall: e.g. motorcycles, flowers, combat boots, photographs and letters (Allen, 1995). The memorial and its accompanying commemorative works (i.e. the flagpole and two sculptures) have also sparked many virtual communities on the web, including *The Virtual Wall, a Digital Legacy Project for Remembrance* (at http://www.thevirtualwall.org/) and *The Vietnam Women's Memorial Project* (at http://www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org/pages/index2.html). A travelling, half-size replica of the memorial, *The Moving Wall* (also to be found on the web at http://www.vietvet.org/movwall.htm), visits as many as 50 US cities and towns each year. All of these interactive media underscore the ongoing cultural work of mourning and memorialising integral to The Wall's provocation of the historical imagination on both personal and public levels of discourse.

Now do this . . .

1. For digital copies of Whitman's, Bishop's and Virgil's pastoral elegies as well as of Ovid's elegiac retelling of the Orpheus myth, see respectively:

- http://www.geocities.com/~spanoudi/poems/whitm01.html
- http://www.shadowpoetry.com/famous/bishop/elizabeth2.html#3
- http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/eclogue.10.x.html, and both
- http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.10.tenth.html and
- http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.11.eleventh.html.

2. For digital images of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument and the Korean War Veterans Memorial, see respectively:

- http://www.nps.gov/vive/
- http://www.nps.gov/linc/
- http://www.nps.gov/wamo/, and
- http://www.nps.gov/kwvm/.

3. For a digital map of the National Mall, see:

- http://sc94.ameslab.gov/TOUR/tour.html.

4. For digital images of the flagpole, the Three Servicemen Statue and the Vietnam Women's Memorial, see respectively:

- http://www.nps.gov/vive/memorial/servicemen.htm, and
- http://www.nps.gov/vive/memorial/women.htm>.

5. Having explored the various websites noted above that concern the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and other commemorative works at the VVM site, compare and contrast the ways in which The Wall and the AIDS Memorial Quilt (see http://www.aidsquilt.org/Newsite/) – as represented by and reconfigured through digital media – perform the work of mourning and memorialising on both personal and public levels. Does landscape still play an important role in these virtual communities and, if so: how and why? How and why do these websites refashion the idea of Arcadia to work with as well as against the principles and motifs central to this chapter?

6. Compare and contrast the visions and versions of Arcadia discussed in this chapter with the representations of nature in three landscape paintings: the first, *Et in Arcadia Ego* (*c*.1621–23) by Giovanni Francesco Guercino (1591–1666); the other two – both of which respond directly to Guercino's earlier work – *Les Bergers d'Arcadie I (Et in Arcadia Ego I)* (*c*.1626–28) and *Les Bergers d'Arcadie II (Et in Arcadia Ego II)* (*c*.1638–39) by Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665). Digital reproductions of these paintings may be located, respectively, at the following websites:

- http://www.galleriaborghese.it/barberini/it/arcadia.htm
- http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin4.html, and
- http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin42.html.

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Freud, S. 1953: Mourning ar
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Mitford, J. 2000: *The Am*
Random House.
Ramazani, J. 1994: *Poetry o*
Sturken, M. 1997: *Tangle*
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4 See Curtius, 1973: 195–2
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poussin42.html.

(a) How and why do these landscape paintings embody the theme of *et in Arcadia ego* – 'even in Arcadia, there (am) I' – as part of their work of mourning and memorialising?

(b) Do the paintings engage with the principles and motifs central to this chapter? If so, how so and why? If not, why not and how so?

Further reading

Caruth, C. (ed.) 1995: *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Hopkins.

Freud, S. 1953: Mourning and Melancholia, in Rickman, J. (ed.) *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth, 142–61.

Mitford, J. 2000: *The American Way of Death Revisited*. New York: Random House.

Ramazani, J. 1994: *Poetry of Mourning*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Sturken, M. 1997: *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley: University of California.

Notes to Chapter 2

1 I wish to express my gratitude to my colleagues at the University of Denver – Jan Gorak, Jessica Munns, Alexandra Olsen and Catherine O'Neil – for their comments on early drafts of this essay.

2 This relationship between grief, memory and historiography complements current psychoanalytic and sociological theories of the mourning process that posit grief as an internalised, private experience and mourning as an externalised, public manifestation of forces that remain largely hidden within the individual. Just as the mourning process makes visible a struggle with, for and against the remembrance of things lost and gained, landscapes of memorialisation may also serve as physical and public records of continuities and gaps between notions of the past, present and future. See Freud, 1953: 142–61; Scarry, 1985: 3–23; Houlbrooke, 1989: 1–24; Caruth, 1995: 3–12 and 151–7.

3 In one of the earliest recorded references to Arcadia, the Homeric Hymn 'To Hermes' (c.800 BCE) describes the landscape as 'rich in sheep' (see Lang, 1899: 134). For architectural, literary and sociological studies of the idea of Arcadia, see respectively Ritvo, 1992; Haber, 1994; and Hugill, 1995. On the related literary themes of Arcadia and the pastoral mode, see Empson, 1950; Loughrey, 1984; and especially Toliver, 1984. For studies of interrelationships between poetry, painting and landscape architecture, see Spencer, 1973; Hunt, 1976; Janowitz, 1990; and Fitter, 1995.

4 See Curtius, 1973: 195–200. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'Arcadia' entered the English language in 1590 by way of Thomas Watson's elegy on the death of Sir Francis Walsingham, *Meliboeus*: 'And let *Arcadians* altogether sing/a woeful song against heaven's tyranny' (see Watson, 1895: 139–75, line 49).

5 The name of an American killed in 1957 that was discovered after the memorial's
   completion was added to the panels out of order (see Allen, 1995: 242).
6 For a provocative critique of both the funeral industry and customs of mourning
   in the USA, see Mitford, 2000. For a trans-historical and cross-cultural study of
   funerary architecture, see Ragon, 1983.

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