UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE LEGIBILITY OF EMPIRE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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Norman, Oklahoma
2016

THE LEGIBILITY OF EMPIRE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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This dissertation is for my son, Jacob Smith Hibdon.

The ideas that inspire us and get us going in the morning are often worth pursuing, even – or perhaps especially – when they seem impractical. Our words and actions transform not only our selves, but the people and the world around us as well. Go forth and dream.

Acknowledgements

Almost every successful piece of writing is preceded by many failures, and this dissertation is no exception. I am indebted to many wonderful readers who have offered thoughtful commentary on early drafts that enabled me to transform nascent (and, at times, nearly unreadable) ideas into a coherent project. I want to especially thank my advisor Francesca Sawaya, whose friendship and mentorship I have valued as much as the insightful feedback she provided as I drafted this dissertation. I am indebted to my esteemed committee members, William Henry McDonald, Eve Bannet, Ronald Schleifer, and Peter Barker, for the inspiration and generosity they provided throughout this process. I am also grateful for the guidance I received from Karl Offen in a directed reading on geography; this dissertation would not be possible without his influence.

My heartfelt thanks goes to the colleagues I have been lucky enough to work with and call my friends. I specifically want to thank Shannon Toll, Saara Raasu, and Derek La Shot for the feedback and community they offered during the dissertating process. An earnest thanks goes to Katie Shearer and Shannon Toll, with whom I spent many hours discussing teaching and research over lunches and wine-infused evenings, and who always had encouraging words to say during our impromptu office visits.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my parents, who have been unconditionally supportive as I pursued this degree, and to my brother, extended family, and in-laws. I am grateful to all of you for your love and encouragement. Laura Hansen, thank you for your incomparable friendship. And finally, I want to thank my partner, Bill Hibdon, who has been my greatest champion throughout the many small successes and, at times, seemingly unconquerable challenges that I faced while pursuing this degree.

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Abstract

In this dissertation, "The Legibility of Empire in Nineteenth-Century American Literature," I examine how American authors used their literary works to comment on – and, at times, challenge – the way legibility is mobilized to manifest imagined communities such as the nation and empire. My use of the term legibility is deliberate, as I mean to evoke the way that ideas and information become visible through language and writing. In recent years, critics have examined how authors have approached issues of geographic representation in their literary works. This dissertation pursues a similar trajectory, investigating the way that authors simultaneously embraced and questioned the capacities of geography and literature to make the world legible through language or writing, thereby demonstrating how important geography was to nineteenth-century American literature. Using legibility as a grounding concept for this dissertation, however, allows for a more diversified approach to the same issues of institutional power and national identity that other critics have traced in the influence of geography on literature. Questions central to this dissertation include: How does legibility facilitate acquisitions of information that lead to power (generally), and structure the growth and expansion of governing institutions in the United States (specifically)? Similarly, how is legibility mobilized subversively to undermine the power of governing institutions? In my endeavor to answer these questions, I analyze works from major and minor American authors throughout the long-nineteenth century, including Charles Brockden Brown, Leonora Sansay, Herman Melville, and Sarah Orne Jewett. In doing so, I extend arguments in existing criticism on the intersections that appear between geography and

literary works to discuss the way that legibility is alternately wielded to both reify and disrupt the formation of imagined communities.

INTRODUCTION | Legibility and Empire

In her compelling open letter written to Edward Snowden while he was stranded at the Moscow airport, Rebecca Solnit, a contemporary American author, eloquently articulated the source of the U.S. government's backlash against the man who leaked classified documents detailing the NSA's oversight and actions in terms of privacy. "Privacy," says Solnit,

> is a kind of power as well as a right, one that the public librarians fought to protect against the Bush administration and the PATRIOT Act and that online companies violate in every way that's profitable and expedient. Our lack of privacy, their monstrous privacy — even their invasion of our privacy must, by law, remain classified — is what you made visible. The agony of a monster with nowhere to stand — you are accused of spying on the spies, of invading the privacy of their invasion of privacy — is truly a curious thing.

What Solnit alludes to here but does not state explicitly is the way that privacy can be thought of as the ability to withhold information from the purview of others (in this case, the government). To claim that citizens have a "right" to privacy, then, is to claim that they have a right to retain some measure of obscurity in the eyes of such higher powers. Likewise, for the government to conceal how they invade the privacy of its citizens and people around the world by determining that information to be "classified" is to render this invasion largely invisible, to prevent those who are under surveillance from seeing and understanding the extent to which they are surveyed. As Solnit deftly points out, by leaking information about how the NSA operates and collects their information, Snowden illuminated the extent to which the United States government will go to covertly make its own citizens and people of the world legible.

I begin this dissertation with the unlikely example of Rebecca Solnit's response to Edward Snowden's act of exposing the extent of U.S. surveillance because her

observations are demonstrative of the most paranoid manifestations of the demand for legibility as they play out in arenas of institutional power. Solnit's comments illustrate an interiorized espionage exposed from within, and her description of Snowden's success in reducing U.S. surveillance practices to "the agony of a monster with nowhere to stand" nicely reveals the way that legibility can be mobilized in two different (but related) ways: for institutions to gain authority and control over people, and for people to expose and disrupt institutional authority and control. What is more, the invasion of privacy that the NSA and other intelligence organizations committed toward U.S. citizens and beyond has everything to do with the stability of democracy, for the people must be aware of violations to their privacy in order to mobilize resistance. As Glenn Greenwald explains in his detailed account of the history and aftermath of Snowden's whistleblowing efforts, the NSA's attempt to eviscerate the privacy of its citizens by "collecting … all" (98) metadata of communicative activity presents a material threat to democracy:

> Only when we believe nobody else is watching us do we feel free … [It] is the realm of privacy where creativity, dissent, and challenges to orthodoxy germinate. A society in which everyone knows they can be watched by the state – where the private realm is effectively eliminated – is one in which those attributes are lost, at both the societal and the individual level.
>
> Mass surveillance by the state is therefore inherently repressive. (174)

It is in this commentary about our contemporary moment, then, that the tension between the institutional manifestation of the nation and its people becomes most evident, for it exposes the need to maintain avenues for popular *dissent*. The justification for comprehensive surveillance as a necessary measure to protect a nation's people cannot be separated from the inevitable and (as Greenwald and Snowden would argue)

oppressive consequences of controlling and shaping the population to better suit its own goals.

The issues that Solnit and Greenwald locate in their respective discussions of "privacy" and "surveillance" are at the heart of this dissertation, though I examine them through the lens of a more encompassing inquiry of *legibility*, especially as it manifests in literary accounts of geography as a discipline. By using the terms "legible" and "illegible" in this dissertation, I mean to evoke the way that ideas and information become visible in the process of "putting into language or writing" (x), as Michael Gilmore explains legibility in *Surface and Depth: The Quest for Legibility in American Culture*. In recent years, critics such as Hsuan Hsu, Martin Brückner, and others[1] have examined how authors have approached issues of geographic representation in their literary works. This dissertation pursues a similar trajectory, investigating the way that authors simultaneously embraced and questioned the capacities of geography and literature to make the world legible through "language or writing," thereby demonstrating how important geography was to nineteenth-century American literature. Using legibility as a grounding concept for this dissertation, however, allows for a more diversified approach to the same issues of institutional power and national identity that other critics have traced in the influence of geography on literature. Thus, while most of the chapters in this dissertation directly address intersections of geography and

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[1] In addition to Hsu's *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* and Brückner's *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity*, other notable contributions in this area of research have been made by Eric Bulson (*Novels, Maps, Modernity*), Robert T. Tally (*Melville, Mapping and Globalization: Literary Cartography in the American Baroque Writer*), Rick Van Noy (*Surveying the Interior: Literary Cartographies and the Sense of Place*), and Anne Baker (*Heartless Immensity: Literature, Culture, and Geography in Antebellum America*).

literature, Chapter 2, which examines Leonora Sansay's *Secret History: Or, The Horrors of St. Domingo*, expands this focus to analyze how subversive accounts of history also shape and influence the formation of imagined communities that comprise the nation and empire.

Although Gilmore's inquiry into legibility does not focus on geography, his contributions to the study of legibility have significantly influenced this dissertation. This is especially the case in his argument that the demand for legibility is a defining feature of U.S. culture. As Gilmore explains, unlike European nations that evolved out of feudal societies, the "tardy birth" of the United States in the "New World" meant that the nation "did not have to be dragged into modernity," immersed as it was in the "spirit of inquiry" and pursuit of knowledge that persisted in the wake of the Renaissance (x). Thus, "the demand for legibility," which Gilmore argues is a cornerstone of American culture, can be traced to the earliest European colonies in North America (ix): John Winthrop's sermon "A Model of Christian Charity" reiterates the Puritan belief in a culture of "highly visible piety" under the omniscient gaze of God and the constant surveillance of community members alike (11); while "The Declaration of Independence," upon careful analysis, can be read as a document that refutes the unilateral visibility typically conferred upon the royal governments of Europe by empowering "each separate branch of the government [in the U.S. to be] a sentinel over the others, ever on the alert for encroachments upon its terrain" (36). The latter example indicates that, at least in theory, no branch of government is immune from the watchful gaze of the others, as each is charged with the responsibility of maintaining a balance of power through the principles of transparency.

In these examples and others, Gilmore constructs a convincing argument that demonstrates the pervasive "demand for legibility" in American culture. However, while Gilmore's analysis of the intersections between legibility and discourses about race, gender, and class in American literature and culture is revealing, he does not pursue what this "demand for legibility" may reveal about the nature of American empire and other manifestations of institutional power.[2] By contrast, in this dissertation, I aim to demonstrate how legibility emerges by examining its association with the authority entrusted in an array of political and intellectual institutions, particularly those associated with the establishment and maintenance of U.S. empire.

James C. Scott's excellent examination of the demand for legibility in early modern European statecraft helps us to better understand the relation between legibility and empire. He details how cultural measures of standardization (such as language, governmental policies and laws, systems of measurement, and more) have historically been imposed on local communities to render citizens legible to the larger state. In doing so, Scott explains that subjects must be simplified in order to achieve "an overall, synoptic view of a selective reality," which "[makes] possible a high degree of schematic knowledge, control, and manipulation" (11). By acknowledging the processes of simplification that attend the pursuit of legibility, Scott's work suggests that legibility

[2] Gilmore's justification for avoiding an examination of such power relationships originates, as far as I can tell, in his desire to more effectively address the "cultural unevenness, or relative distance from consensual attitudes" that appreciate "the literary as multifaceted and sedimented in its engagement with an ideological bias" (xii). In particular, Gilmore suggests that the application of Foucaultian scholarship distorts readings of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon to better fulfill a certain ideological narrative about power relationships between citizens and the nation state. I see no reason, however, why the power relationships that Foucault extrapolates from Bentham may not be subjected to thoughtful critique and productively mobilized to examine the function of legibility in imperial and colonial contexts.

itself cannot be separated from the act of inscription: legibility requires not only observation, but description, and thus cannot avoid some measure of *imposing upon* the subject that is scrutinized.

What is more, by locating "control" and "manipulation" as facets that have led to the rise of the modern nation-state, Scott acknowledges a power dynamic more readily recognized in descriptions of imperial enterprises. "The aspiration to such uniformity and order," Scott explains,

> alerts us to the fact that modern statecraft is largely a project of internal colonization, often glossed, as it is in imperial rhetoric, as a 'civilizing mission.' The builders of the modern nation-state do not merely describe, observe, and map; they strive to shape a people and landscape that will fit their techniques of observation. (82)

Implicit in this statement is the relative power of remaining *illegible*. As Snowden's illumination of NSA activity demonstrates, intelligence agencies charged with the task of gathering information about U.S. citizens and those across the globe ostensibly retain more power when they operate invisibly, meaning that laws and social contracts can be transgressed with impunity. It is this same quality of invisibility, however, that offers citizens like Snowden the opportunity for demonstrations of dissent; it was Snowden's very familiarity with how the NSA and other intelligence agencies gather information and data that empowered him to evade detection, even as he was collecting information in order to expose their inner-workings. What Scott and Snowden exemplify, then, is the profoundly differentiated interests that separate the smallest and largest of imagined communities. To determine whether Snowden's actions should be deemed heroic or traitorous is not the point; what his challenge to institutional power indicates, however, is the way legibility emerges as a byproduct of colliding interests, whether they be

between individuals, imagined communities, or both. In following this vein of inquiry, this dissertation is principally concerned with the contradictions that arise from within the nation-state through the dynamic process of striving to simultaneously "describe, observe, and map" a people as well as "shape" them – a process that, notably, many individuals and groups struggle to resist.

To lend further clarification to the relation of legibility to empire, while the rhetoric of Thomas Jefferson's "Empire for Liberty" or American exceptionalism might seem to counter the description of European governance that Scott puts forth, the chapters in this dissertation demonstrate that the same process of "internal colonization" must be acknowledged as a consequence of the United States's rapid formation and expansion. Moreover, by employing the language of imperial expansion, Scott's arguments demonstrate what Amy Kaplan, Benedict Anderson, and others have also observed, namely the difficulty in delineating boundaries that would distinguish between national and imperial identities.[3] The very idea of a democratic nation operates on the assumption that government represents and works on behalf of the people – that the nation is *comprised of* the people, and is hence *defined by* them rather than the other way around. Empire, by contrast, is more evocative of the way colonization imposes external definitions and demands upon "other" people and cultures. And yet, as Scott,

[3] See especially Kaplan's *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, where she analyzes the implications of the U.S. defining Puerto Rico as an "unincorporated territory." The discussion that follows articulates the false dichotomies (such as "foreign/domestic") that are mobilized in an attempt to deny the "collapse of boundaries between here and there, between inside and outside, and the incoherence as much as the coherence that the anarchy of empire brings to the making of U.S. culture" (15). Benedict Anderson uses the unevenness of imagined communities to trouble common perceptions of the nation as a clearly defined entity. What constitutes a "nation, nationality, [or] nationalism," Anderson argues, is "notoriously difficult to define" (3).

Kaplan, and Anderson remind us, these distinctions are more fluid than we often understand. In an effort to highlight the complexity and inevitable overlap that occurs within conversations about the nation-state and empire, then, my approach to American empire in this dissertation must account for the way American imperialism and nationalism, like concepts of "foreign" and "national," are in fact inseparable from one another.

Before proceeding further, I want to discuss in greater detail what the following chapters reveal about legibility as a concept, especially as it is deployed in the effort to define and confer authority on the nation-state and empire. First, my attempt to trace the influence of legibility through the long nineteenth century of American literature is more indebted to deconstructionism and post-structuralism than Gilmore acknowledges in his own methodology. As such, whereas Gilmore seeks to demonstrate the obsession with legibility as a phenomenon endemic to American culture, this dissertation is more focused on the *processes* that govern the production of legibility as evinced in American literature. It is my argument that the authors I examine situate legibility as the result of attempts to stabilize meaning within an unstable and otherwise incomprehensible world. Within the specific context of statecraft and imperialism, legibility emerges from a delicate balancing act – one that negotiates the tensions that arise between individuals, or the people whom government purportedly represents, and the inevitability of institutional powers shaping constituents through the very attempt to make imagined communities visible unto themselves. The numerous avenues for imagined communities to become manifest is relevant to this discussion of legibility as well. As mentioned previously, Gilmore advances the term legibility because it evokes

"the idea of putting into language or writing" (x). While legibility may carry connotations that better align with literacy and text, I emphasize the word "language" to clarify that, in this dissertation, legibility transcends the simplistic division of speech and writing. The tangible thought, the spoken word, and collective activities among groups – singing, marching in unison, or the like – are also features of language that foreground the possibility of imagined communities (such as the nation-state) becoming visible to and accepted by an individual or group of people.

This is not to say that communication is the same as legibility, for achieving the property of *visibility* – which is central to the way I employ the term legibility – requires something more. While my discussion of elements that increase visibility should not be taken as absolute, in this dissertation two emerge as conspicuous in efforts to manifest the nation-state: multiplication (of bodies or text), and repetition (of thought, speech, or behavior). While I will be discussing these elements separately, I do not want to minimize the way they are, in fact, interrelated: the multiplication of bodies or text in a singular moment can be thought of as a repetition in space, whereas the repetition of thought, speech, or behavior can be thought of as dispensing properties of multiplication over time. As I go on to argue in my chapters on Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, the distinguishing factor between the various manifestations of legibility is not the mechanism of expression (as in text versus the spoken word), but rather the problem of impermanence. In a world saturated with language, achieving enduring visibility in representations of the nation typically requires some form of multiplication or repetition.

The multiplication of bodies as a means to achieve visibility is most effectively illustrated in Anderson's description of imagined communities. A cognizant recognition of unity, for example, may precipitate from a group of "people wholly unknown to each other" who produce an "experience of simultaneity" by collectively "utter[ing] the same verses to the same melody" (145). But how enduring and far-reaching the recognition of this collective experience becomes is contingent, at least in part, on the number of participants. That is, if we isolate the "simultaneity" and "unisonance" generated by a congregation as the catalyst for identifying as part of an imagined community, then we must also acknowledge that the imagined community evoked by a crowd singing the national anthem at the Super Bowl achieves a greater degree of enduring visibility and symbolic national significance when compared to the same action performed by a crowd attending a high school football game. This same principle, in which opportunities for visibility are increased by multiplication, applies to text as well. In his discussion of inscriptions as the foundation of scientific culture, Bruno Latour describes the duplication of text as integral to the aggregation and longevity of ideas by virtue of making them *immutable*, a property which "is ensured by the process of printing many identical copies; mobility by the number of copies, the paper and the movable type" (10). The crystallization of ideas into a duplicable and mobile textual medium increases the chances that they will be encountered and seen by others, and will endure. In his extensive research on the relationship between geography and national identity, for example, Martin Brückner discusses the faith many authors put in geographic primers as a means for facilitating a sense of national community. Proponents of this approach believed that the mass duplication and dissemination of such texts would "become a

popular language by which ordinary citizens learned to imagine the contested idea of national unity" (101, *The Geographic Revolution*).

The significance of repetition is likewise a formative condition for the idea of ritual and ceremony, both of which elevate actions above customary, everyday conduct, and are premised on some recognizable and prescribed behavior that is repeatedly performed. Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, which is featured in Chapter 4, assembles these elements of repetition in her chapters on the Bowden reunion near the end of the novel. The very idea of a family *re*-union articulates the necessity to repeatedly consecrate the tenuous ties that bind distant family members together as they make pilgrimage to the house of their (colonial) ancestral origins. Notably, the culminating moment of the reunion is evocative of ceremony and ritual, when the guests consume an enormous gingerbread house with "Bowden Reunion" inscribed upon it "as if it were a pledge and token of loyalty" (85) – a sacrament eaten in the same manner of a holy communion. It is through the repeated gathering and performance of this collective "pledge" that the extended Bowden family seeks to prevent the family's geographic diffusion from disrupting an enduring recognition of familial ties. What is more, the greater the congregation that collects for the reunion, the more expansive the imagined community becomes. In her excellent examination of the feast at the Bowden reunion, Elizabeth Ammons goes so far as to identify the gingerbread scene as a "[signifier] of the Anglo-Norman conquest of North America" (97), enlarging the reading of this imagined community to encompass a symbolic microcosm of colonial expansion.

In this dissertation, repetition therefore emerges as a means for achieving enduring visibility, illuminating patterns that may otherwise remain obscured by the banality and chaos that attend the ubiquity of language. The processes that go into tallying and aggregating repetition, however, are not always apparent. In his historical account of map making during the Enlightenment, Matthew H. Edney locates two related acts that mobilize repetition to gain visibility: reconnaissance (to gather information), and mapping (to organize that information into pictorial geographic representation). "Reconnaissance," Edney explains, "emphasizes the linear route of the geographical traveler" on the ground, generating a catalogue of information that may later be incorporated into maps ("Reconsidering Enlightenment Geography" 176). Notably, many maps – and especially those that canvassed large areas of land – required several sources of reconnaissance, and these accounts frequently had details that did not align. Thus, Edney explains, "the geographer had to make many informed decisions about the quality and relative importance of each source in order to reconcile conflicts. Significantly, any conflicts could always be reconciled" (186). In this process, the mapmaker gravitated toward what is repeated in reconnaissance accounts, eschewing conflicting outliers in favor of what became visible through recognizable patterns.

Repetition and patterns alone were not sufficient to establish the credibility of maps produced in the Enlightenment, however. Because the process of synthesizing reconnaissance and previous map images required the use of reason, geographic memoirs were produced in the mapmaking process to document "how geographers arranged and combined their data in order to distinguish between geographic knowledge that was simply ambiguous and that which was *certain*" (187, emphasis in original).

These texts, Edney continues, were generated to bolster authority by justifying processes of reasoning, for "[without] the memoirs geographic knowledge was invalid" (187). And yet, geographic memoirs were most often published in volumes that never accompanied the image itself, and thus were completely distinct from the maps they described. What Edney illuminates in his research is the map's embodiment of the decision-making process, which, while written, is divorced from the image itself; and, while his research is specific to the Enlightenment, I emphasize his findings because I contend they make visible the complexity of legible entanglements that, while foundational to pictorial geography, are often erased from view. That is, the process of reasoning has not been erased from the production of modern maps, but the disciplinary expectation for this particular form of documentation has. Ultimately, recognizing the processes of discerning patterns and the formation of geographic memoirs that underlie Enlightenment mapmaking offers insight into how the visual authority conveyed by even modern maps obscures the subjectivity inherent in their formation.

Edney's illumination of the historical complexity of language foregrounding the formation of maps during the Enlightenment offers some insight into my own decision to pursue literary responses to legibility in this dissertation rather than geography alone. What Edney brings to light is the inextricable connections that geography shares with other areas of textual production, such as personal experiences (memoirs) and historical accounts of place, but which often go unrecognized in our conventional understanding of the discipline. This is not to say that I depart from an emphasis in geography in this dissertation; it is, however, to say that I find it necessary to utilize the broader aperture of legibility to effectively examine the intersections of geographic legibility and

national identity. As I go on to argue in my examination of texts by Charles Brockden Brown, Herman Melville, and Jewett, these authors explicitly scrutinize the hidden subjectivity in maps and question the limitations of geographic images as authoritative reflections of the physical world. Moreover, all texts discussed in this dissertation approach the legibility of the nation as something to be questioned and complicated by exposing hidden contradictions or narratives that have gone unrecognized, as scales of vision are consolidated and simplified to better bring the nation into focus.

The benefit of examining institutional manifestations of legibility (as opposed to geography alone) that uphold national identity is evident in Mark Rifkin's *Manifesting America: The Imperial Construction of U.S. National Space*, for Rifkin's deliberate use of the term national *space* demands a more abstracted appreciation of the nation than conventional applications of geography allow. In his revealing discussion on U.S. tax policy toward land reacquired by the Oneida Indian Nation, Rifken recounts how the Supreme Court ruled against the Oneida's claims that the land they had repossessed should be exempt from state and federal taxation. While the Oneidas claimed the land should be sovereign because it once comprised "part of their 'reservation'" that was "unlawfully sold to whites in 1807" (3), the court's reasoning, as recounted by Rifken, asserted, "Oneida sovereignty cannot be recognized as extending over this territory because to do so would unsettle longstanding legal schemas" (3). Not only would recognizing sovereignty be politically and jurisdictionally disruptive, but the commentary for the court's majority opinion[4] also went on claim that the Oneida Indian Nation had failed to adequately contest this federal dispossession of land in a timely

[4] Notably, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, one of the more liberal and progressive justices, wrote the commentary for the majority opinion.

manner, such that "the delay in the assertion of native claims over this territory eliminates the possibility of recovering exclusive authority over it now" (Rifkin 3). This assertion is astonishing because it cannot be made without belying the way governing institutions exert power precisely to limit the success of such resistance efforts. Rifkin emphasizes this same point when he argues that "[the] court's perversely tautological propositions in this case illustrate rather dramatically the ways that U.S. national policy and identity fundamentally is animated by and enacts an imperial dynamic – naturalizing domestic space by foreclosing countervailing political geographies" (3-4).

Michel de Certeau's essay "Walking in the City" offers a consolidated example of many ideas discussed thus far, for it brings together the properties of repetition leading to visibility, geography, and abstracted space that I have attempted to describe as formative to legibility. When de Certeau describes the disordered movement of individual urban walkers through the eyes of a city planner, he addresses the problem of attaining visibility amid a chaotic landscape of language and information. These moving bodies, de Certeau suggests, embody "blindness" as they collectively compose "an urban 'text'" that they "write without reading" (102). The aggregation of these movements remains invisible to the participants, for without a unifying emotion or purpose to transform these individuals into an imagined community, there is no conscious attempt to ascribe meaning to the everyday act of walking from within. "These practitioners," de Certeau goes on to explain, "employ spaces that are not self-aware" (102). It is the imaginary voyeur at the top of a "1350-foot tower" who attempts to both observe and direct this activity by monitoring repeated movements "on urban maps" which "translate its traces (*here* heavy, *there* very light)" (106). And yet, while

the map may indeed make visible repetition and patterns that go unrecognized by the walker on the ground, it remains a mere replica of these ambulations, and cannot exist without the walkers: any meaning derived from their movement becomes part of a panoptic "fiction of knowledge" (102).

The "fiction of knowledge" that de Certeau describes is consistent with the way I conceive of legibility in this dissertation. For de Certeau, the fiction is that the representation is, at best, merely a negotiation between the actual movements of the walkers and what the mapmaker can see. If, as I argue, we can describe legibility as the attempt to stabilize meaning within an impermanent and indecipherable world, then the language and text that emerge are merely reflective of attempts to make the inexplicable *visible*. Within the context of the formation and longevity of the United States, this manifests as a problem of description versus domination. That is, the legibility of the nation-state is the product of a vigorous negotiation between two competing objectives: to "describe, observe, and map" the people who collectively comprise a democratic republic, while simultaneously "shap[ing]" the population to achieve some degree of coherence and unification. This same tension that troubles legibility of the nation-state only becomes more pronounced when expanded beyond the nation's (imaginary) borders. At the level of U.S. imperialism, the previously discussed directive to "describe, observe, and map" foreign populations is more expressly acknowledged as a mechanism of control, and the objective of attaining some sense of unification or cohesion generally gives way to "shap[ing]" populations to more effectively serve U.S. interests.

The issue of "shap[ing]" populations, controlling them, and undermining democracy in its own name is precisely the point that Snowden makes in his own efforts to communicate why the surveillance practices he witnessed while working for a company contracted with the NSA are such egregious violations of privacy. In his interview with Alan Rusbridger and Ewen MacAskill in July 2014, Snowden explained, "What I came to feel – and what I think more and more people have seen at least the potential for – is that a regime that is described as a national security agency has stopped representing the public interest and has instead begun to protect and promote state security interests." Thus, in this dissertation, I strive to examine this tension Snowden describes between the people and governing institutions by tracing how legibility as a concept is, in fact, inseparable from the negotiation of power that occurs in the construction and maintenance of the U.S. nation-state, and its expanding imperial reach throughout the long-nineteenth century.

Rapid expansion in the nineteenth century necessarily produced enormous variations in the way citizens imagined themselves as connected to the U.S. as a nation, and, later in the century, as an emerging imperial power. Thus, the organization of chapters in this dissertation follows a chronological trajectory to better survey the way responses to the legibility of the nation by American authors have evolved throughout the long nineteenth century. The first two chapters on Charles Brockden Brown and Leonora Sansay address novels and texts from the early Republic and reveal a shared anxiety about the stability and identity of the new nation. In regards to legibility, both Brown and Sansay demonstrate a preoccupation with the way contemporary vantage points can be disrupted by new information. Chapter 1 presents a comparative analysis

of Brown's gothic novel *Edgar Huntly: Or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799) and a prospectus published in 1809 detailing Brown's plans to complete an ambitious two-volume geographic text titled *A System of General Geography* to put forth a more comprehensive vision of Brown's overall vision for geographic than has previously been attempted. As Martin Brückner has argued in his numerous publications addressing the influence of geography on American national identity,[5] geographic literacy in the early Republic was viewed as an essential component for the development of a widespread national consciousness capable of connecting the individual to the nation at large. Brown channels this relationship between geographic legibility and national identity in both his literary and geographic endeavors, giving voice to the profound colonial anxiety that attended projects of national geographic representation in his time. In *Edgar Huntly*, this anxiety manifests in the indomitable and inherently *unknowable* landscape of Solesbury, which defies the flattening logic of mapped representations produced during the Enlightenment. By evoking the corporeal body and the indecipherable unconscious in his descriptions of the landscape, and by featuring the hidden stratified interior of Solesbury's cavernous geology, Brown resists the impulse to characterize the land as a legible feature.

What is more, reading *Edgar Huntly* alongside Brown's later proposal for *A System of General Geography* reveals the author's extraordinary prescience in terms of changes that have since occurred within the discipline of geography. Though critics have largely ignored Brown's 1809 prospectus, this chapter argues that his geographic

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[5] See especially *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity*; and "Lessons in Geography: Maps, Spellers, and Other Grammars of Nationalism in the Early Republic."

vision advocates changes that are better recognized within the sub-discipline of human geography, the rise of which many historians attribute to Brown's German contemporaries Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter a mere decade later. What the comparative analysis of these two texts ultimately reveals is Brown's long-term interest with the problem of any characterization of the nation, whether literary or geographic: because knowledge and information about the nation accumulates at such a rapid pace, the need for revision is constant, thereby undermining the durability of any attempt to make it legible. By acknowledging this problem of enduring legibility in his work, Brown reinforces the idea that the nation and its identity must be understood as mutable.

In Chapter 2, I examine intersections of imperial powers in the Caribbean and their violent collisions in Sansay's *Secret History: Or, the Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808) to reveal Sansay's veiled commentary on imperial expansion in two very different contexts: first, the French colonization of St. Domingo, where Sansay formerly lived with her husband and was forced to flee during the slave uprising in 1802; and second, a historical riddle regarding Aaron Burr, who served as Vice President under Thomas Jefferson, and in 1807 (one year prior to the publication of *Secret History*) was tried and acquitted for treason for allegedly conspiring to wrest land and territories from the United States in order to establish his own empire. I argue that the increasingly claustrophobic spaces of confinement that Sansay's protagonist Clara endures within an abusive marriage to her French husband parallel similar claustrophobic enclosures that emerge in the escalation of the slave revolution under French rule in St. Domingo to comment on the inadequacy of French colonial governance. As Clara and her American

sister Mary flee the slave uprising in St. Domingo, the pattern of claustrophobic confinement associated with French colonialism expands to similarly charge the British and Spanish in the Caribbean with being unfit to govern, portraying these nations as doing little more than pillaging resources to be siphoned back to the European continent.

The criticism that Sansay levies toward European colonies is in sharp contrast to the novel's reverence for Aaron Burr, and reveals what criticism on the novel has largely overlooked: the "secret history" of American empire that had unfolded just after the novel's account of failed French governance in St. Domingo. By addressing nearly all of the letters in the epistolary novel to Burr, and by framing him as a friend and supporter of women, I argue that Sansay seeks to restore the former vice president's damaged reputation in the wake of his failed attempt to secure his own American empire. Moreover, my analysis of the spaces of constriction that arise due to poor governance exposes the novel's oblique criticism of Jefferson as the nation's leader, and puts Burr forth as a candidate better suited to deliver Jefferson's vision for an "Empire for Liberty" than the president himself. Many critics have interpreted *Secret History* as Sansay's attempt to redeem her own reputation in the wake of leaving her husband Louis Sansay, for the biographical details of this event closely mirror the specter of social condemnation that Clara encounters upon fleeing her abusive spouse. My reading of Burr's haunting presence in the novel offers a complementary reading, and contends that Sansay is equally interested in re-authoring him. By presenting an alternative portrait of Burr and his western misadventures, Sansay directly challenges the dominant "history" of him as a traitor and ruined man, and encourages her readers to

acknowledge an altered vision of his legacy and place within the sphere of American politics.

While Chapters 1 and 2 reveal a shared anxiety about the stability of the nation, my examination of Melville's *Moby-Dick: Or, The Whale* in Chapter 3 demonstrates a subtle shift from these earlier concerns. Rather than viewing representation as susceptible to disruptions that emerge from the discovery of new information, *Moby-Dick*, I argue, grapples with the subjectivity inherent in any attempt at representation. The novel thus continues to explore the pervasive manifestation of colonial and imperial anxiety in relation to the U.S. by addressing the problem of permanence as a constructed concept. While the first two chapters of this dissertation address these anxieties with reference to the stability and long-term viability of the early Republic, the widened orbit of Melville's transoceanic novel, and the text's acknowledgement of the relentless progression of *infinite* time, put forth the suggestion that failure is inevitable for any conceived nation or empire. In regards to the United States, Melville's novel questions the tenuous connections that uphold the nation's rapid westward expansion by observing a contradictory imperative hidden in mapping: to put forth purportedly objective descriptions of present geographical realities that appear to be permanent (but are not), and to simultaneously predict the future of these geographical and geopolitical formations. Without minimizing Moby Dick's mythic symbolism, which embodies ideas and readings too numerous to detail, this chapter reads the whale as an illustration of the limitations inherent in any representation, especially as they relate to the tools and methods available for generating geographic accounts of the world at large. By interrogating the most basic assumptions about legibility, and by putting forth the

disorienting suggestion that permanence is little more than an illusion, my reading of *Moby-Dick* interprets Ahab's monomaniac pursuit of the White Whale as a futile attempt to gain the supernatural and godlike vision that the novel suggests is required to make representation possible.

The final chapter in this dissertation features Jewett's short novel *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), and departs from concerns of stabilizing national borders by addressing the nation's acceleration toward becoming an imperial world power at the end of the century. This shift in perception is most evident when the novel features a map of the North American continent, the northernmost contours of which stand in contradiction to a baffling account of polar discovery provided early on in the novel by a character named Captain Littlepage. By featuring the map's hemispheric perspective as a scale capable of erasing individual experiences that arise from empathetic human connections, Jewett's novel questions at what point a nation's identity becomes so divorced from its local inhabitants that its massive scale of representation becomes *violent*.

As I go on to explain in Chapter 4, this conception of violence as it relates to representation is evinced in acts of erasure that accompany projects of legibility. What is more, these erasures are not limited to mapped representations, but extend to narratives of discovery and national identity as well. Jewett critics to date, for example, have failed to observe that the novel features a peculiar era of scientific inquiry in the nineteenth century that alleged the existence of an open polar sea located at the North Pole, beyond the Arctic ice, which had been debunked some years before the novel's publication. Thus, I draw upon the work of Thomas S. Kuhn to argue that Jewett's

Country interrogates the fallibility of institutional knowledge and the narratives they generate, such as those produced by the "Ge'graphic Society" referenced by Captain Littlepage, which are often viewed as trustworthy and authoritative. In doing so, I contend the novel exposes a preoccupation with the validity of narratives, especially as they coalesce in the formation of national identity. That Littlepage's account of the Arctic would have been deemed conceivable a short time prior to *Country*'s publication, but is now unceremoniously rebuked by the North American map, makes visible the injustice and pain that accompany erasures exacted by revisionary histories. In the context of national identity, Jewett puts forth a cautionary outlook on the way individuals and local communities allow themselves to be defined by more encompassing views of the nation.

What I have developed in these four chapters is far from comprehensive, and I was unable to address several texts and broader implications for this study of legibility. In the Afterward, I offer an overview of authors and works I would have liked to incorporate into this dissertation, as well as a brief discussion of how this study of legibility in the long nineteenth century might be applicable to more contemporary issues. What becomes most clear about legibility in the following chapters, however, is the inevitable power that accompanies any attempt to manifest the idea or image of a nation. As exemplified in Henry David Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government," the individual's place within the nation requires a transaction of power that undermines the idea that "we should be men first, and subjects afterward" (965), for the connection that binds an imagined community cannot be achieved without some loss of individual autonomy. This is not to endorse individual autonomy over connections to the nation or

empire, but rather to say that violence attends both extremes of this spectrum. The calamities that attend Edgar, Brown's protagonist in *Edgar Huntly*, begin with his solitary forays into the wilderness, and, more often than not, result in the destruction of those who threaten to disrupt the control of his singular narrative over the landscape's embodied geographies. Addressing the other end of this spectrum, Jewett's *Country* brings to the fore the great challenge of finding a balance between the benefits of community membership and the totalizing impositions that come from the dissociated authority of governing institutions.

The authors featured in this dissertation thus demonstrate the necessity for power to be persistently negotiated in efforts to make the nation legible. Legibility, I contend, is like a pendulum that becomes visible from the intersection of influence exerted by governing institutions, which cannot help but impose definitions upon the people it attempts to describe, and the challenges to institutional authority that arise when individuals and smaller groups occasionally succeed in disrupting this dynamic. As this dissertation shows of nineteenth-century America, this pendulum shifts and moves over time; it never rests in a permanent station due to the constant pressure exerted on both sides. Thus, the meaning of the nation is never stable and is always in a continuous process of negotiation, illuminating the uncomfortable fragility of legibility that attends efforts to describe an impermanent and ever-changing world.

CHAPTER ONE | Writing the Corporeal Nation: Charles Brockden Brown's Embodied Geographies

The sheer breadth of Charles Brockden Brown's written production poses several challenges for contemporary audiences. Though he is most famous for his early gothic novels,[6] Brown's later forays into a miscellany of journalistic pursuits makes his diverse body of work difficult to categorize. Many critics tend to divide his literary fiction and later journalistic writing, but Michael Cody offers a compelling argument for considering the unifying principles within Brown's oeuvre. For one, the categorical distinctions that many scholars rely upon today are not necessarily applicable in our retrospective assessment of Brown's many literary pursuits. Citing the work of Susan Balasco Smith and Kenneth Price, Cody advocates for considering the "history of the book" when it comes to Brown's work, which as Smith and Price explain, comprises "a study of the context of printed texts in a variety of forms (books, magazines, newspapers, journals, reviews, and pamphlets) and how those texts are produced, received, and interpreted" (5, cited in Cody). The result, Cody argues, is a more comprehensive understanding of the profound influence that Brown's many areas of work had upon the nation:

> Brown and others believed that a wide diffusion of useful knowledge – of politics, education, science, and the like – would help create the stability, order and national identity necessary for the union's survival. He seems, in part, to have turned from the book market because of the greater opportunity offered by magazines for this diffusion of knowledge in the young republic, a mission that was, perhaps, his only long-term concern as a professional author. (12)

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[6] *Wieland; or, The Transformation* (1798); *Ormond; or, the Secret Witness* (1799); *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799); and *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793*, published in two parts (1799 and 1800).

The concession that Brown abandoned books as a medium for disseminating knowledge to the nation does not necessarily indicate a transformed belief regarding the value of his novels; rather, it speaks to the way that Brown's efforts were redirected to more efficaciously address his "long-term concern" with ensuring the nation's continuation.

This chapter takes up what Cody only touches upon here, which is the way that Brown viewed text as a medium imbued with the capacity to shape the identity of a burgeoning nation. Not only did Brown "[believe] that a wide diffusion of useful knowledge … would help create the stability, order and national identity necessary for the union's survival" (12), but, as I go on to argue, he viewed the textual mediums through which this knowledge was conveyed as capable of manifesting the nation. Brown's writing, that is, could be described as a lifelong effort to "write" the nation into being. There is a crucial gap within the critical conversation on Brown's use of text to shape American national identity, however, in which his early republic fiction remains divorced from his later publications and endeavors in generalized knowledge and geography. While Cody analyzes the shaping influence of "knowledge" disseminated by Brown through publication venues like the *Literary Magazine*, scholars like Martin Brückner and Hsuan Hsu have compellingly argued that Brown's interest in geography was similarly grounded in the desire to locate a national identity. In this chapter, I investigate the unexamined intersection between these two formulations of text as a means to articulate and influence national identity. Ultimately, I argue that it is necessary to recognize the way that Brown viewed pictorial geography (such as maps) as a means to manifest the nation's body, while a meaningful synthesis of textual information *about* the nation would reveal its identity.

This chapter therefore focuses on two very different texts – Brown's prospectus for *A System of General Geography* (1809) and his gothic novel *Edgar Huntly* (1799) – with the idea that a comparative study enhances our understanding of Brown's geographic vision, his geographically-minded novel, and the way that these texts concomitantly strive to manifest the nation's body and identity in Brown's work. *Edgar Huntly* expands traditional conceptions of geographic earth description, which include surface-oriented surveys, to address the surface *and* interiority of a subject. For Brown, the nation cannot be understood through a reductive treatment of the physical properties, the kind of understanding most explicitly associated with geography. Reading *Edgar Huntly* with an appreciation for the shortcomings Brown viewed in geography justifies a more liberal reading of Brown's prospectus for *A System of General Geography* than has previously been attempted. By comparing the corporeal nation to the human body, and by emphasizing how text is imbued with the capacity to shape the corporeal subject, Brown accentuates the plasticity of character and emphasizes the relentless change and evolution of the nation.

1.1 Groundwork for "a new system of geography"

In his prospectus for *A System of General Geography*, Brown declared his intent to "present to the world a new system of geography," emphasizing in particular the "[necessity] that he should give the world something *new*" for the project to be deemed a success (2, emphasis mine). The work was conceived as a small gazette of maps accompanied by two descriptive volumes: one dedicated to North America, and the other to the rest of the world. Although Brown had allegedly completed the volume depicting the world outside of North America before his untimely death – a tome

comprised of over 1000 pages – efforts to locate it have been unsuccessful. Brown's prospectus is therefore plainly valuable in obtaining a clearer picture of what was particularly "new" about his *System of General Geography*, but its succinct nine pages pose obvious challenges. As such, I suggest that a comparative analysis of Brown's prospectus and his literary works, and *Edgar Huntly* in particular, demonstrates that Brown viewed pictorial geographic representation as a means to manifest the nation's body, but viewed this representation as incomplete; only through a meaningful synthesis of information – which included but also extended beyond geopolitical descriptions – could the nation's identity be conceived.

To apprehend the innovative elements Brown's proposed *System of General Geography*, which aims to address the problem of locating a national identity *in addition to* a physical body, first requires a historical overview of geographic ideas at the turn of the nineteenth century. Brown's prospectus emerges in the midst of a critical period of transition in the spatial consciousness of Americans, one that might broadly be characterized as the movement from the underpinnings of Enlightenment rationality in geographic representation to the advocacy of scientific positivism that characterized the emergence of cartography later in the century. The upheaval of geographic ideas at the time of Brown's intervention will be described in greater detail below; for now, however, it is enough to say that his prospectus sought to challenge superficial interpretations of "earth description" that tended to dominate geographic practices, but were insufficient to articulate and bring the nation's identity into being. America's break from the empires of Europe left many questions regarding what the nation was, and what it would become; unlike its European contemporaries, the United States did

not have an established history that could reflect a cohesive sense of self. Brown's geography, I suggest, sought to address this shortcoming. With the exception of Brückner, Brown scholars and historical geographers alike have largely overlooked how the prospectus for *A System of General Geography* communicates this endeavor to articulate a national identity. This examination is therefore be valuable for historians of geography in early America and for Brown scholars interested in how his geographic ideas may have influenced his literature (and vice versa).

The publication of Brown's prospectus occurs at a moment when the conception of geography as a discipline was expanding and becoming more unwieldy. According to Helena Michie and Ronald R. Thomas, "Through much of the eighteenth-century, geography was historically understood to be a discipline of earth description, as the name implies" (10); however, "in the nineteenth-century … such a narrow understanding of the mission of geography was called into question" (10). The rise of fields like geology and botany near the close of the eighteenth century ushered in new ideals of what ought to be valued in the sciences, as the analysis of relationships between living organisms and an ever-changing planet began to eclipse the previously dominant methodology of geography as a project of mere "earth description" (11). In response to evolving approaches to scientific disciplines, exemplified here by geology and botany, Michie and Thomas explain, "the field of geography was clearly going through fundamental rethinking and revision" in the nineteenth century (11). Brown, I contend, sought to influence the evolutionary trajectory of geography at this time of disciplinary upheaval.

What Michie and Thomas refer to in passing as a "narrow understanding … of geography" is clarified by some terminology introduced in Geoffrey J. Martin's account of Bernhardus Varenius, who in the first part of the seventeenth century articulated an "intellectual problem" in geography regarding "the relation between the specific and the general" (90). With the inundation of new information generated by exploration, a problem arose with how to manage what Varenius referred to as "special geography," or information about a specific place, with the aims of "general geography," which sought to reconcile an abundance of specific information into universal principles that could be broadly summarized (90). While Varenius and others conceded that special and general geography were "two mutually interdependent parts of a whole" (90), our understanding of this era as adopting a "narrow" focus is derived from the belief that special geography was only valuable insofar as it contributed to the "coherent structure" of general geography (91). The emphasis on general geography, in other words, operated as an organizing – and editing – principle for distilling information generated from special geography.

Matthew H. Edney brings the distinction between special and general geography into even greater clarity in his account of Enlightenment geographic practices, which detail the relationship between reconnaissance and mapping – two methods that represent special and general geography, respectively. Reconnaissance, or the process of organizing space and visual landscape observations into a "linear narrative that replicates the observer's route through the world" (176, "Reconsidering Enlightenment Geography"), is a manifestation of special geography that served to provide detailed information about the landscape from the ground, often through the accounts of travel

writers and explorers. Geographers ultimately relied upon multiple sources of reconnaissance to enact general geography, or what would eventually be represented in small-scale maps. (For those operating outside the realm of geography, the idea of placing *general* geography in the same category as *small-scale* maps may seem counterintuitive. Nonetheless, small-scale maps are general because they refer to representations that cover large areas of land. A map showing a great expanse of land is deemed "small-scale" because it shows a large area of land on a *small* space.) Most importantly, and consistent with Martin's account, both reconnaissance and mapping were critical to the success of "projects for encyclopedic knowledge production" during the Enlightenment. Taken together, the dual projects of reconnaissance and general geography, or mapping, were "idealized as constituting a comprehensive *archive*" of geographic knowledge (165, emphasis in original).[7]

While both reconnaissance and mapping produced information that comprised the geographic archive, they were not equally integrated in geographic knowledge production; rather, the "coherent structure" of general geography superseded contributions made by special geography. Map makers, who evaluated the surplus of information supplied by reconnaissance to integrate into maps, "had to make many informed decisions about the quality and relative importance of each source in order to reconcile conflicts. Significantly, any conflicts could always be reconciled" (Edney 186, "Reconsidering Enlightenment Geography"). Principles of Enlightenment geography

[7] Edney's use of the word "archive" is consistent with the first and second definitions listed in the Oxford English Dictionary, both of which were established around the beginning of the Enlightenment (1645 and 1638, respectively): "1. A place in which public records or other important historic documents are kept," and "2. A historical record or document so preserved."

dictated that the rational thought processes underpinning the reconciliation of discrepancies that emerged from competing reconnaissance accounts be made transparent, and so as an accompaniment to the maps they made, geographers wrote "geographical memoirs" to justify the legitimacy of their maps. These memoirs explained "how [map makers had] arranged and combined their data in order to distinguish between geographical knowledge that was simply unambiguous and that which was *certain*. Without the memoirs, geographic knowledge was invalid" (Edney 187). In terms of the distinction between special and general geography, geographic memoirs offered rhetorical justification as to how some information from reconnaissance accounts could be adapted, or, for those parts that posed problems for the cohesiveness of the map, discarded. This meant that reconnaissance accounts detailing tangential observations were dissevered from the larger project of general geography, though they could be catalogued for the general benefit of the archive.

In the early nineteenth century, however, different fields had a more direct influence on geography, causing a shift in the way the field was conceived. On this point, Geoffrey J. Martin argues that there are good reasons for considering German geographers Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter as pivotal figures marking the end of classical geography and the beginning of modern geography (107). One essential distinction is the way that Humboldt and Ritter perceived geography to be interconnected with "the physical, biotic, and human features of the earth" (138), facilitating a new synthesis of information common to these fields. Humboldt, for example, "connected the vegetation cover on the steep slopes with the water supply in the Lake of Valencia and with the economic and political conditions that led to the

deforestation of the slopes" (143), whereas Ritter "sought to understand the interconnections, the causal interrelations, that make the world cohesive" (123). Ritter went so far as to use the word *zusammenhang* to articulate the "harmony of interconnected parts" that a study of geography might reveal (143). The objective of geography for Humboldt and Ritter, in this sense, was not merely to accumulate facts and observations, but rather to broadly extrapolate what this information revealed about the relationship between humans and their environments. In essence, their works represented a new direction in the field that privileged not only the kinds of "earth description" that could be absorbed into general geography, but also how geographic descriptions were related to – and, in some ways, contingent upon – other scientific disciplines and the capitalistic activities that supported human civilization.

If the modern geography described by Humboldt and Ritter is principally characterized by relationships between the landscape and its organisms, then it bears considering how Brown promoted this shift in geographic thinking on the American front. It is arguably because Brown's *System of General Geography* was never completed and made widely accessible that scholars of the history of geography – like Martin – have largely overlooked the way that his 1809 prospectus anticipated many of the geographic developments attributed to his German contemporaries. The publication of Humboldt's massive thirty-volume *Voyage aux regions equinoxiales de Noveau Continent* (*Journey to the New Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent*) had only just begun in 1808, and the most influential portions of this publication in the scholarly world – *Relation historique* (Volumes 28-30) – were not translated into English until 1825 (Martin 115-116). Ritter's 19-volume work, *Die Erdkunde im Verhältniss zur*

Natur und zur Geschichte des Menschen (*Geography in Relation to Nature and the History of Mankind*), appeared even later, over a period from 1816-1859 (124).

Like Humboldt and Ritter, Brown sought to derive some larger sense of meaning from the process of earth description, though it is worth noting the difference between a general movement that pushed for geography to transcend the Enlightenment's impetus for accumulating knowledge and the American search for a national identity. After all, one of the governing arguments in Brückner's book, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity*, has to do with the way that "the description of physical geography provided a highly productive metaphor through which American identities were imagined" (5). Thus, when Brown professes dissatisfaction with geographic works that, hitherto, only detailed "the *means* by which the real state of this globe … has been ascertained" rather than "the *results* of these discoveries or processes" (7, emphasis in original), his issue is not with the information itself, but how little is being made of it. To this end, Brown planned to compose a mindful "selection of facts," the arrangement of which, he argued, would present "connection[s]" and lead to "deeper inquiries and more elaborate reflection … than in any [book] hitherto published on the same subject" (3). In other words, rather than presenting an accumulated tabulation of information, Brown's work would take shape by emphasizing information that could orient Americans, offering them a national mirror that would convey who and what the country was.

Notably, Brown advocates a historical perspective to demonstrate the significance of his findings. "The history and condition of human society," Brown writes, "are themes sufficiently important and extensive to demand much larger space

than is commonly allowed them on such occasions" (7) – "such occasions" here referring to similar publications that attempt to convey geographic information. One reason that "history" and "human society" were important in Brown's vision of geography is because they exemplified the fact that, like the characters in his early novels, geographic subjects were continually changing. The identity of the United States was similarly a subject that would be prone to change and evolution. This emphasis on the inevitability of change is echoed in Brown's acknowledgement of the static nature of geographic representation, in which the archive cannot keep pace with the immediacy of exploration and experience. Brown's historical approach to geography is at odds with the general aims of encyclopedic knowledge production during the Enlightenment, which tended to present geographic information as a matter of data collection, systematically filling in voids and blank spaces on the imperial map. The temporal progression of geographic exploration and asynchrony of reconnaissance accounts in Enlightenment geography, in other words, is obviated by the larger project of general geography, which presents a cohesive image of the land – one that rhetorically implies a unification of time, even though the production of information represented is temporally disparate. Brown troubles this static representation of geographic knowledge in *A System of General Geography* when he writes,

> Every day new regions are explored; countries hitherto familiar to us are traversed by more candid and sagacious observers; the errors of former travellers are detected; new views are opened to us. The lapse of a single year is sufficient to make the most important additions to our knowledge, and to render existing geographical works in some measure obsolete. …With respect to North America, the daily and rapid extension of our geographical knowledge is notorious, while the rapid progress of this portion of the world, in population and riches, continually calls for new pictures. No writer can hope to keep pace with this progress, and the most perfect work will be made essentially defective

by the lapse of a very few years. (6)

Central to Brown's account of geographic knowledge pertaining to North America is that it remains in a perpetual state of revision. Thus, the most prohibitive element in conducting a comprehensive study of geography for Brown is not the challenge of creating a thorough account of the land, but the durability of that account over time.

By framing endeavors to organize geographic information as a continual work-in-progress, Brown articulates a transition in spatial consciousness distinguishing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: whereas eighteenth-century geography typically adopted Enlightenment assumptions of rationality, often presenting knowledge as encyclopedic (and, by extension, finite), nineteenth-century geography – characterized here by Brown – departs from Enlightenment traditions by troubling the objectivity of geographic surveys, and particularly the notion that rationality could translate to geographic precision.[8] By accounting for both the "rapid extension of our geographic knowledge" and "the rapid progress of this portion of the world" (6), Brown rejects the possibility for definitive geographic knowledge by demonstrating that attempts to represent North America are not only spatial, but also cultural and temporal. In all, Brown's emphasis on synthesizing information to generate meaningful commentary, and his insistence on connecting the former tenets of geographic "earth description" to the historical evolution of civilization, offer a glimpse into how the author conceived of influencing the future of geography in his proposed *System of General Geography*.

[8] Indeed, by asserting that "the rapid progress of this portion of the world, in population and riches, continually calls for new pictures" (6), Brown calls for an expansion of geographic knowledge to include information about the culture and people who reside there as well. For more on Brown's fascination with geographically-specific statistical information, see Brückner's perceptive essay "Sense, Census, and the 'Statistical View in the *Literary Magazine* and *Jane Talbot*."

Despite the fact that Brown's work in geography was related to the concurrent broadening conceptions of the discipline and its interrelationships described above, his writings on this matter have been mischaracterized and overlooked for the nuances they advocate in contrast to the numerous texts on geography written by Brown's predecessors. In the most detailed analysis available on Brown's prospectus for *A System of General Geography*, Brückner charges Brown's "vision of geography" as being "expansive, totalizing, and even chaotic in its undiscriminating appropriation of nearly all forms of knowledge" (*The Geographic Revolution* 187). This assertion is based on a lengthy passage where Brown recites the dynamic characteristics of geography as a discipline, and which Brückner only partially cites to the detriment of his analysis. With the aim of clarifying the misconception, I quote at length:

> Geography is commonly and vaguely defined to be "*a description of the earth*." The points of view in which the earth we inhabit presents itself to our observation. If it be viewed collectively, as a great mass of matter, having certain motions, and obtaining light and heat, dryness and moisture, in portions and degrees, arising from these motions, and from its local relation to other distant masses of matter, we may be said to describe the earth, and therefore to discuss a necessary branch at least of geography. Geography will likewise confer her name upon our labours, if we consider the earth as composed of solid inert masses, of different colours, densities, gravities, and chemical properties. In like manner, if we describe the various ranks of organized beings, from man to moss, we describe the earth, and may therefore be considered as geographers. If we view the surface of the earth, as divided horizontally into land and water, and vertically into hill, valley, and plain, we are geographers. If we consider man in his social, political, or physical condition, and the surface and products of the earth in relation to the works and subsistence of men; as divided among nations; as checkered by cities, villages, and fields; as ploughed, or pastured, or resigned to the reign of nature, we are still geographers. (4, emphasis in original)

Brückner's assessment of this passage as conveying an "expansive, totalizing, and even chaotic" representation of geography is not incorrect in regard to its general content (187), but attributing these ideas unequivocally to Brown's "vision of geography" is.

While acknowledging that Brown begins "in keeping with the tradition of textbook authors, who define 'Geography 'as 'a description of the earth,'" Brückner determines that "Brown inserts *his* definition of authorship and readership … conventionally enough with the fundamentals of the geographer's work: 'Geography will … confer her name upon our labours …'" (187, emphasis mine). This determination is ambiguous at best; there are no linguistic markers in the passage to indicate that the views outlined above are *Brown's* "definition," nor to distinguish where the "tradition of textbook authors" ends and Brown's begins.

I emphasize this point because the disciplinary boundaries of geography towards the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century were not so clearly defined as Brückner's interpretations of Brown would suggest. Immanuel Kant's writings and lectures on geography during the Enlightenment, for example, have recently prompted an edited collection of scholarly responses entitled *Kant's Geographies* (2013), in which Stuart Eldon has concluded, "Kant understood geography in a very broad sense, including much of what we would today understand as human geography under his title of physical geography" (4-5). Similarly, as Michie and Thomas remind us, not only did "geographic expeditions and explorations" serve a "wide variety of scientific, political, commercial, and military purposes" in the nineteenth century, but "the tools and discourse of geography were being appropriated by a host of other disciplines – for example, biology anthropology, ethnology, physics, and literary and travel writing – and the influence of geography expanded well beyond the confines of the profession of geography itself" (11). In light of how expansive the definition of geography appears to have been at the time that Brown was staging his

own geographic intervention, I suggest that a careful reading of the language used in his prospectus indicates that Brown is exposing the insufficiency of totalizing interpretations of geography as "earth description" by devolving into superfluity. His opening statement contains a subtle critique of the common view of geography as "'*a description of the earth*,'" which he immediately charges as "vague" (4). The repeated use of the conditional "if," moreover, is consistently grounded in iterations of the "vague" terminology of "earth description": "*if* we describe the earth," "*If* we view the surface of the earth," "*If* we describe the various ranks of organized beings … we describe the earth, and may therefore be considered geographers" (4, emphasis mine). In each instance, the conditional "if" creates a causal argument based upon the conventional definition of geography as "earth description," which necessarily implicates an entire discourse surrounding the community of "geographers."

The superfluity inherent in characterizations of geography as "earth description" is precisely what Brown critiques in his discussion of volumes on "general geography," which are all too often so ambitious in their breadth that their works become unfocused and ineffective. According to Brown, "all writers of general geography," bound by the audacious and expansive terminology of "earth description," strive to simultaneously represent "the province of the astronomer, the historian, the political economist, the lawyer, the botanist, the zoologist, the chemist, the philologist, the orator, and the moralist," and, therefore, ultimately produce works that "are unsatisfactory and superficial" (4). In an era when geography was redefining itself in relation to other fields, it makes sense that Brown would specify for his readers how the aims and limitations of his work relates to an otherwise dizzying array of information. Indeed,

Brown's precise objectives for *A System of General Geography* narrow the scope of his own project by reasoning that "[a] description of the surface of the earth, first, physically … [and] secondly, politically … seems to come more strictly under the proper definition of geography than any other view on the subject" (5). That Brown goes so far as to suggest a more limited and "proper definition of geography" is enough to demonstrate that the author is, in fact, more discriminatory in his "vision of geography" and overall design for *A System of General Geography* than Brückner recognizes in his critique.

The brevity of Brown's prospectus limits what extrapolations can be made about his designs for the project as a whole, but the analysis above supports a few modest conclusions: first, that Brown sought to influence the future of geography as a discipline, which was in flux at the turn of the nineteenth century; and second, that he viewed geographic representation as an effective – albeit temporally limited – method through which a national identity could begin to be recognized and further shaped. The American landscape, Brown acknowledged, was continuously changing, and in emphasizing this point, he conceded that even his own *System of General Geography* could not escape the inevitable fate of becoming "obsolete" or "essentially defective" in a matter of years (6). To conclude this portrait of Brown's geography here would be premature, however. As the next section demonstrates, the landscape in Brown's 1799 novel *Edgar Huntly* features numerous interior dimensions that complicate the idea of geography as a discipline focused upon the surface and exterior of the globe. In doing so, Brown extends the complex psychology of his characters to the landscape itself, thereby emphasizing the problem in reducing the nation's image to a matter of surfaces

and geopolitical boundaries. Brown's conception of the nation, like his characters, cannot be severed from the question and construction of identity; and identity, Brown demonstrates, is itself complex.

1.2 Corporeal Geographies in *Edgar Huntly*

The opening pages of *Edgar Huntly: or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*, an epistolary novel written primarily from the viewpoint of Brown's protagonist Edgar, begin with a seemingly straightforward premise: to avenge the death of his late friend Waldegrave, who was murdered by an unknown assailant under a distinctive Elm – one of the only orienting landmarks in the novel's otherwise confounding landscape. The Elm's symbolism expands beyond its physical appearance, grounding a host of narrative entanglements – "murder, guilt, pursuit, sleepwalking, and Indian warfare" among them (Krause 464) – that radiate outward from the site, much like the branches of a tree. One of the most prominent plot lines to emerge from this location is Edgar's infatuation with the Irish immigrant Clithero Edny, whose somnambulism and inexplicable visitations to the Elm tree lead Edgar to suspect that he may be responsible for Waldegrave's death. This fixation persists long after it becomes clear that Clithero is not connected to the murder and strangely eclipses the original purpose that Edgar articulates at the novel's outset.

A second plot line of significance to this chapter is the storied history of the novel's setting: a tract of land between the Delaware River and the Blue Mountains in Pennsylvania that fell under colonial control through the infamous Walking Purchase Treaty of 1737, the terms of which were allegedly negotiated at the "Treaty Elm," and were reprehensibly manipulated to dispossess the Delaware Indians (also referred to as

the Lenni Lenape) of their land. That any such meeting ever occurred is unlikely. As Sydney J. Krause explains, “Research has uncovered no land deeds derived from it; Penn himself left no record of such a meeting, nor was there a word about it in any of his numerous and often detailed letters” (465). The terms stated that a tract of land be measured by the distance a man could walk in a day and a half, or about 40 miles; but the Walking Purchase was carried out by three trained runners on a cleared trail, one of whom traveled roughly 70 miles, thus divesting the Lenni Lenape of nearly twice the land that the timed parameters for the “walk” suggested (Krause 485). Attempts by the Delaware to seek redress through the federal courts were unsuccessful; ironically, while the treaty’s origins could not be traced back to any credible documentation, the decision to uphold the removal of the Lenni Lenape was woven into the political fabric of the legible nation. Edgar’s violent frontier encounters, as Chad Luck explains, unfold as he follows the historical Walking Purchase route through Norwalk.

I begin with the symbolism of the Elm tree because, as Krause has compellingly argued in her detailed analysis of Brown’s response to the Walking Purchase Treaty in *Edgar Huntly*, it “evokes a cumulative significance beyond itself by historical linkage with a comparably central image in the founding of Pennsylvania and, specifically, Philadelphia – heart of the nation to be” (464). As a metonymic signifier of the nation, the Elm casts a long shadow across the events that take place in the novel, and embodies a series of contradictory intents and outcomes: the auspicious friendship between William Penn and the Delaware Indians that was famously rumored to be established under Treaty Elm, for example, is sharply contrasted by the betrayal of the Walking Purchase and the frontier violence that unfolds as the Lenni Lenape strive to

recapture their stolen land in Brown's novel (Krause 465). The paradoxical symbolism of the Elm, moreover, is extended to many of the novel's characters. The contradictions rooted in the Elm are exemplified by Edgar's wild emotional vacillations and character doublings, which produce a seemingly schizophrenic specimen of unity: his vow to avenge Waldegrave's death and "[pursue] … his assassin" (8) is almost immediately transplanted by an overwhelming surge of "sympathy" and "compassion" for the suspect Clithero (9-10), and colonial native Edgar increasingly begins to resemble the Irish "alien" as he retraces the latter's movements. In a similar incompatible juxtaposition, Edgar is mistaken for one of the Lenni Lenape Indians, whom he believes has murdered his family. The significance of these seemingly paradoxical likenesses comes into focus when Edgar awakens in a cave and experiences "a strong propensity to bite the flesh from [his] arm" (157) – an impulse he associates with the same perverse instinct that "[compels] the mother to feed upon the flesh of her offspring" (160). These allusions to the cannibalized self and child, alongside character doublings that align Edgar with colonial interpretations of the alien (Clithero) and the savage (Lenni Lenape Indians), resituate the novel's violence as a wound inflicted upon the self, and upon future generations. If the nation's body, as Brown presents it, is unified by anything, it is conflict and contradiction.

As this section goes on to demonstrate, Brown extends the complexity of his irresolute characters to the very nature of the American landscape itself. That is to say, the landscape of Solesbury, like a person, cannot be reduced to a question of mere surfaces or exteriors; rather, it mirrors the inaccessible and enigmatic dimensions of the psyche and its generative capacities, troubling any attempt at representation that would

render the landscape simplistic or static. In his depictions of the landscape's interior, Brown sometimes conflates imagery that evokes both the psyche and the womb. While this combination may seem counterintuitive, I want to suggest that Brown's womb-imagery is a complementary feature when considering the transformative capacities that he associates with information produced from the psyche and imagination, which has the capacity to shape and influence the physical world. This act of generative legibility – putting ideas into language and writing – aligns the physical world with the properties of text, insofar as it can be shaped through language generated by the mind. In crafting his narrative, Brown's protagonist reflects a colonial anxiety to impose his own narrative onto the landscape and "write" it into being. In doing so, Edgar betrays his own tendency to minimize the complexity of an anthropomorphized landscape, viewing it not as densely psychological and multifaceted, but as "savage" and therefore uncomplicated. In lieu of being able to read the landscape as it is, Edgar embarks upon a process of colonial erasure, preparing a blank page to receive his colonial narrative.

The metaphorical connection that Brown establishes between the body and the landscape accentuates the way that their exterior and interior dimensions inscribe and reinscribe upon one another. In a chapter addressing social constructions of the body and the cultural significance of "The Body as [an] Inscriptive Surface," feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz locates the source of American philosopher Alphonso Lingis's anxiety toward bodily inscription in the simultaneous superficiality and permanence of the so-called "savage" practice of tattoos and other external manipulations of the body. As Grosz reasons, "[its] superficiality offends us; its permanence alarms us" precisely because humans "are not so much surfaces as profound depths, subjects of a hidden

interiority" (138). Building upon the (problematic) distinction that Lingis makes between the external construction of identity evinced by the "savage" tattooed body versus the interior depths of the "civilized" body, Grosz illuminates the assumptions embedded in Lingis's view of the "civilized" body, which "is not a superficial identity but an enigma, a mystery to be uncovered, a secret to be explored through a reduction of the body to a symptom of self" (141). Implicit in this contrast between "savage" and "civilized" bodies is the assertion that the "civilized" body alone harbors this inexplicable interior dimension. Asserting the absence of the same in the "savage body," which Lingis assumes is devoid of this elusive complexity, produces a blank that, like the processes of inscription exhibited in tattooing, suggests a surface ready to be externally inscribed upon and defined.

The distinctions that Grosz articulates in Lingis's approach to the inscriptive dimensions of the body – interior and exterior, "savage" and "civilized" – resonate in Brown's descriptions of Solesbury as an anthropomorphized and inscriptive body. As Huntly explores the landscape, a dynamic tension arises between his *discovery* of the "mystery" and "secrets" of the enigmatic wilderness, which reflect the complexity Lingis locates in the "civilized" body, and the colonial impulse to view the landscape as "savage," or devoid of preexisting text. The distinctions that Grosz identifies in Lingis's formulation of the "savage" and "civilized" body arise from his 1984 publication of *Excesses: Eros and Culture*, and though Roy Harvey Pearce does not reference this work specifically, his account of "savagism" and "civilization" as arising from a distinct "history of belief," published in *Savagism and Civilization* only four years later, lends further credence to the notion of "savagism" as a concept inviting colonial inscription.

The colonial perception of "American Indians," Pearce writes, was of "men who were not men, who were religiously and politically *incomplete*" (6, emphasis mine), thereby creating a void where colonial intervention was viewed as a religious and moral imperative. This view extended beyond the so-called "incomplete" American Indians to the land itself, for the lack of cultivation in the wilderness represented a blank canvas within the imperial logic of Anglo-European civilization. As Pearce explains, the Pilgrims and Puritans alike viewed the project of developing the landscape as part of "God's commandment to men to occupy the earth, increase, and multiply; what followed, then, was that the land was technically *vacuum domicilium*, and that the English, who would farm the land and make it fructify, who would give it order, were obliged to take over" (20-21). It is through this act of "[taking] over" the land, which I argue is anthropomorphized in Brown's fiction, and further shaping it to answer the rhetoric and reasoning of European colonists, that I read these advances as acts of colonial inscription.

The colonial rhetoric of the wilderness as "empty habitation" is demonstrative of the way that its complexity is belied to better establish an illusion of control. By contrast, in *Edgar Huntly* the contested landscape of Norwalk, and its uneven development and incorporation into the "civilized" province of Solesbury, is presented in the novel as an embodied geography. The landscape, though not a character per se, takes on an anthropomorphized presence that defies principles of geographic representation that would reduce it to a matter of surfaces. To read *Edgar Huntly* through the lens of the geographic conventions that prevailed during much of Brown's

life is, at the very least, to raise important questions about how he sought to revise the discipline in his later years.

In his numerous descriptions of land formations, Edgar limns the dimensions of a landscape that transcends the surface layers visible to the eye – the most common subject of geographic surveys. "The basis of all this region," Edgar explains to readers, "is *limestone*; a substance that eminently abounds in rifts and cavities" (22). Consequently, the landscape of Solesbury contains a stratified interior realm, largely unseen and inaccessible, but which is occasionally discernable to Edgar by "the hollow sound … produced by my casual footsteps, and which showed me that I trod upon the roof of caverns" (22).[9] As Edgar's descriptions go on to demonstrate, these subterranean dimensions evoke a complex and inaccessible psyche of an anthropomorphized landscape. Edgar's forays into the novel's distinct cavern begins when he ascends "[the] brow of the hill," and enters through the "mouth of the cave" (93), descriptions that sketch the suggestion of a head. Additionally, in the course of his post-somnambulistic explorations of Solesbury, Edgar frequently encounters steep inclines and hills that he identifies as "brows" (119, 205, 206, 209), language that casually reflects the stress upon his own psyche when he admits that his own "brows were heavy, and [he] felt an irresistible propensity to sleep" (207). Following Edgar's description of the cavern opening as a "mouth" (93), he describes Sarsefield's response to the duplicitous accounts of Clithero's history as an echo from the psyche's most incomprehensible depths: "My friend stared at these sounds as if the earth had yawned at his feet" (253).

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[9] By acknowledging the interiority of Norwalk as a dimension that is not subject to the optical demands of pictorial geography, Brown emphasizes the limitations of visibility, most privileged by the scientific disciplines.

In other instances, Edgar emphasizes a more holistic view of the landscape's "body" (206, 210), which absorbs the generative potential often associated with the womb into the psychological references I have outlined above. The most explicit imagery in this vein comes from within the novel's cavern, where Edgar awakens to inexplicably find himself at the bottom of a deep pit – a scene that I will later examine in great detail. Additionally, to his fiancée Mary, Edgar writes, "Half of Solesbury, thou knowest, admits neither of plough nor spade. The cultivable space lies along the river, and the desert, lying on the north, has gained, by some means, the apellation [*sic*] of Norwalk" (92). The "cultivable space" of Solesbury can easily be thought of as aligning the town – and civilization – to the conscious mind, but it also suggests the ability to control the landscape and what it produces; the "half" that "admits neither of plough nor spade" is not only a reference to the unconscious, or that which cannot be legibly absorbed into civilization, but to land that does not yield to the designs of colonial agricultural development. The growth that does emerge from this region, then, is both indigenous and wild, and extends beyond the control of the Solesbury establishment.

When Edgar references the two "halves" of Solesbury, he also draws attention to the "half" of additional land that was nefariously acquired in the Walking Purchase Treaty. In his meticulous reconstruction of Brown's geographical references in the novel, Chad Luck confirms that Edgar's path through the outer limits of the "uncultivable" portion of Solesbury

> traces a path nearly identical to that taken by the walkers. The three trained runners hired by the Penn brothers began from the boundary-marking chestnut tree in Wrightstown (very close to Edgar's 'natal township' of Solesbury) and then walked in a northwesterly direction for some sixty-four miles. They moved through the area known as 'the Forks of the Delaware' (where we are told Edgar lives) and then crossed the Blue Mountains at Lehigh Gap. … From there, the

> lone remaining walker, one Edward Marshall, continued across a rugged valley to the slopes of Ponoco Mountain. This valley seems to be precisely the terrain that Edgar must navigate after he emerges from the wilderness cave. (276)

In addition to aligning the “rugged valley” by Ponoco Mountain to the outer limits of the Walking Purchase – the most contested land that was acquired – Edgar’s description of this land formation further reinforces the image of a gigantic head: “Canst thou imagine a space, somewhat circular, about six miles in diameter, and exhibiting a perpetual and intricate variety of craggy eminences and deep dwells?” (92). Crucially, this space is all but inaccessible for those who approach it, as Edgar does, by a “continued vale” that “serves the purpose of a road”: “Openings and ascents occasionally present themselves on each side, which seem to promise you access into the interior region, but always terminate, sooner or later, in insuperable difficulties, at the verge of a precipice, or the bottom of a steep” (92). Symbolically, Edgar’s prohibited access to this “interior region” gestures toward the colonizer’s inability to intimately know – and thus dominate – the land. It confers a psychological interiority and generative capacity to the wilderness that is distinct from colonial apparatuses, but which they seek to transform (through “cultivation”) and thus absorb without the contamination of unknown foreign elements. What is more, the problem of accessibility serves to emphasize the limitations of knowledge production, and the constructed nature of imperial legibility. Edgar surmises, “Perhaps no one was more acquainted with this wilderness than I, but my knowledge was extremely imperfect. … there was much which, perhaps, could never be reached without wings” (92-93). The limited access to the region’s interior, and metaphorical psyche, means that Edgar’s allegedly “superior knowledge” cannot accurately produce the aerial birds-eye view that pictorial

geography adopts: the land evinces a depth and stratification that defies the reductive flattening demanded by maps.

As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that, ironically, the same inscrutability of the forest that gives rise to Edgar's invented sense of colonial control also conceals the information that would unsettle it. Edgar describes the Solesbury wilderness as an "inextricable maze" abounding in "narrow and intricate paths" (164-5), without acknowledging the former inhabitants, lately removed, that likely created them. For Edgar to concede that indigenous people with a distinct history created the paths would require him to acknowledge the rhetoric of a complex society that eludes his vision and understanding. Though the connections between Brown's forest and the modern urban landscape described in Michel de Certeau's essay "Walking in the City" may initially seem tenuous, they have a shared engagement with a complex array of human interactions that frustrate panoptic and totalizing interpretations. According to de Certeau, the elaborate and innumerable paths of urban walkers, "whose bodies follow the cursives and strokes of an urban 'text' they write without reading" (102), comprise a distinct rhetoric that "[eludes] the imaginary totalizations of the eye" (103). The movement of these walkers is an essential element to the city, weaving an intricate fabric of stories that, while taking place, remains place-less in their enactment; the voyeuristic, panoptic perspective that attempts to generate meaning may result in a "fiction of knowledge," but cannot intimately know the stories and motivations of the walkers themselves.

The Solesbury wilderness is similar to the urban landscape that de Certeau describes: Edgar's inability to decipher the "inextricable maze" of the wilderness

reflects his failure to read the preexisting text written into the landscape, and its chaotic, impenetrable entanglements therefore become grounds for imposing his own narrative. Hsuan L. Hsu puts forth a similar argument in his analysis of *Edgar Huntly*, noting that the novel "challenge[s] the possibility of a transparent, two-dimensional representation of the terrain" (35). When Edgar ascends from the recesses of a cave and the "previously chaotic landscape" of Solesbury's wilderness, he enjoys a panoramic view from atop a summit that "effectively reduce[s the landscape] to a map" under his "cartographic gaze" (35); this achievement, however, merely "dramatizes the illusory nature of panoptic vision" (36), which fails to account for the hidden caves and recesses that distinguish Solesbury's three-dimensional landscape. As de Certeau argues, a panoramic vantage point "changes an enchanting world into text" while simultaneously "[creating] the fiction of knowledge" through the necessary procedures of simplification; what results is "a picture, of which the preconditions for feasibility are forgetfulness and a misunderstanding of process" (102).

It is therefore notable that many of Edgar's misconceptions of the wilderness are articulated when he achieves a "cartographic gaze" atop the summit of the previously inaccessible interior of Solesbury's far wilderness, which establishes the optical conditions for "forgetfulness and a misunderstanding of a process" (102) that de Certeau describes. From this vantage point, the narrator can surmise, "It was probable that human feet had never before gained this recess, that human eyes had never been fixed upon these gushing waters. The aboriginal inhabitants had no motives to lead them into caves like this, and ponder on the verge of such a precipice" (99); and yet, almost immediately after, and "[while] musing upon these ideas," Edgar spies "an

human countenance!" whom he later discovers to be Clithero (99-100). This surprising appearance requires Edgar to amend his reading of the wilderness and its occupants, and accentuates the limitations of Edgar's own vision and understanding. The degree of Edgar's limited access to information about the wilderness is further reinforced through the way that he conceives of the forest as empty through an absence of information about motives. His statement that "aboriginal inhabitants had *no motives* to lead them into caves like this" is slightly revised while focused on the surprising presence of Clithero, expressing instead that "no motives were *imaginable* by which others could be prompted to explore [the] road" which has led Edgar to the summit (99-100, emphasis mine). Projecting an image of the wilderness that is devoid of mankind enables Edgar to imagine a landscape that is wholly unclaimed and therefore empty of content; only by denying the human history of the land is Edgar empowered to write it through the optics of his colonial gaze.

My reading of Brown's conception of rhetorical *space*, as I am discussing it here, is insightfully examined by Luck, who reads Edgar's entrapment at the bottom of the cavern scene as Brown's response to the spatial philosophies of John Locke and David Hume: "Locke vigorously maintained that space is an empty container, an absence of matter in which bodies orient themselves" (280), while Hume asserts that "the only way we can have any conception of space is through *relational association* of objects that we can see or feel" (281). On this topic, Luck makes a compelling argument that "Brown uses the celebrated cave sequence … as an opportunity to side with Hume" (282). As Luck explains, Edgar's description of the panther's eyes, which, "'[though] lustrous themselves created no illumination around them,'" "almost directly echoes

Hume's language describing relational space" (282): "'light discovers only these [two luminescent] bodies themselves, without giving any impression of the surrounding objects'" (282). Thus, when Edgar aims his tomahawk to strike between the panther's eyes, or the "two luminescent objects" that represent "where Hume locates the origin of our extrapolated ideas of relational space" (282-3), he both "calls attention to the Humean concept of relationally defined space" and "symbolically destroys the false Lockean notion of an empty space that can exist apart from, and independent of, other material objects. In this way, Edgar's tomahawk delivers a fatal blow to the notion of space as a vacuum" (283).

I would like to offer a revision of Luck's reading here, for while it may be true that Brown underscores the reality of relational space in this sequence, Edgar's actions can be productively read as an effort to destroy this concept in order to propagate his colonial fantasy of the wilderness as an unwritten spatial vacuum. In this regard, my discussion of Brown's landscape, which emphasizes the way that its subterranean spaces are symbolically linked to the generative capacity of the psyche, enhances Luck's reading of Edgar's violent encounter with the panther in the cavern. When Edgar first enters the interior of Solesbury through the cavern's "mouth," he encounters an indeterminate precipice that cannot be discerned by sensory information: "I … stretched my hand forward and downward, but all was vacuity. … It might be a few inches … or hundreds of feet. By leaping down I might incur no injury, or might plunge into a lake or dash myself to pieces on the points of rocks" (96). The conscious, rational Edgar wisely determines not to take this treacherous leap; but when sleepwalking, and thus directed by his own unconscious mind, Edgar wanders beyond the safety of the

precipice's edge and connects with the symbolic depths of landscape's psychic unconscious – an unwritten vacuity of empty space, characterized by the lack of information he can obtain through sensory information. In this sense, we can read Edgar's leap into the cavern's pit as an attempt to fully embody "the Lockean notion of an empty space that can exist apart from, and independent of, other material objects" (283) – or space that is completely blank, and perfectly unwritten.

Thus, when Edgar emerges from this pit and hurls his tomahawk toward the "luminescent objects" of the panther's eyes, he seeks to extinguish evidence of his relational association with an entity that threatens to disrupt his ability to "write" the colonial narrative of Solesbury. In Edgar's mind, there is no potential for peaceful coexistence with this threat from the wilderness. "The first impulse," Edgar says, "was to arm myself against this *enemy*" (159, emphasis mine); after terminating the panther's life, Brown's protagonist proceeds to consume its body. Luck reads this act as evidence of "Brown's belief in a relational, embodied alternative to [empty] space by dramatically revealing an actual *body* … the edge of the tomahawk uncovers a 'warm' and 'reeking' body that Edgar can not only touch and smell, but that he will taste and consume … The Lockean vacuum gives way to a body-filled plenum" (283). This interpretation, however, does not distinguish the way that "Brown's belief" nonetheless leaves room for his protagonist's futile attempt to assert the opposite. By dispatching the panther and proceeding to "taste and consume" it (283), Edgar seeks to utterly destroy, or *erase*, the competing presence of this body by absorbing it into his own. This action is not passive, but transformative: Edgar's "stomach was seized by pangs" and "agonies" from the "abhorred meal," leading him to believe that "[death] was now

impending" (160). That Edgar survives and goes on to exit the symbolic psyche of the land – now absolved of relational markers – to enact a massive killing spree of the Lenni Lenape natives, reveals that he must absorb the "savagery" he perceives in the wilderness in order to obliterate the competing presence of other bodies in the wild: by erasing these competing entities, the landscape can more effectively embody colonial rhetoric, cultivation, and control. Edgar, in short, seeks to defy theories of relational space in order to assert a Lockean vacuum that offers the opportunity to control the narrative – and textual embodiment – of Solesbury.

Brückner's discussion of the unmappable landscape in the novel offers valuable commentary on how Brown's literature dovetails with questions regarding the young nation's nascent identity. The possibility of a citizenry that identified as a united whole, Brückner argues, can be traced to a geographically-minded "federal fantasy," in which "a systemized landscape could become the discursive basis for creating a disciplined national American identity" (*The Geographic Revolution* 203). Edgar's experience in the wilderness of Solesbury, of course, refutes the "fantasy" of a nation with such "systemized" control over the landscape, as the wilderness "becomes increasingly unmappable, either in cartographic or narrative terms" (200). Brückner attributes Norwalk's "unmappability," at least in part, to a problem of geographic education and method: a "lack of proper geography books, and a properly codified and textualized national landscape," he argues, "strips Edgar Huntly not only of his national identity but of his very identity as a rational subject" (203).[10] The extent to which Brown conceived

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[10] The basis of Edgar's education, we learn, comes from the English émigré Sarsefield, who, like his scholar, "was fond of penetrating into [Norwalk's] recesses, partly from the love of picturesque scenes, partly to investigate its botanical and mineral

"a properly codified and textualized national landscape" as possible, however, is less clear. In fact, the argument that Brown makes in his prospectus for *A System of General Geography* – that the nation's geographic representation "continually calls for new pictures" (6) – seems to suggest the contrary: that even should the nation adopt the "proper" education and methods in the effort to "systemize" the landscape, the representation produced would still not achieve the stability that Brückner poses as requisite for Edgar to retain his "national identity" (203). The nation's body can no more be "systemized" than the interior of a living person.

What is missing in the argument that Brückner presents about the relationship between geographic representation and national identity in *Edgar Huntly*, I contend, is that Brown conceived of national identity as a concept rooted in the body of an anthropomorphized nation. By emphasizing the corporeality of the nation's body, which mirrors the same organic propensities for people to evolve physically and psychologically, Brown anticipates his later views of geography as a subject requiring ceaseless revision. In this regard, the most compelling example is the connection that Brown limns between the nation and the ever-changing character of Edgar's beloved

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productions, and partly to carry on more effectually that species of instruction which he had adopted with regard to me, and which chiefly consisted in moralizing narratives or synthetical reasonings" (92). Brückner cites this passage as evidence of Edgar's deficient geographic education: "While … Edgar's education carries a thin veneer of the scientific in its attention to botany and geology, these studies are subordinate to the study of narrative and the picturesque. (His failure to designate that these scientific 'investigations' revolve around the careful analysis of specimens and taxonomic organization suggests that the examination of botany and minerals becomes code for appreciating the sentimental or sublime emotions evoked by flora or craggy cliffs) … Edgar has learned to read the world, not geographically, but novelistically or poetically" (199). This assessment does not sufficiently account for the evidence I have presented throughout this chapter, however, which presents the landscape as a formation infinitely more complex than geographic approaches of "earth description" tend to account for.

friend, Waldegrave. To read *Edgar Huntly* in this way, I suggest, demonstrates that Edgar is not "stripped" of his national identity or rationality as Brückner argues; rather, Brown calls into question the entire fantasy of national identity and rationality as *static* concepts.

1.3 Discerning the Legible Nation

When Brown was composing *Edgar Huntly* at the end of the eighteenth century, it was uncertain whether or for how long the United States would remain intact. The specter of the nation as a possible failure haunts the periphery of Brown's novel, and this anxiety – especially in regards to representation – is narratively played out through Waldegrave. That Waldegrave's death occurs before the novel commences means that his final representation is filtered to Brown's audience through Edgar, who draws upon a series of Waldegrave's letters, and his own memories, to explain the character of his friend; when taken together, the letters and Edgar's recollections convey the complexity of Waldegrave's personality and internal beliefs. What Edgar's descriptions make clear, however, is that should a person find Waldegrave's decontextualized letters, the result would be a gross misrepresentation of his friend. As Edgar explains, "Waldegrave … had adopted, at different periods, different systems of opinion, on topics connected with religion and morals" (125), and it so happens that while the two friends were separated for a time, Waldegrave's worldview was prominently atheistic and grounded in the material world. His compelling letters convinced Edgar of these "creeds," which "tended to … deify necessity and universalize matter; to destroy the popular distinctions between the soul and body" (125). Upon being placed within a "sphere of religious influence" – and notably, one that was premised on conversational language rather than

the materialist realm of text and writing – Waldegrave "insensibly resumed the faith which he had relinquished" in his letters, "and became the vehement opponent of all that he had formerly defended" (126). For Edgar to embrace the full range of contradictions evinced by his friend provides an apt metaphor for Brown's own acknowledgment of the conflicts he acknowledges to be embedded in the nation's history.

Although Waldegrave does not inhabit the novel's physical world, his letters take on a distinct corporeal presence in the novel, as if to supplant the body that has been destroyed. As Edgar testifies, "mixed up with abstract reasonings, were numberless passages which elucidated the character and history of my friend. These were too precious to be consigned to oblivion, and to take them out of their present connection and arrangement, would be to mutilate and deform them" (127). Brown advances two essential ideas in this example, the first being an argument for the inherent value of history. Waldegrave's desire to ensure that his letters are destroyed exposes his desire to embrace his transformation so wholly as to erase his previous self. That Edgar denies this erasure demonstrates his esteem for the "precious" value of the *history* of his friend's ideas over those expressed at the end of his life. Secondly, through Waldegrave, Brown conveys a powerful image of textual embodiment, and, by extension, the ability of legibility to bring ideas into the realm of materiality.

It is therefore appropriate that Waldegrave's materialist views are recorded in the realm of physical text, for the circumstances leading to his later revival of spiritual beliefs are cultivated by the ephemeral nature of discussion, and in turn suggest that the static and concrete dimensions of text are insufficient to capture the transcendent

qualities of his evolving beliefs. To rely solely on the textual vestiges to reconstruct the personality of Waldegrave, Brown's novel suggests, would be a gross misrepresentation of his character, and could lead others who encounter them to perform a dangerous misreading: Waldegrave, Edgar tells his readers, "was anxious that the letters and manuscripts … be destroyed" for fear that they would "communicate the poison [of false belief]" to others (126) – a scenario that, for Waldegrave, was only rectified through conversation. Just as Waldegrave succumbs to the ambiguous "sphere of religious influence," which is marked by the oral "reasonings and exhortations" of his instructor "Mr. S—," so too does Edgar say that he receives the "antidote" from his friend in the form of "transient conversation" (126).[11] The implications behind the history of Waldegrave's evolving worldview surpass the metaphysical topics that his friend explores, and illustrate the problems inherent in overvaluing the powers of legibility; the text fails to account for Waldegrave's later transformations, and to omit this part of his history leads to a false representation of his overall character.

Some productive connections can therefore be drawn between *Edgar Huntly* and the ideas that Brown later proposed in his prospectus for *A System of General Geography*, the first relating to the continual need for "new pictures" (6). When Edgar explains how Waldegrave's ideas evolved over time, he presents readers with a portrait of his friend that amends an identity conveyed by the letters alone. I agree with Brückner when he asserts that geography was mobilized as a way for Americans to form a sense of national identity; but if this is the case, then Brown makes clear that this

[11] Though beyond the scope of this chapter, it must be noted that Edgar's transformation is not as profound as Waldegrave's. As Edgar explains, "I did not entirely abjure the creed which had, with great copiousness and eloquence, been defended in these letters" (126).

“picture” of national identity, like that of Waldegrave, must be plastic, and supplemented beyond a single image. What is more, Brown emphasizes the need for a *holistic* rather than partial assessment of a subject when it comes to matters of accurate representation. One of the reasons that Edgar values Waldegrave’s letters is because the “numberless passages which elucidated the character and history of my friend” (127) are inextricable from the ideas that Waldegrave deemed dangerous. To take them “out of their present arrangement,” Edgar explains, “would be to mutilate and deform them” (127). The corporeal qualities that Edgar ascribes to Waldegrave’s letters connect the material dimension of the author’s ideas to the ghost of his absent, physical body.

Nowhere is this connection between the corporeal body and Brown’s conception of pictorial geography more explicit than when Edgar encounters a collection of “old books, and remnants of maps and charts” in his uncle’s attic, which he describes as “worthless” (131). Given Brown’s professed dedication to geography, especially in his later years, this statement is puzzling enough to give readers pause. Following the value that Huntly places upon a holistic picture of Waldegrave, whose identity extends beyond the textual limitations that his letters represent, I suggest that the maps and charts that Edgar discovers in his uncle’s attic are “worthless” because they offer a limited and decontextualized image of the landscape: as “remnants,” they offer no orientation and are incapable of imparting the complete story of their subject. Their fragmentation embodies the same mutilation that Edgar associates with the proposed dismemberment of Waldegrave’s letters – and, I would also argue, Brown’s own apprehension about the United States’s ability to endure conflicts and events that threatened to fracture its tenuous alliances within. This corporeal dimension of text is

reflected in Edgar's violent encounters with Native Americans in the wilderness, whose startling presence is only made more prominent by their relative invisibility at the outset of Brown's novel. The bodily and psychological trauma resulting from the conflict between Solesbury's encroaching settlers and its former indigenous population gestures toward a more profound and widespread threat to the identity of a geographically anthropomorphized nation. Through the textual embodiment of the wilderness in *Edgar Huntly*, Brown accounts for so-called "savage" bodies as part of a complex and convoluted national body. In doing so, he also troubles conventional surface-oriented processes of "earth description" that are foundational to geographic representation.

The repercussions of legibility upon the corporeal nation are most ominous in the novel's conclusion. Early in the novel, we learn that Mrs. Lorimer, who was once Clithero's benefactor, believed her life to be inextricably connected to her twin brother Arthur Wiatte, and that she would perish should his life be terminated. Thus, when Clithero realizes that he has unwittingly murdered Wiatte out of self-defense, he becomes possessed with the belief that he has also become the agent of Mrs. Lorimer's impending death. This perverse conviction culminates into Clithero's own misguided effort to assassinate her, an action he deems benevolent insofar as it would protect Mrs. Lorimer from learning of – and perishing from – the news of her late sibling's demise. After breaking into Mrs. Lorimer's bedchamber, Clithero mistakenly raises his arm to strike Clarice, his fiancé and Mrs. Lorimer's niece, though an astounded Mrs. Lorimer interrupts him before the violent action is completed. At this point, Clithero confesses his intentions to both women, states that he has murdered Wiatte, and witnesses Mrs. Lorimer fall to the ground before he flees the bedchamber and boards passage to

America, believing all the while that that his confession has ended the life of his benefactor. That Mrs. Lorimer survives this encounter, unbeknownst to Clithero, establishes the foundation for Brown's profound statement on the material dimensions of *text*. When Mrs. Lorimer intercepts a letter addressed to her husband from Edgar, in which he details Clithero's awareness of his benefactor's presence in America, and his subsequent malicious intent to fulfill his "evil destiny" by terminating her life (280), the effect of this information is so entirely material that Mrs. Lorimer miscarries. Here, Brown distinguishes between the consequences wrought of oral and textual communication: news of her brother's death did not bring Mrs. Lorimer's extreme prophecy to fruition because it was delivered *verbally*, whereas the material dimension of Edgar's *textual* correspondence delivers a blow that is physically quantifiable.

Little has been made in Brown criticism of the early termination of Sarsefield and Mrs. Lorimer's child, but I want to suggest that it reinforces the argument I have sustained in this chapter regarding the impulse to enact *erasure* in order to maintain control over a dominant narrative. Most critics interpret Clithero's intent to inflict harm upon Mrs. Lorimer at the close of the novel as evidence of his deranged mind. I would like to posit a complementary explanation, however, that aligns with the arguments I have made about the novel's concern with legibility and erasure: that Clithero's impulse toward violence relates to an illogical compulsion to protect his own narrative of events, however incriminatory and detached from reality they may be. To state it another way, the motivations that explain Clithero's narrative of tragic violence, and the way this narrative has shaped his very existence, is wholly at odds with the result that the same description of events has had on Sarsefield and Mrs. Lorimer. The specter of past grief

and present menace posed by Clithero provokes Sarsefield to go so far as to say that he "will not occupy the same land, the same world with [Clithero]" (254), emphasizing the impossibility for peaceful coexistence. At the heart of this assertion is a battle for control over the narrative. For Clithero, Mrs. Lorimer's mere existence threatens his long-held version of events, which are so elemental to his experience and character that he feels compelled to destroy her once and for all. Relatedly, Sarsefield's understanding of Clithero's past misdeeds becomes conflated, it seems, with Brown's anthropomorphized American landscape: the American "land" – and the nation's connection to the broader world – offends Sarsefield because he views the mythic Clithero, long-established in his narrative of events, as inextricably connected it.

In this way, Clithero's "evil destiny" mirrors the climactic confrontation that Edgar faces with the competing presence of the panther in the depths of Norwalk, and which I have argued can be read as an act of colonial erasure. Clithero's compulsion to murder Mrs. Lorimer can similarly be read as an attempt to erase the counter-narrative that she represents to his own deranged perceptions, better enabling him to establish and maintain his own story. Connected to this battle for narrative control is the question of the *nation's* narrative (and so too its future), allegorized in *Edgar Huntly* by the symbol of the child. When Clithero becomes engaged to Clarice, Mrs. Lorimer's niece and adoptive daughter, the anticipated bonds of marriage prepare him to become her son as well. The series of tragic events that precipitates his escape to America, of course, prevents Clithero from realizing this station. It cannot be overlooked, then, that Edgar, Clithero's doppelgänger, becomes primed for the role of Mrs. Lorimer's son. When news emerges that Edgar's uncle has perished in the violence from the Lenni Lenape's

efforts to reclaim their rightful land, Sarsefield assumes the responsibility of a surrogate parent. His advantageous marriage to Mrs. Lorimer, Sarsefield explains, gives him "the power of being the benefactor and protector of [Edgar] and [his] sisters," while his wife "longs to embrace [Edgar] as a son" (252), just as she had once wished for Clithero. The prospect of Edgar, an American, assuming a juvenile duty to an English father and Irish wife is more than familial palimpsest: such a union would symbolize the eventual return of the nation into England's orbit of influence, a reading that would not have been lost on Brown's American readership.

In a narrative maneuver that elucidates the strange, distracted structure of the novel's content, Edgar metaphorically "consumes" Clithero into his story of events, and, in doing so, unintentionally absorbs the latter's monstrous intentions, just as his ingestion of the panther precipitates Edgar's violent killing spree against the Lenni Lenape. As such, when Edgar sends Sarsefield intelligence of Clithero's imminent arrival, the text delivers what his Irish double could not: a violent trespass against Mrs. Lorimer's physical body. That it is the unborn child (and not Mrs. Lorimer) who ultimately perishes poignantly conveys Brown's own attempt to erase the hopeful narrative that Europe – and England in particular – may have had toward America, and the possibility of a future reconciliation. In this manner, Edgar's written warning of Clithero's impending arrival stages a reenactment of the competition detailed in the cave sequence, but instead of extinguishing the life of a feline enemy through a physical act to better protect his ability to inhabit and define the land, Brown emphasizes the power of legibility to erase – or overwrite – this forthcoming relational presence.

This final example of the corporeal dimensions of text puts forth an ambivalent argument about the role of legibility in the new Republic. Brown's development of the landscape as a corporeal subject in *Edgar Huntly* presents a terrain that is multi-dimensional, and infinitely more complex than the discipline of geography accounted for in his era. It is from this place of acknowledgement, I contend, that Brown began developing his own *System of General Geography*, which would attempt to expand conceptions of geographic legibility the same way that Brown sought to shape the nation through his collective writing endeavors. As Brown concedes through Edgar's explorations of Solesbury, however, no textual representation – whether in the form of letters, narrative, or maps – can offer an orderly and complete account of a subject: missing information will always disrupt the seeming cohesion of attempts at legibility. Ultimately, in Brown's view, the power to shape and define the identity of the young nation required a delicate negotiation of rhetorical space, one that accounted for the complexity of indigenous and foreign peoples and their inerasable competing claims to the land. Thus, it is through the seeming contradictions in Brown's written production that we can understand his attempt to confront and embrace a national identity rife with contradictions, and his sustained effort to "write" the nation into being.

CHAPTER TWO | Re-Authoring the Nation in Leonora Sansay's *Secret History*: Aaron Burr's Challenge to Thomas Jefferson's "Empire of Liberty"

In an extraordinary letter written to former Vice President Aaron Burr on May 6, 1803, Leonora Sansay describes her encounter with General Rochambeau[12] at a ball on a vessel just offshore Cape Francois, Haiti. Using the alias "Clara," Sansay explains she "began her empire like that of Venus rising from the waves" upon "seeing the general at her feet, and all the women bursting with envy. The taste of the general influenc'd that of the company, & all the men offer'd their homage at the same shrine" (225, 227). Going on, Sansay, as Clara, acknowledges the folly in her conquest, admitting it was only her vanity – not "her heart" – that was aroused: "'twas power, 'twas place she aim'd at, and had she not been thwarted, she would have rul'd St. Domingue" (227). The letter goes on to detail events that comprise the first half of *Secret History: Or, The Horrors of St. Domingo*; but it is Sansay's vivid account of imperial conquest and subsequent ruin in this letter, a theme that dominates her novel, that strikes me as most extraordinary, especially given allegations that Burr had attempted to establish an empire of his own just prior to the novel's publication. Like the original letter, Burr is referenced on the title page of *Secret History* as the recipient of nearly all of the letters that comprise the novel; and yet, as Michael Drexler acknowledges in his most recent criticism on Sansay, the "semiotic significance" of Burr in *Secret History* has been inadequately examined ("Leonora Sansay's Anatopic Imagination" 155).

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[12] Donatien Marie Joseph Rochambeau, who, according to Michael Drexler in his notes to *Secret History*, was the son of Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau. Both men "served … at Yorktown during the American Revolution" (69).

In this chapter, I aim to unravel the meaning of Burr's haunting presence in *Secret History*, especially as it relates to Sansay's commentary on the uncertain future of U.S. westward expansion. Burr is most remembered for his infamous duel with Alexander Hamilton, but it is also important to remember that he was tried for treason in September of 1807 for allegedly conspiring to erect his own empire on the North American continent by wresting land and territories away from the U.S. government. That Burr was acquitted from all charges has done little to settle historical debates about the matter, however, and a myriad of interpretations have emerged from historians regarding what his intentions may have been. While I make no attempt in this chapter to clarify what Burr's designs ultimately were, I do intend to examine the influence of the Burr Conspiracy on Sansay's novel, which was notably published in 1808 just after Burr was absolved of the charges he faced. The timing of these events is certainly remarkable, and it is therefore surprising that Sansay critics have not sought to discover how *Secret History* might be read as a commentary on the particularly mysterious – and "secretive" – scandal known as the Burr Conspiracy, especially in relation to the westward expansion of the U.S.

As I go on to argue in this chapter, Sansay's novel offers, as is typical of the secret history genre, expertly veiled commentary on the political climate in the early Republic. Several critics have productively explored a variety of "secret histories" addressed by the novel, but none have explicitly noted its sustained critique of the "horrors" of European imperialism in the Caribbean. While this is one focus of this chapter, I take this observation further to argue that Sansay focuses on European governance to put forth an opaque – but no less incriminating – critique of President

Thomas Jefferson and his administration, declaring it as unfit to govern the nation's new land acquisitions. Sansay, that is, mobilizes the secret history genre to disrupt the political discourse at the time of the novel's publication, which tended to revere Jefferson and demonize Burr in the wake of the conspiracy for which he was charged. In doing so, Sansay suggests that Burr is better suited to deliver Thomas Jefferson's vision for an "Empire for liberty" than the president himself.[13] Thus, the novel not only attempts to re-author Burr and restore his damaged reputation, but it presents him as a model leader – one who embodies characteristics celebrated in idealized portrayals of U.S. governance.

While the details of the Burr Conspiracy remain unknown, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Burr was invested in shaping the future of the nation's western territories and newly annexed land from the Louisiana Purchase. At the time, no U.S. vice president or president had yet ventured west of the Appalachian Mountains, and Burr's foray into the West was no mere visit: his substantial expedition spanned from the end of 1805 until March of 1807, when he was brought to trial in Richmond, Virginia. In his 1903 publication detailing original source material related to the Burr Conspiracy, Walter Flavius McCaleb offers a rare glimpse into the elusive designs that historians have speculated Burr pursued by describing three maps allegedly drawn by

[13] Though Jefferson used this phrase repeatedly, its meaning is most clearly conveyed in his 1780 letter to George Rogers Clark, the highest-ranking military officer from the American Revolutionary War: "we shall be at leizure [*sic*] to turn our whole force to the rescue of our eastern Country from subjugation, we shall divert through our own Country a branch of commerce which the European States have thought worthy of the most important struggles and sacrifices, and in the event of peace on terms which have been contemplated by some powers we shall form to the American union a barrier against the dangerous extension of the British Province of Canada and add to the Empire of liberty an extensive and fertile Country thereby converting dangerous Enemies into valuable friends" (238).

the Vice President. Apart from one map that was reproduced in McCaleb's text, evidence of the others is only related by the author's description of them, as the originals appear to have since been lost.[14] Nonetheless, the maps, McCaleb claims, "are of preëminent significance, illustrating, as they undoubtedly do, the outlines of Burr's project" (xv).[15] While this claim is clearly speculative, McCaleb's detailed account of the land featured in these maps reinforces arguments put forth by other historians who argue that Burr was preoccupied with the uncertain future of territories encircling the Gulf of Mexico and extending westward.

Critics are in general agreement that Sansay incorporates some biographical details in *Secret History*, though the boundaries between autobiography and fiction in the novel remain unclear; but there is good reason to believe that Sansay would have been interested in weighing in on the political controversy surrounding Burr after his trial for treason. Like the Burr Conspiracy itself, details of Sansay's personal connection with Burr are unclear; while letters document they had a close friendship, the nature of

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[14] McCaleb claims that at the time of his research and publication (1903), the maps were "in the possession of Mrs. Thomas C. Wordin," who "inherited [them] from her grandfather, Dr. John Cummins, who lived in the Bayou Pierre in Mississippi Territory where Burr's expedition collapsed" (xv). In his extensive research on the subject, David O. Stewart, author of *American Emperor: Aaron Burr's Challenge to Jefferson's America*, has been unsuccessful in his efforts to locate the original maps described by McCaleb. He did track the record of yet another map that had allegedly been in Burr's possession of the Louisiana/Texas frontier to the Harvard Map Collection. While they maintain a digital copy of this document, the original has also been lost.

[15] The maps McCaleb references are described as follows: "Map No. 1 … shows the lower region of the Mississippi River with Natchez, New Orleans, and the Washita lands, also New Mexico and Mexico down to the Yucatan. Map No. 2 is an admirality chart … and gives with astonishing minuteness a survey of the Gulf coast from New Orleans to Campeche. Islands, bars, and inlets are recorded, and soundings are given. The chart is beautifully executed on paper bearing the watermark of 1801. Map No. 3 … exhibits in some of its details with startling correctness that section of Mexico lying between Vera Cruz on the east and Mexico City on the West" (xv).

their relationship is disputed by historians.[16] What is clear, however, is that Sansay was compelled by Burr's vision for land acquired from the Louisiana Purchase and the western territories. In 1806, she moved from Philadelphia to New Orleans "with several Burr associates to await [his] expected arrival, thereby implicating herself in his alleged plot to seize the western territories"; and later, in 1807, she testified on his behalf at his trial in Richmond, Virginia under the name Madame d'Auvergne (Lapansky 34). While the extent of their relationship following the Burr Conspiracy remains unknown, Burr's surviving letters document that they kept in touch as least until 1812 (Drexler, "Introduction" 35).

This chapter is organized to demonstrate two related arguments. In the first section, I carry out a close reading of European imperialism in *Secret History*, which is characterized as driven by unbridled desire toward material wealth and possession of women, to demonstrate a repeated pattern of claustrophobic confinement that this approach to governance produces. The violence that results from these spaces of constriction for those unfortunate enough to be caught in the fray of imperial contests

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[16] Philip S. Lapansky, the foremost historian on Sansay, has suggested that she was a longterm mistress and confidant of Burr's, and that their romantic relationship spanned more than twenty years. Angela Vietto echoes this sentiment in her biographical write-up on Leonora Sansay in *American Women Prose Writers to 1820*, claiming, "it is clear from their correspondence that Sansay began a romantic relationship with Burr sometime [around 1798] … While sporadic, their relationship seems to have been intense, both romantically and intellectually" (330). The correspondence Vietto refers to as a "clear" indication of the nature of their romantic relationship, however, is not directly referenced or examined. In contrast to Lapansky and Vietto, Jennifer Van Bergen is more circumspect, arguing that suggestions of romance between Burr and Sansay are dubious at best, emerging largely from jealous letters penned by her husband Louis Sansay. This literary portrait of Louis Sansay as a ferociously jealous man is consistent with Sansay's depiction of him in *Secret History*. As Van Bergen warns, however, "It is an error of logic to conclude that because Sansay's husband was jealous, she must have done the thing his jealousy suggests she did."

for power reveals a "secret history" in the novel that Sansay critics have not yet observed regarding the "horrors" of European imperialism.

Tracing Sansay's sustained criticism of European governance in the Caribbean lays the groundwork for the second argument put forth by this chapter, which extends my reading of claustrophobic confinement in *Secret History* to address the novel's veiled commentary on American politics. I argue that Sansay viewed Jefferson as a detached and naïve leader, placing him in the same class of men as General LeClerc, whose governance of St. Domingo is described as woefully incompetent in the novel. Sansay also draws a comparison between hard-won ideals of liberty and equality from the French Revolution, which are hypocritically withheld from the Creoles living in St. Domingo, and Jefferson's ideals for an "Empire of Liberty" to argue that his dissociation from the western territories is responsible for reproducing similar injustices for those who live there. Such an interpretation of *Secret History* testifies to Sansay's interest in producing a disruptive historical portrait of Aaron Burr – one capable of expanding the claustrophobic confinement that suffocated his reputation and resulted in widespread assertions that he was a ruined man.

Many critics have read *Secret History* as Sansay's attempt to recoup her own reputation after leaving her husband, Louis Sansay; what is missing in these readings, however, is the way that Sansay's novel simultaneously attempts to re-author Burr in the aftermath of the Burr Conspiracy, amending our understanding of who this man was in the wake of an imperial contest for land that he had recently lost. That the novel largely failed to sway public opinion in the early-nineteenth century is of little surprise,

especially given the gravity of the charges Burr faced.[17] With growing interest in Sansay and her work, however, this chapter expands the current criticism to consider the broader imperial commentary her novel provides on this contentious period of U.S. history.

2.1 Claustrophobic Confinement and the "Horrors" of European Imperialism

Because Sansay's work remains relatively obscure in the American literary canon, a brief summary of *Secret History* is necessary before proceeding further. Critics have described the text as a partially autobiographic epistolary novel in which Sansay divides her identity into two fictional alter-egos, Mary and Clara. The novel's title page makes clear that the majority of the letters, which are composed by the observant narrator Mary, are addressed to Aaron Burr. In these letters, Mary records the trials and misadventures of her beautiful sister Clara, a Philadelphia woman who travels with her French husband, St. Louis, to St. Domingo in 1802 in hopes of reclaiming property he abandoned at the onset of the Haitian Revolution. At that time, General Charles Le Clerc was in charge of reestablishing control over the slave population, but was replaced by General Rochambeau[18] upon his untimely death to yellow fever in 1802. Shortly after arriving, Clara's naively coquettish behavior leads to dangerous conflicts between her jealous husband, herself, and an array of overzealous suitors – General Rochambeau chief among them.

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[17] In addition to the charge of treason, Burr had outstanding warrants for his arrest in both New York and New Jersey for the murder of Alexander Hamilton, preventing his ability to return to either state for the rest of his life.

[18] According to Michael Drexler in his notes to *Secret History*, Donatien Marie Joseph Rochambeau was the son of Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau. Both men "served … at Yorktown during the American Revolution" (69).

Clara's precarious position as a beautiful woman whom many men desire to possess, and the violence she suffers at the hands of her covetous husband, escalates alongside a resurgence of violence from the former slave population as they revolt against the French military establishment in St. Domingo. As danger closes in from the revolution and the men in her life from all sides, Clara and Mary flee the country with hopes of reaching St. Jago de Cuba. The sisters are interrupted by English forces, however, which rob them of their possessions and divert them to another location in Cuba. Eventually the sisters make it to St. Jago where they reunite with St. Louis, whose possessions were similarly pillaged by the British upon escaping St. Domingo. Clara's magnetic beauty continues to attract admirers, however, further exacerbating her husband's jealousy and leading him to threaten her very existence. Finally, Clara abandons her husband and amorous pursuers for the Cuban countryside, reveling in an emancipation that, while necessary for safeguarding her life, gravely endangers her public reputation. Ultimately, St. Louis returns to France alone, and Mary and Clara safely reunite in Kingston, Jamaica with plans to return to Philadelphia. Before departing for the United States, Mary expresses her hope that Burr will receive them, and that they will find happiness with him as a "friend and a protector" (154).

The trope of European men aspiring to possess land, resources, and women appears throughout the novel's narrative arc, and serves as the premise for the theme of claustrophobic confinement that pervades *Secret History*. Though Sansay's works have been garnering more interest in recent years, criticism on *Secret History* remains limited, and largely interprets the "*horrors* of St. Domingo" from the novel's title in terms of patriarchal violence (especially as revealed in Clara's abusive relationship to

her husband, St. Louis), or as violence emerging from racial conflict during the revolution. By contrast, in this chapter I contend that Sansay puts forth European imperialism, and the claustrophobic confinement it produces, on the same plane as the gendered and racialized "horrors" ubiquitously discussed in the novel's criticism. In the selection of examples that follow, I demonstrate a pattern of escalating danger from increasingly claustrophobic spaces of confinement generated by the efforts of Europeans to secure various objects of desire, and which can be traced across the imperial *and* domestic themes in the novel. As such, this section begins by examining the violent enclosures generated by French colonialism and contests for European imperial power in the Caribbean and subsequently examines the similar violent enclosures and threats of erasure that Sansay's protagonist Clara experiences in the convergence of volatile forces from colonial and imperial conflicts and the decline of her domestic marriage.

In one of her biographical letters sent to Aaron Burr while Sansay was in the Caribbean, she voices her discontent regarding the confinement she experiences in St. Domingo: "Almost a year has passed since I arrived here, during which time I have been coop'd up in the hollow bason [*sic*] in which the town is built, for there is no means of going a mile in any direction beyond it without I chose [*sic*] to make a sortie on the brigands which I have not yet determined on" (224). The ambiguity of "brigands" here is deliberate, capable of unifying the threats Sansay describes from a dangerous confluence of desire and incompetence characterizing the French (especially those in positions of power), and the rebel slaves who disrupt order and colonial rule in an effort to secure their freedom. This sentiment is corroborated in a strikingly similar

passage appearing in *Secret History*, as Mary mirrors the same frustration of being immobilized by the landscape and geopolitical discord that surrounds her:

> I feel like a prisoner in this little place, built on a narrow strip of land between the sea and mountain that rises perpendicularly behind the town. There is to be sure an opening on one side of the plain, but the negroes are there encamped; they keep the ground *of which general Le Clerc suffered them to take possession*, and threaten daily to attack the town! (77, emphasis mine)

Without stating so directly, Mary implies the rebel slaves are not singularly responsible for her "imprisonment" on the island; rather, it is through the failures of the governing establishment, commanded by General Le Clerc, that such discord is allowed to be cultivated in the first place. In her interpretation of race relations in the novel, Tessie P. Liu compellingly demonstrates that, although Sansay largely circumvents the proliferation of sensationalized tropes of black violence against white female victims that appeared after the onset of slave revolution in Haiti in 1791, *Secret History* nonetheless "posits that the freedom of white women is incompatible with black power" (392). In this passage, Sansay does indeed imply that the failures of French governance on the island are directly responsible for the threats that black men pose to white women in the domestic sphere. More central to my argument, however, is the way that Sansay places the blame for this omission of space, a product of imperial warfare, squarely on the shoulders of inept French colonial rule, and extends this viewpoint in her disparaging portraits of European occupancy throughout the Caribbean.

Crucially, the novel attributes these failures to the French classism and nepotism organizing the leadership of the colony. Napoléon Bonaparte never visited colonies acquired by France in the Americas; in the case of St. Domingo, he appointed General Le Clerc, the husband of his sister Pauline, as the commander in charge of

reestablishing slavery on the island. Mary's descriptions of Le Clerc are devoid of the confidence one might expect in a military leader; rather, in direct opposition to the fortification Le Clerc was charged with bringing to the colony, she portrays him as a Trojan Horse for the slave population to gain an even stronger foothold in their fight for freedom: "The natives of the country murmur already against the general in chief; they say he places too much confidence in the negroes. … The Creoles shake their heads and predict much ill" (65). The gulf that Mary observes between the local Creoles and general Le Clerc emphasizes the naivety of the latter, as he is unable to perceive the nuanced picture of race relations in the colony. Such harbingers of slave revolution would have resonated with Sansay's American readers as well. While concerns in the southern states for maintaining control over slave populations were widespread, they were especially present in Orleans Territory, where the protracted departure of Spanish officials engendered an air of greater instability. As Stewart recounts, "[when] a free black man reported a revolutionary plot in 1806, [William C. C.] Claiborne," the governor of Orleans Territory, "wrote that he had 'no doubt, but that the free people of color have been tamper'd with, and that some of them are devoted to the Spanish interest'" (128). Territory from the Louisiana Purchase came with imperial baggage that had yet to be processed, and the sheer geographical distance from the centralized government in the eastern states was enough to crystallize the sense that U.S. control was tenuous at best.

Even more incriminating than General Le Clerc's inability to read racial tensions on the island he governs is Sansay's suggestion that French leadership has betrayed foundational principles of liberty and democracy from the French Revolution

and in fact has hypocritically reproduced the same disparity and want in its colonies that led to the revolution in France. As Mary explains, General Le Clerc

> has shocked every body by having ordered a superb service of plate, made of the money intended to pay the army, while the poor soldiers, badly cloathed [*sic*], and still more badly fed, are asking alms in the street, and absolutely dying of want.
>
> A beggar had never been known in this country, and to see them in such numbers, fills the inhabitants with *horror*; but why should such trifling considerations as the preservation of soldiers, prevent a general in chief from eating out of silver dishes? (66, emphasis mine)

This portrait of General Le Clerc reinforces one of the numerous "horrors" detailed in *Secret History* that Sansay critics have failed to sufficiently explore: the horrors born of French desire as they manifest in imperial aspirations. The passage indicates that Le Clerc's desire to maintain an immoderate lifestyle is directly responsible for reducing the French soldiers to such poverty – the very model of inequality that prompted the French Revolution in the first place. His utter lack of understanding for the common man in the colony forces a comparison to the naivety betrayed by Queen Marie Antoinette, whose insulated and lavish lifestyle prompted her most infamous (if unreliably reported) decree to "let [the peasants] eat cake" since they had no bread.

This is not the only fault that Mary ascribes to the French who occupy the island. Not only is their leader Le Clerc completely dissociated from the island's politics and the basic needs of his men, but the French military is described as incapable of restoring order: "[The Creoles] had supposed that the appearance of an army of thirty thousand men would have reduced the negroes to order; but these [French] conquerors of Italy, unnerved by the climate, or from some other cause, lose all their energy, and fly before the undisciplined slaves" (76). The thin resolve of the French is, once again, associated with their failure to adequately protect white women in the colony. None are

more cowardly, however, than the "pusillanimous General Le Clerc," who upon receiving word of "a plot formed by the negroes in the town" to overtake the French arsenal and attack the town, flees, sending his valuables and personal effects to a vessel with the intention of being safely conveyed from the island (68-69). Although his scheme is interrupted, his safety – and that of the colony – is fortuitously ensured by "[the] guarde nationale, composed chiefly of Creoles," who fought "bravely" alongside "[the] American captains and sailors [who had] volunteered their services," though "many of them perished" (68). Though Mary is generally critical of the Creole population throughout the novel, describing them as prone to the same decadent proclivities as their native French counterparts, the bravery they exhibit in battle with "American captains and sailors" testifies to their adaptability when placed in a "proper" sphere of influence. The land, she suggests, would be better served if governed by the local Creole population – aided, of course, by the mentorship, guidance, and resources of those from the U.S., who are far better suited (and willing to sacrifice themselves) for the objective of reconstituting order on behalf of the Creoles.

In all respects, then, the colony's attachment to France is portrayed by Sansay as both oppressive and dangerous to the Creoles who have committed themselves to a life of work and investment in the island. According to Mary, "[many] of the Creoles, who had remained on the island during the reign of Toussaint, regret the change [of power to Le Clerc]," and righteously "have cause" to be upset by this intervention, "for they find in the army sent to defend them, oppressors who appear to seek their destruction. Their houses and their negroes are put under requisition, and they are daily exposed to new vexations" (76). The Creoles, Mary continues, "say that they were less vexed by the

negroes than by those who have come to protect them" (76). For Sansay's contemporary readers, the outcome of the Haitian Revolution was already known: the black and mulatto population had successfully established their control over the island. The novel suggests that it is the Creole population, impossibly trapped between their impotent French rulers and the subsequent power this misguided imperial power unwittingly granted the slave population, that suffers most from the claustrophobic confinement generated by these colliding forces. It should be remembered as well that the implications of the Haitian Revolution were not contained to the island, but produced widespread anxiety for surrounding colonies and slaveholding states in the U.S. that feared that it would inspire radical ideas in slaves throughout the region. Sansay's commentary on French governance in *Secret History* issues a strong message, then, about the diffusive danger that European control of Caribbean colonies posed to the U.S.

The impetus for this danger, it should be recalled, is the problem of empire itself: in *Secret History*, European imperialism represented a geographically self-interested endeavor. There was little benefit to be reaped by the French for selflessly protecting those who had left Europe and established profit-generating enterprises. On this topic, Mary excoriates Europeans at large, observing that they "appear to regard the Island as a place to be conquered and divided among the victors" (66). What is more, the desire of European powers to acquire the resources of the New World does not insulate Americans from threat. When Mary and Clara eventually flee St. Domingo, they are initially hopeful that their American status will safeguard them from the type of exploitation from the British they had witnessed the Creoles suffer at the hands of their

French oppressors: “Every vessel that sails from hence is seized and plundered by the English; but, as we are Americans, perhaps we shall pass” (105). This hope is short-lived, however. Mary narrates,

> As soon as we were out of the harbour a boat from a British frigate boarded us, condemned the vessel as French property, and, without further ceremony, sent the passengers on board another vessel which was lying near us, and was going to Barracoa [in Cuba], where we arrived in three days, after having suffered much from want of provisions and water. Every thing belonging to us had been left in the schooner the English made a prize of. (106)

This passage exposes the vulnerability of Americans unfortunate enough to be caught in the fray of the Napoleonic Wars, and who are treated as poorly (from “want of provisions and water”) as Mary’s description of the subjugation of the French army by General Le Clerc in St. Domingo. The political affiliation that Mary and Clara have as Americans is unceremoniously rejected by the British, and this encounter symbolically suggests that the U.S. should not believe that European powers will continue to honor their independent status; unless vigilance is preserved, encroaching European interests on the continent may subject Americans to the same exploitation and miserable treatment that the Creoles of St. Domingo are described as experiencing.

The numerous examples of claustrophobic spaces of confinement I have described above, which are fueled by the desire of European men to conquer and possess colonial land and resources, are only part of the story that Sansay details in *Secret History*, for this same confinement generated by economies of desire is extended to women in the domestic sphere. This is especially the case for Clara, whose beauty inspires the envy and passion of men who endeavor to possess her throughout the novel. But it is not Clara’s beauty alone that initiates these contests for her possession; as Mary writes early in the novel, “there is a vein of coquetry in [Clara’s] composition which, if

indulged, will eventually destroy her peace" (77). Like the Creole population, which Sansay suggests has the potential for self-governance if placed within a proper sphere of influence, Clara's character is similarly impressionable. The novel makes a clear distinction between the comportment of American women in marriage and the French, who frequently engage in affairs and "appear to understand less than any other people the delights arising from a union of hearts" (96). *Secret History*, that is, suggests that it is Clara's removal from American society and introduction to the influence of depraved French customs that inspires her to "indulge" this "vein of coquetry" (77), and which initiates triangulations of desire that result in her claustrophobic confinement.

In what follows, I demonstrate that the danger to which Clara is exposed from numerous European admirers throughout the Caribbean colonies, and the brutality she endures in the possession of her husband, are all generated by economies of undisciplined desire that Sansay relentlessly attributes to Europeans throughout the narrative, and which manifest in aspirations for both imperial gain and possession of women in the domestic sphere. The connection between revolutionary and domestic violence in *Secret History* is well established in Sansay criticism. Melissa Adams-Campbell, for example, describes Sansay's "brilliant juxtaposition of macro- and micro-revolutions" in the novel as a method that effectively exposes "'the horrors' of political upheaval and racial warfare with the horrors of domestic abuse" (127).[19] Mary goes on

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[19] Like Adams-Campbell, in "Female Bodies and Capitalist Drive: Leonora Sansay's *Secret History* in Transoceanic Context," Michelle Burnham observes that "[throughout] the book, colonial relations are described as marriage relations and vice versa" (182). Burnham continues by explaining how the novel's subtitle – *The Horrors of St. Domingo* – "refers at once to the violent slave uprising and to Clara's personal 'horror' of 'breaking' the 'life-long tie' that has bound her to her husband" (182). Similarly, in "The Secret History of the Early American Novel: Leonora Sansay and

to make the connection explicitly in her comments on the subjugation of women in the Spanish colony of St. Jago de Cuba, where "the women kneel on carpets, spread on the ground, and when they are fatigued, cross their legs, and sit Turkish fashion; whilst the men loll at their ease on sofas. From whence this subversion of the general order? Why are the women placed in the churches *at the feet of their slaves*?" (112, emphasis mine). This "abominable custom" (112) described by Mary reinforces the gendered and racial comparisons that so many have observed in the novel and discussed in Sansay criticism. Michelle Burnham takes this connection further by presenting readers with an array of intersecting triangulated relationships, from the "relationship between Clara, St. Louis, and Rochambeau [that] occupies the heart of the novel" and in turn "mimics the Atlantic trade triangle in which French Europeans and French Creoles battle for possession of the desirable sugar colony, including its profits, its pleasures, and its population of African slaves" (183). I reference the connection Burnham draws between the drive to conquer and secure resources within the Atlantic trade triangle with the love triangle comprised of Clara, St. Louis, and General Rochambeau because the latter nicely demonstrates the way boundless desire, which I argue aligns with the conflicts that emerge from European contests for imperial control, creates the conditions for claustrophobic confinement that threaten to destroy those caught in the middle.

The novel opens by recapping the destruction of much of St. Domingo at the hands of "Christophe, the Black general [of revolutionary Haiti]" three months prior to Sansay's arrival. As Mary explains, Christophe, "who commanded at the cape, rode

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Revolution in Saint Domingue," Elizabeth Maddock Dillon argues that "Sansay … displaces the violence of race revolution with that of patriarchal, domestic violence" (145). Finally, see also Tessie P. Liu's "The Secret beyond White Patriarchal Power: Race, Gender, and Freedom in the Last Days of Colonial Saint-Domingue."

through the town, ordering all the women to leave their houses – the men had been taken to the plain the day before, for he was going to set fire to the place, which he did with his own hand" (62). At the core of this scene is the colonial struggle between the French and Creole plantation owners who seek to repel the rebel slave forces that intend to overthrow the plantation regime. But setting fire to the town of Le Cap presents a visceral example of destruction levied toward the town's domiciles that literally comprise the domestic sphere. The destruction to the town that Mary describes at the outset of the novel mirrors the climax of Clara's claustrophobic confinement and the threat of destruction to her physical body – a point to which I will soon return.

The opening scene of Le Cap's destruction in *Secret History* is nearly repeated in St. Domingo, where "[it] was discovered that the negroes in the town intended to join those who attacked it from without and to kill the women and children, who were shut up in their houses" (82). Although the attack was ultimately prevented, Mary's narration reveals that it is the combination of slavery and French governance that creates this threat in the first place. The local Creole population knows and understands the subtleties of the slave economy they have long governed, and it is by divesting them of power that the incapable French manage to endanger white women in the domestic sphere. It is the ripple effect of this constriction that further restricts the limited mobility bemoaned by Mary, who describes "[feeling] like a prisoner" in the town (77) early in the narrative, to the even more circumscribed space of the houses.

The constriction described by Mary is not limited to the women and children in St. Domingo, for the situation of Clara's husband, we later learn, is just as precarious, confined as he is by orders from General Rochambeau to protect the town that situate

him “in the most advanced post, on the very summit of the mountain, where [he and sixty men] were crowded together on the point of a rock. In this disadvantageous position, … forty men were killed” (85). While the profound physical immobility of this post is reinforced by the imagery of the mountain, which concludes at the “point of a rock” beyond which there is no avenue for escape, St. Louis’s inferior military and social status, which compels him to obey General Rochambeau, is equally responsible for his confinement. Mary details the unprecedented orders of placing the guarde nationale, of which St. Louis is the commander, “before the troops of the line,” leading to “the common opinion … that it was the general’s intention to have St. Louis destroyed, as it was by his order that he was so stationed, and kept there all night, though the other posts had been relieved at midnight” (85). If it was General Rochambeau’s purpose to remove St. Louis as an obstacle to his wife Clara, this design is thwarted not by outright violence (as evident in the slave uprising), but by St. Louis’s defiance for the hierarchy of military order, for the next morning, “he left his post without orders” (84).

Though abandoning his post momentarily protects St. Louis from the physical threat he faced on the mountain, new dangers arise in lieu of the immediate threat of former situation, as he is “exposed … to all the rigours of a court-martial” (84) and potential retaliation from the General. This threat is compounded when St. Louis proceeds to insult the general in a most unprecedented entrance: upon arriving to the governor’s house, St. Louis confronts the General “without waiting [for] the officers in the antechamber [to announce] him” to better accuse him of his “infernal designs” for stealing his wife, and to also call him “a villain!” (84-85). In response to these events,

Clara persuades her husband that their only course forward is to flee the island, telling him, “But you have destroyed yourself” for “the general will never pardon you” (86).

Attending to the various positions of confinement to which St. Louis is subjected, and his limited capacity to resist these enclosures that threaten his physical being without provoking further invitations for harm, exposes a rationale for the deterioration of his marriage to Clara, which has gone unnoticed in Sansay criticism. Although Mary makes clear from the novel’s outset that Clara is destined “to be wretched” in her marriage to St. Louis (61), their incompatibility is disheartening rather than dangerous: Clara’s “aversion to her husband” is not due to his cruelty, but rather to a particularly poor match in intellect and manner, for “[he] is vain, illiterate, talkative. A silent fool may be borne, but from a loquacious one there is no relief” (63). It is only afterward, when the advances of General Rochambeau become undeniably intense and threatening, that Clara testifies to the beginning of her husband’s abuse toward her. The fact that St. Louis owns property in St. Domingo and is part of the guarde nationale rather than the French military suggests he is himself a Creole; and, as this chapter has argued, Sansay’s novel suggests that the Creoles in St. Domingo may be influenced by the type of governance that oversees them. General Rochambeau embodies the characteristics of imperial desire that Sansay attributes to the French, and his desire to possess Clara contributes to spaces of confinement for both St. Louis and his wife. It is this confinement, Sansay suggests, that catalyzes the violence St. Louis commits toward his wife, and which is revealed by Clara later in the narrative.

My analysis to this point has focused on the constriction that arises in the general domestic sphere and toward Clara’s husband in the course of triangulated

relationships driven by the desire to conquer and secure prizes of empire, which can be read both in terms of the struggle to possess land in St. Domingo, and the bodies of women such as Clara. Tracing the theme of claustrophobic confinement as it manifests in Clara's increasingly restricted spaces of captivity sets the precedent for her physical escape and her subsequent efforts to justify these actions through her narrative. While St. Louis is detained at his post on the mountain summit, General Rochambeau deceives Clara into leaving her house against her husband's express instructions by suggesting he has been killed in battle. When St. Louis learns of his wife's disobedience after leaving his post, his belief that she has been faithless compels him to "[drag] her into a little dressing room at the end of the gallery, [locking] her in" (84) before confronting General Rochambeau in the hostile manner previously described. The General retaliates by further constricting the couple's mobility, establishing "an embargo on all the vessels in the port" that would prevent St. Louis – and especially Clara – from departing the island (86). Clara, caught in the fray of this battle between men who wish to possess her, is increasingly restricted. St. Louis develops a "passion for locking her up" (88), and confines her to "a small room, adjoining her chamber" (86), prohibiting even Mary from seeing her. In this immobilizing position, Clara's limited space contracts upon her from all directions.

Clara's husband finally releases her from perpetual captivity when General Rochambeau ends the embargo in St. Domingo, and she is thus able to tell Mary of extraordinary events that passed while confined. One night, after St. Louis had departed the property, the General "mounted the tottering roof" beneath Clara's locked chamber, "and, calling [her] to the window, gave her [a] letter, glowing with the warmest

professions of love, and suggesting several schemes for her escape," which she rebuffed (88). The General's unseemly actions mirror St. Louis's equally unprecedented confrontation with his rival at the governor's house, and, as such, the escalating hostility and desperation exhibited by both of these competing forces contracts around Clara. Thus, Clara is powerfully pressed upon from the jealousy of her husband from within, and the pressure of her admirer from without; the constriction of her space since her first imprisonment in the "little dressing room" further intensifies (84). The collision of male desire, which attacks Clara both internally and externally, symbolizes her complete immobilization.

The climax for this theme in the novel, however, appears after Clara and Mary escape St. Domingo and the influence of General Rochambeau, and St. Louis eventually reunites with them in St. Jago, Cuba. There, Mary reports that "[St. Louis's] old disease has seized him with fresh violence, and he intends to carry his wife beyond the reach of men" (125). Clara later affirms in a letter to Mary, where she writes, "In every man that approached me he saw a rival!" (138). The details of what occurred within Clara's chamber in St. Jago – her most interior, private space in the domestic household – fittingly remain secret until after she escapes her husband's captivity. The profound absence of Clara's experience early in the novel, which Mary cannot access from her limited vantage point, is later revised by Clara's letters, revealing a disturbing new understanding of scenes earlier described by Mary. As Elizabeth Maddock Dillon rightly notes, the three letters in the novel that appear from Clara to Mary serve to reveal "the *secret* that lies between the sisters—what Mary 'never knew'—about the level of physical, psychological, and sexual violence contained within the marriage

between Clara and St. Louis" ("The Secret History" 92, emphasis in original). In these letters, Clara reveals that the night before her escape, St. Louis raped her and "swore that he would render me horrible" (138) by disfiguring her face with nitric acid.

The brutal threat of such destruction to Clara's face and the literal violation to her body bears striking resemblance to Christophe's reported destruction of the town at the novel's outset, and for good reason: in both instances, when faced with the prospect of being unable to acquire control over a desired, contested object, both Christophe and St. Louis are compelled to destroy what they cannot indisputably secure and enjoy.[20] This ultimate threat of destruction to Clara's face, which aligns her body to the destruction of Le Cap by fire, reveals the most intense claustrophobic enclosure presented by the novel. As Clara explains, its effect would lead to an imprisonment for which there is no key – an act of violence she associates with a fate worse than death: "This last menace deprived me of the power of utterance; to kill me would have been a trifling evil, but to live disfigured, perhaps blind, was an insufferable idea and roused me to madness. I passed the night in speechless agony" (138).

Throughout the novel, the combination of uninhibited male desire and Clara's beauty in a culture where her "vein of coquetry" (77) might be tempted leads to her methodical disempowerment that ultimately threatens her life. It is therefore no

[20] Slavoj Žižek makes a similar argument in his analysis of the violence that drives terrorism, reasoning that the impetus behind such destruction lies in *envy*: "The subject does not envy the Other's possession of the prized object as such, but rather the way the Other is able to *enjoy* this object, which is why it is not enough for him simply to steal and thus gain possession of the object. His true aim is to destroy the Other's ability/capacity to enjoy the object" (90). While important distinctions between early nineteenth-century colonialism and modern day terrorism remain, I would argue that the struggle for power articulated here by Žižek shares enough similarities to my discussion of colonial desire in this chapter warrant this passing comparison.

coincidence that, in this climactic example of claustrophobic confinement in the novel, Clara is not only confined but also utterly *silenced*. Deprived of the power of "utterance" and rendered "speechless," readers must appreciate that Clara's ability to escape and tell this "secret history" operates as a subversive narrative to the silence of domestic violence in Mary's earlier letters. Thus, when Mary and Clara escape to the U.S. and Mary beseeches Burr to be Clara's "friend and protector" (154), Mary is essentially asking that Clara be placed within the orbit of Burr's proper American domestic governance. A second interpretation emerges as well, however, for Clara can equally be read as an allegorical Caribbean colony reaching out to the U.S. for proper imperial governance. Thus, her conveyance to Burr at the novel's conclusion makes a profound statement about U.S. international policy *and* Burr himself. Collectively, these statements reflect Sansay's endorsement of Burr as a leader uniquely qualified to ensure that the principles of an "Empire for liberty" are realized in both domestic and imperial arenas.

2.2 *Secret History* in Political Context: Sansay's Endorsement of Burr's "Empire for Liberty"

Examining the significance of Burr in *Secret History* requires us to reorient Sansay's commentary on imperial governance in the Caribbean in relation to concurrent anxieties of Americans on the North American continent, and to detail some of the transatlantic politics that dominated at the time of the novel's publication. First, however, it is important to clarify that while *Secret History* presents a disruption to political narratives that were dominant in the U.S. at the time of the novel's publication, it does not put forth abolitionist or anti-imperialist sentiments. Instead, Sansay blames the slave insurrection in Haiti on poor French governance to argue that the great

responsibility of managing an empire requires a worthy leader. In this vein, the novel establishes some important connections between Jefferson and leaders of major European imperial powers in the Caribbean during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). In *Secret History* the imperial ambitions of the French, English, and Spanish throughout the region are consistently characterized as preoccupied with exploiting resources and wealth to be syphoned back to the European continent, often to the detriment of the white and Creole colonists who occupied plantations under the flags of their native European nations. In the case of the French, this certainly appears to stand in contradiction to the principles of equality and liberty extolled by the French Revolution under Bonaparte's leadership. As a "secret history" commenting on the Jefferson administration, Sansay extends this critique of Bonaparte to consider whom the president's "Empire for liberty" will ultimately serve. Would the people residing in lands newly acquired by the U.S. will be treated as equals, or would they be expected to serve and enrich their central government – just as Sansay's novel describes in her account of French governance of the Creole population and resources in St. Domingo?

The question of who could better deliver an "Empire of liberty" for the West is especially resonant when considering the competing visions that Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr had for the future of the United States, and how narrowly Jefferson won the presidency over Burr. The election of 1800 was indeed dramatic, as Burr and Jefferson each received seventy-three electoral votes for the office of president. "Through the winter of 1800-01," writes Stewart, "Burr [was] at the threshold of the highest office in the land," and the final outcome of the election required several rounds of contentious voting within Congress and the House of Representatives for Jefferson to finally emerge

as the victor (21). This does not mean that Burr's supporters, such as Sansay, readily accepted the outcome.

Distinctions between the two men became even more apparent in the aftermath of Burr's duel with Hamilton, especially in locations that were geographically removed from the central U.S. government. Although Burr's reputation was badly damaged in the eyes of those with power and influence in New England, he found a welcome reception from those inhabiting territories west of the Appalachians. The thirteen states comprising the U.S. were governed by a culture where socioeconomic and political hierarchies remained the norm, but the frontier "amplified American ideas about equality" and retained a distinct "separateness" from the political heart of the nation (Stewart 58). Just as Napoléon Bonaparte never visited colonies in the Americas controlled by France (such as St. Domingo), no U.S. vice president or president had ever visited territories west of Appalachia until Burr in 1805. Many colonists of European descent who had moved toward the frontier felt disconnected from the eastern states, and this only made Burr – an outcast of that centralized government – more appealing to them. As Stewart explains, Burr's criticisms of Jefferson resonated with "Westerners," who "were gratified that this eminent man understood their problems and saw their situation so clearly" (100).

Burr's immersion in the western territories made Jefferson's detachment from this land all the more conspicuous, and offers one explanation for Sansay's endorsement of his leadership. As *Secret History* suggests, leaders who are unfamiliar with the needs of far-off colonies tend to hinder rather than help the local population's prosperity. The acquisition of land from the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 generated new uncertainty for

the viability of the nation's long-term cohesion, both in terms of its rapidly shifting and expanding borders and the stability of slaveholding states. In a letter composed in 1804, Jefferson acknowledged the challenges facing the U.S. in the long-term project of incorporating the Louisiana Purchase, writing, "[w]hether we remain in one confederacy, or form into Atlantic and Mississippi confederacies, I believe not very important to the happiness of either part. Those of the western confederacy will be as much our children and descendants as those of the eastern" ("Letter … to Joseph Priestley 447). What is striking in this passage is not so much Jefferson's admission that the unity of the nation may not hold, but rather the way he describes land from the Louisiana Purchase as a distant colony that may eventually fall under the paternalistic governance of the U.S. Such an interpretation aligns more with Sansay's criticisms of French governance in St. Domingo and compromises the suggestion that Jefferson's "Empire for Liberty" would directly benefit those who lived in these western territories.

The most compelling argument for Sansay's ire toward Jefferson, however, can be found in his duplicitous interventions in the governance of Haiti, for Sansay personally experienced their consequences. Following the initial slave uprising that established Toussaint Louverture's control over the colony,[21] Jefferson was justifiably concerned about the influence the revolution may have on slaveholding states in the southern U.S., and therefore supported Napoléon Bonaparte's move to regain control over St. Domingo in 1801 (Matthewson 216). The return of 40,000 French soldiers to the island inspired Leonora's French husband, Louis Sansay, to reclaim land he had

[21] Drexler's notes on *Secret History* indicate that Toussaint Louverture was a black "coachman on a plantation near Cap Français" who "had become the dominant military and civil leader of Saint Domingue" when slavery was abolished in 1794 (63).

abandoned in 1795, four years after the revolution had begun. In 1802, Leonora arrived in St. Domingo with her husband, though French control was dubious and unrest on the island never completely subsided while the Sansays were there. Despite Jefferson's initial support of the French reestablishing control over the island, he remained suspicious of Bonaparte, who he believed had aspirations to expand French control to the North American continent once the rebellion in St. Domingo was subdued (Matthewson 221). Thus, the Jefferson administration reversed course in 1802, declaring that the U.S.

> would follow a policy of neutrality on the belligerency in Saint Domingue, but, in this specific context, the seemingly benign word *neutrality* meant that contraband of war would continue to flow to the blacks through the usual U.S. merchant channels and the administration would refuse all French requests for assistance, credits, or loans. (Matthewson 226-227)

Thus, it was the policies of the Jefferson administration that had initially encouraged Leonora and her husband to return to St. Domingo, and then obliquely supported the slave insurrection that eventually caused them to flee the island. In 1804, any white colonists who had dared to remain were massacred (Matthewson 240) – an event that Sansay conspicuously details as one of the novel's many "horrors."

The failure of French rule in St. Domingo served as an ominous reminder of the tragedies that poor governance in the Louisiana Purchase may yield. Notably, the Louisiana territory had several Creole residents of French descent who shared ideological connections to their Caribbean Creole neighbors, and this demographic posed distinct challenges for the project of incorporating the Louisiana Purchase into the United States. Historians such as Stewart, for example, have noted the strain this population felt under Jefferson's leadership:

> For the Creoles [in Louisiana], as the French-speaking residents were called, American control was obnoxious, imposing the English language, American law, and American taxes. Louisianans had to prove to their new government that they held title to their land, even though the Spaniards took away most land records when they left. (69)

Jefferson's ambivalent stance regarding this land – whether it would be incorporated into the U.S. or be expected to serve the nation as one of its "children and descendants" – reproduces a scenario that is similar to French rule in St. Domingo, situating it as a far-off colony imbued with the potential to enrich the dominant nation-state. Jefferson's leadership, Sansay suggests, was dangerously out of touch with the needs of the population in this newly acquired territory.

There are some delicate slights aimed toward Jefferson threaded throughout the novel as well that support my argument that *Secret History* offers a "secret" criticism of the U.S. President. For one, Sansay privileges the image of George Washington to represent the U.S. over Jefferson, despite the fact that the latter was president during the novel's timeframe. When Mary first arrives in St. Domingo, she pays a visit to Madame Le Clerc, presenting her with "one of the beautiful silver medals of Washington, engraved by Reich, with which she seemed much pleased" (65). In her biographical letter to Burr, written May 6, 1803, however, Sansay relates that she "gave [Madame Le Clerc] the Medal of Jefferson" in this exchange (225). Drexler observes this alteration in his notes on *Secret History*, but places minimal importance on it, suggesting, "[perhaps] the change was made by Sansay's publishers, Bradford and Inskeep," whose Federalist leanings "would have [given them] slight interest in commemorating Jefferson as a great leader" (65). As I have argued throughout this chapter, however, there are several reasons to believe that Sansay would have made this change herself.

Changing the imagery of the medal to Washington in *Secret History* may just as easily be read as Sansay's protest toward recognizing the legitimacy of a Jefferson presidency or an expression of frustration regarding his administration's irresolute policies toward French occupancy in St. Domingo.

Such a reading is strengthened later in the novel when General Rochambeau leads Clara to a room "ornamented with military trophies, and on every panel was written the name of some distinguished chief," including "Buonaparte [*sic*], … Frederic, … Massena, &c" (80). Clara responds by acknowledging the room as "very pretty, but that Washington" – not Jefferson – "should also have found a place there!" (80). This additional slight toward Jefferson emphasizes his lack of military experience, and from this we must note a crucial disagreement between Burr and Jefferson in their respective views on the role of military engagement. While Burr had fought bravely as a lieutenant colonel for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War, Jefferson was well out of danger, cultivating his political career by serving as the governor of Virginia. Their contrasting backgrounds undoubtedly influenced their philosophies on the use of military force. Jefferson, Stewart explains, "always wished to avoid war. 'Our constitution is a peace establishment,' Jefferson insisted, 'it is not calculated for war. War would endanger its existence'" (93), whereas "Burr, whose youthful military success helped form his personality, insisted that government must defend the nation's interests with energy and purpose. … When events justified force … Burr reached for his sword" (92-94).

Thus, Sansay's depiction of European imperialism as a rapacious endeavor capable of obliterating those caught in the middle of violent collisions, and her

suggestion that American intervention may have been effective in stopping the "horrors" detailed throughout her novel, offers a subtle critique of Jefferson's passive stance toward the use of military force. I would not go so far as to argue that Sansay's description of Le Clerc is an allegorical portrait of Jefferson, but some notable similarities put forth from the novel must be observed. Like Le Clerc, Jefferson had command over an army of men, though Le Clerc's cowardice and Jefferson's lack of practical military experience work to discredit confidence in their respective abilities to effectively advise and lead in this area. What is more, the literal geographical distance separating Jefferson from the western frontier and the territory he had only recently acquired in the Louisiana Purchase suggests that, like Bonaparte and Le Clerc, his understanding of the people and their needs is, at best, limited. At worst, Jefferson's removal exposes the nation's new acquisitions to the danger of attack from forces he is too naïve to see or understand. Burr's familiarity with Orleans Territory and the western frontier from his western expedition, however, aligns him better with the Creoles in *Secret History* who not only feel oppressed by their governing leaders, but better understand the needs of the people and the politics that govern stability in the land they inhabit. When viewed through this lens, Sansay's re-authorization of Burr presents him as an American hero attempting to deliver the U.S. from the imperial threats he recognized from European powers, especially in the case of western Florida (then governed by Spain), but toward which Jefferson remained passive, refusing to exert the military force that Burr viewed as necessary for securing the nation.

The most compelling and outright endorsement of Burr in the novel, however, comes from Mary, who after thoroughly disparaging General Le Clerc, acknowledges,

“[but] you know one of my faults is to create objects in my imagination on the model of my incomparable friend, and then to dislike everything I meet because it falls short of my expectations” (73). Sansay’s participation in the Burr Conspiracy illustrates yet another dimension to this statement, extending the “objects in [her] imagination” to the “Empire for liberty” that Burr had imagined for the West, and for which she viewed him as uniquely qualified to execute. Addressing the letters comprising much of the novel to Burr interpolates the image of a felled leader who, unlike his rival Jefferson or contemporary Napoléon Bonaparte, had been intimately *connected* to the lands he was accused of conspiring to acquire. Sansay, that is, mobilizes the paratext of the Burr Conspiracy not only to redeem Burr’s defamed reputation, but also to suggest that he in fact exemplifies the qualities of benevolent governance heralded in (problematic) justifications for U.S. expansion on the North American continent.

One of the key pieces of evidence featured in Burr’s trial for treason was a cipher, or code through which he was able to secretly communicate sensitive information with others involved in the Burr Conspiracy. The very title of Sansay’s *Secret History* invites readers to approach her work with a similar eye – to decipher the code for the political commentary she puts forth in her novel, which invites readers to reconsider the legacy of Aaron Burr and the vision he had for the U.S. As I have argued, *Secret History* puts forth a disruptive commentary on American politics in the early Republic that unsettles longstanding beliefs about figures like Jefferson and Burr. By referencing Burr and his stand against Jefferson’s vision for an “Empire of liberty,” Sansay presses readers to acknowledge the shaping influence of alternative political geographies in contests for empire.

CHAPTER THREE | Mutable Empires: Geographic Legibility and the Illusion of Permanence in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*

Among the numerous meditative vignettes brought to life by Ishmael in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* is an account of giant paths made by whales as they swim through "vast meadows of brit," or the fry of herring and sprat: "As morning mowers … these monsters swam, making a strange, grassy, cutting sound; and leaving behind them endless swaths of blue upon the yellow sea" (223). But while the paths cut through this living meadow may appear "endless" as far as the eye can see, they do not occupy an "endless" tenure in time. The organic composition of this land-like feature in the ocean is in perpetual movement, its newly-formed "swaths" always already dissolving in the wake of their creation. I emphasize the paradox of space and time embedded in Ishmael's use of the term "endless" because it exposes one of the novel's most intimate, though unrecognized, concerns: that permanence is a constructed concept, and while many may strive toward that fixed ideal, it is ultimately unattainable. More specifically, in this chapter, I examine the way that *Moby-Dick* interrogates *legibility* as a medium that seems to promise the realization of permanence, but ultimately proves insufficient.

I want to explain what I mean by the constructedness of permanence. As Wai-Chee Dimock and Rob Nixon have argued in quite different contexts,[22] there are measures of time so great in their sheer profundity that they are often unrecognized in the context of the everyday and mundane. Dimock advocates for an appreciation of "deep time" in approaches to "American" literature, and, in doing so, critiques the temporal boundaries that otherwise stymie our recognition of a more complex (and less

[22] See Wai-Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*, and Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

geopolitically discrete) "tangle of relations" that depart from "the analytic … of the sovereign state," and which postcolonial, transnational, transoceanic, and hemispheric literary studies have only begun to challenge (3). "Deep time," Dimock argues, places American literature within an entirely different scale of perception, bringing to the fore a different "analytic fabric" capable of transcending conceptions of standardized time that accompany modernity and the construction of the nation-state which effectively minimize "local contexts [and] local irregularities" in lieu of an "[abstracted] metric" that is "at once 'empty and homogeneous'" (2-4). It is from a similar impulse to shift scales of perception that Nixon puts forth his theory of "slow violence," in which the devastating effects of globalization on the environment and underprivileged populations elude visibility precisely because they "[occur] gradually and out of sight," are "dispersed across time and space," and are "incremental and accretive" rather than "spectacular" or "instantaneous" (2). The result, Nixon suggests, is a series of "calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (2) – a violence so slow, and on a timeline so elongated, that it is evades perception.

The fields from which Dimock and Nixon write are admittedly removed from one another, but the unlikely juxtaposition of their ideas parallels a driving force behind Melville's most notorious novel: the recognition of a scale of time so infinitely vast and divorced from the quotidian concerns of the present that the very concept of *permanence* begins to erode. That is to say, no material object or idea – not even the surface and geography of the earth – is immune from the relentless progression of *infinite* time. Like Nixon's description of slow violence, changes that take place on a scale of infinite time similarly "[occur] gradually and out of sight," and are

"incremental and accretive" (2), extending far beyond conventional awareness. *Moby-Dick*, I contend, gestures toward an even "deeper time" than is recognized in Dimock's call to focus on connective threads that transcend temporal boundaries of the nation-state in our examination of literature, evoking, by contrast, a mythic and immeasurable cosmic timeline that Melville's characters – and especially Ahab – resist in their futile attempt to locate some evidence of *permanence* in the world at large.[23]

In this chapter, I discuss the inspiration that Melville derived from Charles Wilkes, who commanded the United States Exploring Expedition (U.S. Ex. Ex.) in the Antarctic and South Pacific from 1838-1842. Wilkes was infatuated with producing painstakingly accurate cartographic depictions of whaling grounds and islands, and historicizing the novel in this manner aligns the *Pequod*'s quest with Wilkes's own aspirations for producing geographically legible accounts of otherwise baffling land formations. Moreover, as numerous scholars have recognized, Wilkes was at least one source that Melville consulted in the development of Ahab's character.[24] Mapping as a metaphor has become so commonplace in our social language that it is often summoned

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[23] Dimock has welcomed the "standpoint of a cosmic *longue durée*" suggested by Mark McGurl in his published response to her book *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*. Dimock writes, "As McGurl points out, when the sun goes out, a spectacular heat-death implosion slated to happen some 4.5 thousand million years from now, the planet will most certainly go out with it. … Most of us, and most works of literature, have indeed been blind to this, going about our business blissfully short-sighted, never giving a moment's thought to the catastrophe projected far into the future, but guaranteed to happen" (614). See "Critical Response I: Low Epic" in *Critical Inquiry* 39 (Spring 2013): 614-631.

[24] Anne Baker, Kathleen E. Kier, and Robert L. Gale are among those who have established connections between Ahab and Wilkes, though several others have noted broader connections between the novel and the U.S. Ex. Ex. Regarding the similarities between Ahab and Wilkes, Gale argues that both "may be described as dangerous, eccentric, and mysterious, and both as dauntless, flawed by insolence and pride, persistent, seawise and soul-sick, and wrathful," and "their voyages were parallel at times and included similar gams" (6).

casually in respect to representation, and so it is not particularly surprising that while many critics have approached *Moby-Dick* with the general idea of mapping in mind, none have explicitly addressed how the novel approaches the temporal limitations of text and inscription in relation to cartographic representations.[25] What the novel exposes in Ahab's attempts to harness methods of scientific measurement – and the data, logs, and charts that he produces from this information – is the way that inscriptions can be read as an attempt to fix that which cannot be fixed, to project a claim of permanence on objects which are perpetually in motion and evolving, though the movement may be so slow that it defies perception. The example of whales carving paths through fields of brit is thus demonstrative of the way that the novel frames inscriptions as inherently transient, and the way that scientific disciplines, such as cartography, may be read as attempts to represent and stabilize that which is impermanent.

Maps are counterfactual in this sense, insofar as they facilitate a vain attempt to shape (rather than represent) the landscape, to contest the unsettling impermanence that Melville's ocean represents. Following this line of reasoning, I argue that *Moby-Dick* can be read not just as a metaphor for mapping, but also as a novel about the *processes* of nineteenth-century cartographic methods, and, importantly, their limitations. More specifically, I demonstrate how *Moby-Dick* confronts the contradictions inherent in two

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[25] See especially "Mapping and Measurement in *Moby-Dick*" by Anne Baker; *Melville, Mapping and Globalization: Literary Cartography in the American Baroque Writer* by Robert Tally Jr.; "Melville's Zig-Zag World-Circle" in *Novels, Maps, Modernity: The Spatial Imagination, 1850-2000* by Eric Bulson; and "Pondering Over the Chart of Kokovoko: Herman Melville and the Critique of Cartological Inscription" by Zbigniew Bialas. Other scholarship referencing Melville's engagement with mapping in *Moby-Dick* includes "The Checkered Globe," especially pp. 132-134 in *Geography and the Production of Space* by Hsuan Hsu; and "Conquistadors, Monsters, and Maps: *Moby-Dick* in a New World Context" by Antonio Barrenechea.

ways of perceiving maps: as supposedly objective representations of geographical realities, and as predictions of the future.[26] Such a reading of *Moby-Dick* not only reveals Melville's engagement with permanence as a constructed concept, but also challenges the very constructedness of maps – and, importantly, their complicity in imperialistic enterprises.

3.1 Limitations of Immutability

The scene I describe in this introduction of whales carving paths through living meadows of tiny fish marks the opening of Chapter 58: "Brit" in *Moby-Dick*, and, as I have posited, presents a compelling example of Melville's engagement with permanence, or immutability, as a constructed concept. It is therefore notable that Ishmael's closing words in the same chapter subtly endorse the idea that permanence is little more than a phantasm. "[We] know the sea," Ishmael tells us, "to be an everlasting terra incognita" (224), a body defined by its fluid impermanence, forever unknowable. And so, Ishmael reasons,

> consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself? For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return!" (225)

The "analogy" Ishmael references here is one that seems to offer refuge against impermanence – an "insular Tahiti" to which men can cling and orient themselves. But

[26] Robert T. Tally Jr. makes a similar argument in *Melville, Mapping and Globalization*, asserting that reading *Moby-Dick* as a "literary cartography" reveals Melville's prescience of globalization and the postmodern state. This chapter, however, focuses on the way that Ahab's process of generating maps within the novel maps the future of the text itself.

even in this example the ideal of immutability is provisional, and the conditions on which it is premised only serve to emphasize its futility.

One of the barriers for return upon "[pushing] … off" is logistical: how does one *find* this island paradise again? Although Ishmael's illustration here is more symbolic than literal, its meaning can be better apprehended by examining historical connections to the island-metaphor he invokes. Queequeg, we learn, "was a native of Kokovoko, an island far away" in the South Pacific that is "not down in any map; true places never are" (59). Melville's inclusion of a fictional, unmapped island in his mythic ocean is evocative of a larger issue circulating in America concerning hydrographic legibility. Jeremiah Reynolds, one of the most prominent advocates of the Wilkes expedition, described the problem of inaccurate information in geographic illustrations as a failure of observational structure. The inaccuracies to be found in "English charts, and those of other countries," Reynolds contended, could be traced back to a problem of methodology, for "[much] of their information has been obtained from loose accounts from whalers, who were careless in some instances, and forgetful in others" (qtd. in Burnett 196).

Even discovery missions with an emphasis on obtaining accurate scientific coordinates (rather than passive observations noted by whaling vessels) were known to produce confounding results, however. In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, Edgar Allan Poe includes a lengthy description of a phantom trio of "islands called the Auroras, respecting whose existence a great diversity of opinion has existed" (147). In 1790, when Captian Manuel de Oyarvido attempted to corroborate earlier claims of the archipelago, he detailed the precise coordinates of each island in "a paper

published by the Royal Hydrographical Society of Madrid in … 1809" (Poe 147). When British Captain James Weddell searched the same coordinates in 1820, however, he encountered no sign of land whatsoever in the vicinity (147-8). The absolute contradiction accompanying efforts to affirm or deny the existence of the Auroras draws upon a tension that suspends the certainty of individual experience and the apparent failure of scientific methods designed to accurately determine geographic orientation. The meticulous coordinates issued by the Atrevida, and presented under the institutional endorsement of the Royal Hydrographical Society, convey an authoritative affirmation of the islands that only compounds the mystery of their unreplicable encounter: the map fails to assure their permanence. In the case of Queequeg's Kokovoko and the "insular Tahiti" that Ishmael identifies in "the soul of man" (225), the history of failed attempts to make the oceans geographically legible challenges the surety of permanence through the logistical uncertainty associated with the return.

A more literal question of permanence arises in the novel, however, by advancing the inevitability of change on the most minute of scales. When Ishmael observes paths through floating meadows of brit, generated by monstrous fish as they consume infinitely tinier fish, he also describes a process of accumulation at a most infinitesimal measure. How many tiny fish, or brit, must a whale consume to attain its massive stature? The novel poses the same logic in regard to islands: large masses of land that represent processes of accretion and erosion so vast that they fall beyond our field of vision. When the *Pequod* encounters the *Bachelor*, a Nantucket ship bound for home, Ahab "[takes] from his pocket a small vial of sand, and then looking from the [disappearing] ship to the vial, seemed thereby bringing two remote associations

together, for that vial was filled with Nantucket soundings" (375). The men on the *Bachelor* share a "remote association" to the sand in Ahab's vial through their shared symbolism: the ship, like the vial, represents tiny particles (or men) from Nantucket swept away by the ocean, now bound for return. The new wares and experiences carried by the ship, however, have arguably transformed their cargo. And so too upon the ship's arrival will Nantucket be slightly modified, absorbing these familiar – but altered – symbolic pieces of sand back into this place of origin.

In the same measure, the literal vial of sand in Ahab's hand will never make it back to Nantucket, but will sink along with the *Pequod* and its men (save Ishmael) in the final, fatal encounter with Moby Dick. What the novel poses, then, is an examination of permanence as a concept that is variously perceived on different scales. If the sand in Ahab's possession does not return home, then Nantucket is surely altered, though the change may be so minor that it escapes detection. So too, then, must we acknowledge the inevitable changes that occur in ebbs and flows that exchange literal and symbolic pieces of sand, bringing them to and from locations that, to all outward appearances, seem to convey permanence. When the *Pequod* escapes Malaysian pirates in pursuit of the ship as it simultaneously chases after whales, Ishmael observes that "Ahab's brow was left gaunt and ribbed, like the black sand beach after some stormy tide has been gnawing it, without being able to drag the firm thing from its place" (299). The imagery here suggests something ineffable has been taken in this exchange, though what is left of Ahab and the *Pequod* – "the firm thing" – remains largely intact. When we consider the implications of this metaphor on *actual* land, however, the emphasis on incremental, infinitesimal accretions and disintegrations resulting in noticeable

differences over the *longue durée* comes back into focus. The extent to which ancient islands and other "firm thing[s]" (299) have eroded or will eventually deteriorate beyond the point of detection comes from a scale of perception that transcends commonplace observations. It is in this way that I argue Melville interrogates the idea of permanence in the novel. If men find solace in the idea of an "insular Tahiti" within the "soul of man" as Ishmael suggests, it is because this image encompasses a powerful illusion that permanence – and the refuge it represents within a vast sea of *impermanence* – is possible.

To recognize Melville's engagement with permanence as a constructed concept is only part of the issue at stake, however: it is through efforts to describe earthly subjects through practices of *legibility* that the novel exposes technologies of measurement and writing as vain efforts to fix that which is impermanent. In "Visualization and Cognition," Bruno Latour responds to theorists who attribute the rise of modern civilization to a radical and evolutionary shift in the human mind from primitive to scientific thought by offering a more modest suggestion: that inscription as an a priori model can explain knowledge through processes of accumulation.[27] The ability to *inscribe* enables methods for understanding the world that supersede the limitations associated with immediate conversation and memory. When put to paper, inscriptions become what Latour calls "immutable mobiles," insofar as they can be taken other places, reproduced, and shared with others. This mobility also yields the

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[27] Latour's use of the term "inscription" in "Visualization and Cognition" relies primarily upon the works of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. For a fine discussion of Latour's term, see Ronald Schleifer, *Analogical Thinking*, particularly Chapter 3. Schleifer uses the term "notation" rather than "inscription" to capture the visual as well as written sense of the term, a matter of particular importance in cartography.

opportunity for inscriptions to be interpreted within different scales and translated into new texts, from which new knowledge can be produced, compared, and combined with other inscriptions. Most importantly, however, inscriptions "are *immutable* when they move, or at least everything is done to obtain this result: specimens are chloroformed, microbian colonies are stuck into gelatin, even exploding stars are kept on graph papers in each phase of their explosion" (21). The organic realities of growth and decomposition are minimized in the culture of scientific inscription that Latour describes, and the same phenomenon is powerfully present in mapped representations of land. "One important epistemological consequence of maps," argues Nick Van Noy, "is that the representation of land in spatial terms flattens out the land and *halts it in time*" (12, emphasis mine). When coupled with the authority imputed by scientific institutions, maps exhibit a profound visual rhetoric that seemingly guarantees its representation of the earth as both realistic and absolute.

What Latour does not fully address in this piece is the way scientific discourses that rhetorically establish permanence and fixability simultaneously construct a powerful illusion of immutability. To what extent can an inscription be said to attain a value of unendangered permanence – an "immutability" that ensures perseverance through the ages? An example from Latour's own article provides a fruitful entryway to my own query:

> La Pérouse travels through the Pacific for Louis XVI with the explicit mission of bringing *back* a better map. One day, landing on what he calls Sakhalin he meets with Chinese [people] and tries to learn from them whether Sakhalin is an island or a peninsula. To his great surprise the Chinese understand geography quite well. An older man stands up and draws a map of his island on the sand with the scale and details needed by La Pérouse. Another, who is younger, sees that the rising tide will soon erase the map and picks up one of La Pérouse's notebooks to draw the map again with a pencil. (5, emphasis in original)

According to Latour, the distinction between the Chinese and the French in this example lies not in their capacities for geographic conception, for both cultures are rich in their traditions of inscription; rather, the distinction lies in the enduring capacity of the pencil and paper emphasized in the example: "What is, for the former, a drawing of no importance that the tide may erase, is for the latter the *single object* of his mission. What should be brought into the picture is how the picture is brought back" (6, emphasis in original). The map has to be copied in La Péruse's notebook in order to be transported to France, to not be washed away by the sea. To Latour's credit, the "properties of being *mobile* but also *immutable*, *presentable*, *readable* and *combinable*" (7, emphasis in original) that he ascribes to immutable mobiles do not require an eternal tenure in time to achieve the aggregation of text that he identifies as the foundation of scientific culture.[28] My purpose here is simply to emphasize that the immutability of text must be placed on a relative scale, one that is merely durable *enough* to sufficiently facilitate processes of mobility and accumulation that Latour describes.

When we qualify the "immutable" properties that Latour attributes to inscription, especially in terms of ultimate durability, the distinction between the map of Sakhalin drawn in the sand versus pencil in the notebook becomes less clear. Certainly

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[28] Latour argues that "immutability is ensured by the process of printing many identical copies; mobility by the number of copies, the paper and the movable type" (10). Of course, even this technology (and more recent innovations, like the internet and digital texts) cannot guarantee a text to be *immutable* in the sense of being everlasting or eternal. In *Empire for Liberty*, Wai-Chee Dimock describes the ambitions of American Empire as expanding "to include the entire hemisphere" in an effort to "dispense space as a sort of temporal currency, buying its tenure in time with its extension in space" (15). Latour's statement about the "immutability" of text follows a similar logic, in which mass reproduction can be thought of as the attempt to extend the durability of a text over time through its physical duplication.

Latour is correct in noting that the map on the beach does not have the properties of mobility ascribed to the notebook; as I have argued, however, the features of immutability, especially in respect to their durability over time, are relative. While paper inscriptions may seem to convey a more essential permanence in comparison to the Sakhalin map drawn in the sand, other examples of *immobile* inscriptions upon the land, such as those that emerge from events like mass migration, reveal a greater degree of intransience. In an impressive piece of historic criticism, John W. Nichol describes Melville's journey to trans-Allegheny America, or "the very edge of the frontier as it existed in 1840" (613), as one source of inspiration for the numerous analogies between the prairie and sea that the author incorporates in *Moby-Dick*. Beyond Chicago, Nichol explains, "Melville would have found no railroad or canal to [his destination] Galena, but two stagecoach routes across the prairies," which "were still not much more than marked-out lanes" (616). As settlers surged westward following the Oregon Trail and other paths in the 1840's, stagecoach and wagon routes, such as the one Melville travelled in transit to Galena, inevitably became more defined, prominent, and, through the repeated westward movements of migrants, more enduring. In Guernsey, Wyoming, for instance, the physical alteration to the American landscape from travellers on the Oregon Trail is clearly evident to this day in the form of deep ruts cut into solid rock shaped by the incessant passage of wagon wheels more than 150 years ago. The point here is not to compare the relative permanence of inscriptions on land versus paper, but rather to emphasize what Latour gestures toward but fails to explicitly state in his own work: that inscriptions only attain the *semblance* of immutability through repetition,

whether that be in the form of duplication via the printing press, or, as I have argued, through repeated movements that continually retrace paths across the land.

This intersection between perceived permanence and inscription foregrounds what I see as Melville's engagement with the politics of American identity and empire in *Moby-Dick*. Latour's selection of La Pérouse in his account of immutable mobiles is unwittingly apropos in this discussion of the durability of empire, for the erasure of the map drawn in the sand serves as a metaphor for anxieties toward permanence that attend imperial enterprises, poignantly exhibited by the many that have faded away. Disciplines related to geography which emerged in the 1960's and 70's, such as the history of geography and critical geography, have rightly questioned assumptions of neutrality that often accompany the production of maps by emphasizing the power relationships that lead to their creation, especially in imperial enterprises.[29] This is the direction that J.B. Harley pursues in his seminal essay "Deconstructing the Map," which addresses the imperial cartographic objectives of explorers like La Pérouse by emphasizing the implicit power relations that underlie and inform representation in maps. To this end, Harley examines external and internal dimensions of power within maps that, when recognized, reveal the subjectivities inherent in their formation. The external power of maps refers to "centers of political power," such as the church or state, in which "power is exerted *on* cartography" to reflect the political priorities of their sponsoring institutions (12, emphasis in original). Under these circumstances, when cartographers create maps, they *internally* "manufacture power: they create a

[29] This is not to say that all maps drive imperial domination, however. As Matthew H. Edney clarifies in "The Irony of Imperial Mapping," "there is little to differentiate cartographic practices in imperial and nonimperial contexts" (13); rather, the key difference lies in the varying implicit and explicit purposes and uses of maps.

spatial panopticon" that in turn reinforces external power (13). This relationship between the internal and external power in maps, which European nations and the United States have notoriously levied to generate power and control over land and peoples in imperial projects, demonstrates the extraordinary power of cartography to not only describe geographical and geopolitical landscapes, but to inform the very *creation* of these landscapes through the socially-situated politics of representation.

One remarkable feature of *Moby-Dick*, then, is the way that the novel erodes the reader's trust in permanence precisely in order to question the assurance that maps seem to provide in regards to the long-term stability of empire. As a result, Melville's ocean reveals the constructedness of maps in ways that the land itself cannot, but also the way that the internal power behind maps seeks to project the longevity of imperial acquisitions – a move that, I argue, can be read as an effort to shape the future.

3.2 The Whale as Surface and Subject: Or, the Empire Maps Back

One of the more extraordinary characteristics of the whale (and especially the White Whale) in *Moby-Dick* is that it embodies both the subject of mapping, and serves as a metaphor for the map itself. This distinction, though subtle, is significant: as the *subject* of mapping, the whale exemplifies processes of spatial transformation achieved through the use of scale to flatten and better comprehend an otherwise unwieldy whole, though, as Ishmael makes clear in chapters like "Monstrous Pictures of Whales," "Less Erroneous Pictures of Whales," and "Of Whales in Paint," any attempt to capture the animal in visual representation is hindered by the distortions that make comprehension possible – a point to which I will soon return. Conversely, the whale as a metaphor for

the *map itself* raises questions for the entire epistemic understanding of knowledge production emerging from practices of geographic surveying and mapping.

In “The Blanket” chapter, Ishmael describes the whale’s skin as “obliquely crossed and re-crossed with numberless straight marks in thick array” that, “to the quick, observant eye … afford the ground for far other delineations” (246). This image of “crossed and re-crossed … straight marks” upon the whale’s surface is evocative of the geographic graticule, and brings to mind the blank grid upon which mapping can occur. The allusion to geographic surveying is reinforced when Ishmael explains that “those linear marks … afford the *ground* for far other delineations,” evoking the pictorial dimensions that accompany attempts to map the land, or “ground” (246, emphasis mine).[30] While it is well documented that the ceteology chapters of *Moby-Dick* evince Ishmael’s obsession with mapping the whale, the idea that the whale’s skin represents the geographic plane upon which mapping occurs gestures toward something more complex. The grid is a conceptual tool that orients the mapmaker, offering structure and optical consistency: it is not the *object* of observation or study, but rather the *means* by which the project of geographic legibility is made possible. To pursue the whale, in this sense, indicates a desire to acquire and master the *means* through which geographic representation occurs.

There is a difference, however, between the generic whale on which Ishmael observes the geographic plane, which reflects the methods currently employed in

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[30] Melville’s allusion to the geographic graticule would not have escaped American readers of his era, most of whom were familiar with practices of surveying. On the history of geographic literacy and its pervasiveness among the general public in the United States, see Martin Brückner’s excellent work, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity*.

geographic representation, and the White Whale, which gestures toward the unprecedented and unknown. As Robert T. Tally Jr. explains in his own examination of mapping in *Moby-Dick*, Melville's writing engages with "the inadequacy, if not downright impossibility, of representation" (187). In parallel with the critiques that Ishmael levies against distorted visual representations of the whale throughout the novel, the methods through which the earth is represented in the sciences, like geography, produce an image always already once removed from the subject. There can be no "true" mimetic image forged through the methods at the mapmaker's disposal. The White Whale, more than any other, reflects these limitations: its whiteness is indicative of "absence," of "dumb blankness" (165); in geography, it recalls the impenetrable Arctic, discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, as well as the absence of knowledge that Joseph Conrad locates in his romanticized longing as a child while "looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting [his] finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent," and determining, "'When I grow up I shall go *there*.'" (33, *A Personal Record*).[31] Moby Dick, in other words, offers a reminder of the incomplete nature of geographic knowledge, but also the limitations inherent in the tools and methods of geographic representation.

As the *subject* of mapping, the whale represents the imperial dynamics of land accumulation, which is especially evident in the chapter "Fast-fish and Loose-fish," wherein the former represents land that is already claimed for empire, and the latter those places yet to be taken. In *Moby-Dick*, the Fast-fish, situated as a metaphor for

[31] The language of Conrad's encounter with the map's "blank spaces" as described in his autobiography parallels a source likely more familiar to readers: the desire of his protagonist Marlowe in *Heart of Darkness* to visit the "blank spaces on the earth" (8), which similarly references Africa along with the North Pole.

imperial expansion, is brutally speared in order to be "fastened" to the imperial motherland. Ishmael attaches the equivocal stipulations for laying claim to a Fast-fish, which "is technically fast, when it is connected with an occupied ship or boat, by any medium at all controllable by the occupant or occupants … so long as the party waifing it plainly evince their ability at any time to take it alongside, as well as their intention to do so" (308). This accounts, to some degree, for the historical exchanges behind the "Loose-fish" Ishmael invokes as the particular prizes of empire: "What was America in 1492 but a Loose-fish, in which Columbus struck the Spanish standard by way of waifing[32] it for his royal master and mistress? What was Poland to the Czar? What was Greece to the Turk? What was India to England? What at last will Mexico be to the United States? All Loose-fish" (310). In this passage, empire is a process of anatomization and accumulation, revealed in the contrast between Columbus's initial claim to America in 1492 and the transformative process that has yielded both "the United States" and "Mexico." The personification of America as a "Loose-fish" is too large to absorb in its entirety; here, it becomes a synecdochal prelude to the processes of dissection and rendering that must take place in order to amass an empire.

The whale's immensity, like that of the world, requires amending our scale of representation to comprehend the creature's entirety. As readers of *Moby-Dick*, we map the whale alongside Ishmael, approaching the subject directly and indirectly, tracing the narrative's meandering descriptions to comprehend the whale's vastness one chapter at a time. Chapters like "The Tail," "Ambergris," and "The Spirit-Spout" divide and

[32] Etymologically, waif (*n.*) refers to unclaimed property, while to waif (*v.*) means "to be thrown up or cast away as a waif" (Oxford English Dictionary). Melville thus employs the term "Loose-Fish" ironically, suggesting that Columbus forcibly instigated the casting off of property in the Americas.

examine the minute details of whale parts, recalling the processes of imperial expansion that divide and systematically survey the land in order to ultimately claim possession. Scholars like Amy Kaplan have emphasized the disruption that the unfamiliar can pose to incorporating territories; defusing foreignness through the project of gathering information ameliorates the "peril of [an empire] becoming foreign and unrecognizable to itself" (11, *The Anarchy of Empire*). It is therefore unsurprising that as a symbol of imperial acquisition, the whale goes through an elaborate process of dissection and reconstruction, viscerally and metaphorically played out in the novel by alternately comparing the whale's exterior to a blanket and a quilt in two thematically yoked chapters, "The Blanket" and "The Counterpane." In "The Blanket," the whale's exterior, which is "stript from him in long pieces, called blanket-pieces" (246), is broken down into the raw materials for a quilt. The quilter, which here plays a role that can be thought of as interchangeable with the mapmaker, meticulously reassembles these "blanket-pieces" – described as "odd little parti-colored squares and triangles" in "The Counterpane" chapter (37) – into a predetermined order: a blanket that organizes the spontaneously occurring raw materials of the unknown into a design and arrangement coherent to its maker.[33]

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[33] An example from the evolution of geographic surveying in America will help to make this comparison between quilter and mapmaker evident. As Martin Brückner explains, dividing the American landscape into individual plats began well before 1700. Modeled after a virtual British revolution that sought to establish clear boundaries between landholdings in the mother country in 1670, the "imperial imperative to chart the land" held even more exigency in colonial projects where landownership was more prevalent among the masses (24-25). Settlers enthusiastically embarked on the project of defining the "cartographic tabula rasa of the [American] continent," seeking to secure their claims to private land ownership amid an emerging, highly speculative real estate market (23). To lend further contextualization of the thriving real-estate market, Brückner offers the example of Kent, Connecticut, which "between 1738 and 1760 …

This examination of the whale as both the surface and subject of mapping in *Moby-Dick* reveals a contradictory imperative for geographic legibility in projects of empire – one that exposes the mapper to his own demands for legibility. Ishmael emphasizes the utility of the whale's "blanket" covering, citing how it enables the animal to travel and thrive in otherwise inhospitable "Hyperborean" and "Arctic waters" (247). As surface (or a metaphor for the *map itself*), the whale's "blanket" represents these inaccessible and unmapped spaces, where pursuing the white blankness of the unknown can prove to be fatal. "[When] seamen fall overboard," Ishmael tells us, "they are sometimes found, months afterwards, perpendicularly frozen into the hearts of fields of ice, as a fly is found glued in amber" (247). Whether by amber or ice, Ishmael touches upon one of the objectives that Latour identifies in inscription: to make subjects *immutable*, halting processes of change and transformation to enable the ultimate goal of mastery. By pursuing and attempting to account for the unknown, the men Ishmael refers to become, I argue, victims of their own efforts to dominate the landscape through practices of legibility. Preserved literally through their physical freezing, but also figuratively frozen in time, their demise accentuates how forays into the worlds "blank spaces" – which through the whale we can understand as the pursuit of enigmatic and unattainable powers of representation – can only result in the contradictory and annihilative act of succumbing to the effects of mapping itself. The

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witnessed more than six thousand land transactions—and this in a community where the male population at its peak was only 872. This meant that the citizens of Kent were exchanging [land] … at a rate of more than seven trades per head" (24). It is thus that the colonial mapping project in the colonies, a process of securing metaphorical blanket-pieces of land to be further divided and reconstituted into an amassed whole, can be recognized in the image of the counterpane.

problem, as played out in the novel's metaphors, circles back to achieve a peculiar tautological self-destruction.

The rationale behind this self-destruction becomes more evident when we consider the imperial anxiety of absorbing the unknown that Kaplan describes. Even rendering the whale, or mapping the land, cannot dispel the ghostly apparition of foreignness. Quoting Melville's response to Nathanial Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse* in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Derek John Woods emphasizes the futility inherent in the pursuit of "exhaustive mapping," which rather than dispelling the unknown, "only 'multiplies the avenues of what remains to be said'" (26). By this logic, maps that seemingly convey the most expert and detailed knowledge of a landscape are even more heavily burdened with unrepresented knowledge when compared to lands that remain unmapped. In "The Counterpane," it is that which "remains to be said" and represented that reaches out of the counterpane, itself a symbolic map that covers Ishmael while he sleeps: "nothing was to be seen, and nothing was to be heard … [but] a supernatural hand seemed placed in mine. My arm hung over the counterpane" while "the nameless, unimaginable, silent form or phantom, to which the hand belonged, seemed closely seated by my bedside" (37). While it is tempting to read the "supernatural hand"[34] and its accompanying "form or phantom" along the lines of indigenous populations that were often written out of European and American maps,[35] Ishmael's strange encounter works in broader strokes as well, exemplifying that which

[34] The term "supernatural" also serves to reinforce the way natural subjects (like land) are transformed by human endeavors to diminish foreignness through attempts at representation.
[35] See *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* by J.B. Harley, and *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* by Martin Brückner.

is not represented and remains unknown in the imperial map and archive. By alluding to the haunting presence of the unrepresented and unknown in mapping, Melville exemplifies the imperial anxiety of incorporating new territories and colonies within an empire. The unknown becomes internalized, and the project of mapping is strangely redirected inward. Thus, Ishmael's imperative to "model thyself after the whale!" (246) produces an unexpected mirror to the mapmaker: just as the whale embodies the contradictory roles of both the means and subject of mapping, so too does the mapmaker find himself the paradoxical architect and object of his own cartographic endeavors. Vast as vacant is the soul of man!

3.3 Ahab, Charles Wilkes, and the United States Exploring Expedition

Assuming, as I have argued, that whales in *Moby-Dick* are metaphors for land in imperial acquisitions, Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick straddles an array of possibilities that accompany efforts to demystify the unknown. Does the White Whale represent the world's last "blank spaces," the few remaining Kokovokos, and the vast unknown of the Arctic? Or is the whale an apparition of mythological knowledge – a phantasm which other whalers will testify to have encountered, but which eludes the proof that a successful harpoon or accurate survey conveys? For Ahab, the problem of locating Moby Dick without a reliable map is similar to the imperial project of trying to map and locate land in the Pacific. Ahab lacks the coordinates, the cartographical information to his most blank and mysterious moving target. In his attempt to define the differences between "Fast-fish" and "Loose-fish," Ishmael determines that a "Fast-fish" is one which bears some symbol of possession (308); and so, when the *Pequod* encounters the *Samual Enderby*, a British whaling vessel, we can understand the significance behind

Ahab's claim that he has "marked" Moby Dick for his own. After hearing the crew relate their unsuccessful lowering for the White Whale, and confirming that there were "'harpoons sticking in near his starboard fin,'" Ahab exclaims, "'Aye, aye—they were mine, *my* irons'" (337, emphasis in original). Of course, to make good on his imperial claim, Ahab must be able to *find* the whale again.

To this point, my analysis of the whale as the surface and subject of mapping in *Moby-Dick* has been limited to the interpretation of metaphors and allusions; here, however, I would like to turn toward the novel's explicit engagement with mapping and the limitations of inscription. As this section goes on to demonstrate, the United States Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842 (U.S. Ex. Ex.), commanded by Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, resonates with Ahab's own pursuit of Moby Dick in the imperial dimensions of their respective projects, their mutual interest in making their subjects legible through geographic methods of surveying, and, ultimately, their failure to perfectly map their subjects. Prior to Wilkes's mission to map the South Pacific and surrounding regions in the U.S. Ex. Ex., information about foreign lands and islands was often supplied by commercial and whaling vessels, though, as previously discussed, such coordinates could hardly be described as consistent or reliable.

In her study of "Mapping and Measurement in *Moby-Dick*," Anne Baker argues that Melville was impressed by Charles Wilkes's cartographic expedition in the South Pacific, which sought to map the area with unprecedented methodical and scientific accuracy. By comparing Ishmael's project of measuring a skeletal whale-temple in "A Bower in the Arsacides" to Wilkes's similar account of taking temple measurements on an island he named "Bowditch," Baker claims that the act of measuring in *Moby-Dick*

should be read as a project in mapping that would produce blueprints for recuperation in a post-apocalyptic world. In this way, Ishmael, by tattooing the measurements of the whale-temple on his body,[36] paradoxically represents both the prophet with the blueprint to rebuild after apocalyptic destruction, and the more troublesome "measurer with a sense of mastery" modeled after Wilkes (192).[37]

The ultimate aim of Baker's research, however, is to showcase Ahab's cartographic endeavors in order to reveal what she contends to be his ultimate departure from them; thus, her conclusion about Ahab is as equivocal as her view of Ishmael, leaving it up to "individual readers to decide … whether Ahab's frustration with science – like his hunt for the white whale – is insane, peculiarly admirable, or some combination of these attributes" (194). I disagree with Baker's conclusion that Ahab holistically eschews the scientific potential of cartography (194) and posit an alternative thesis: that Ahab's frustration lies principally within the limitations of the methods at his disposal for geographic representation – a lack of the *means* which he perceives embodied in the White Whale – which can only imperfectly map the present. In order to

[36] The practice of tattooing in *Moby-Dick* is arguably a practice of legibility as well, though one that is beyond the scope of this chapter. That Ishmael tattoos the measurements on his body indicates an attempt at making the information both immutable and mobile; however, even in this case, the supposed permanence of Ishmael's tattoo is ultimately undermined by his mortality. This is even more clearly exhibited by Queequeg, whose tattoos representing "a complete [though untranslatable] theory of the heavens and earth" (366) are lost to the ocean when he perishes with the *Pequod*. Only the parts *copied* in his carving of the coffin emerge from the sea with Ishmael – an important distinction that supports my claims about repetition as an essential practice for those attempting to ensure the permanence of inscription.
[37] Both Baker and Kathleen E. Kier extend this mapmaker comparison to Ahab; Kier claims that Wilkes "apparently behaved as autocratically as Ahab in many respects" (2:1003), while Baker makes initial comparisons between Ahab's habit of charting whale migration patterns to Wilkes, who worked on a similar chart (of which Melville was aware) in his own expedition.

find Moby Dick, Ahab must abandon the project of trying to create maps that attend to the geographic present in order to pursue the project of mapping the future.

In this respect, a closer analysis of the consonances between Wilkes's expedition and Ahab's quest for Moby Dick reveals that the question of accurate geographic representation is compromised by the ongoing mutability of human relations, best exemplified by the eventual breakdown of obedience within the crew. In his account of the Wilkes expedition, Burnett explains that the particular fusion of cartographic representation of the South Pacific as a naval mission yielded a hybrid between knowledge and power, where "[naval] discipline and military orders authenticated cartographic accuracy, and the whole charting enterprise turned the tools of naval dominance—cannons and landing craft—into the instruments of cartographic precision" (216). The method for approaching a land or coral mass to be charted was carried out with militaristic accuracy: surveying boats coordinated in elaborate formations that measured distances based on their relation to surveying ships, and a complex procession of shooting guns (for a sound coordinate) and timed waving flags (for a sight coordinate). Wilkes refers to this method of cartography as an "'attack,'" allowing "'the means of surveying a harbor or island without even the necessity of touching the shore' (no mean feat around the hostile sands of the untraveled Pacific in this period)" (Burnett 223). Naturally, such a coordinated attack also requires the austere obedience of the crew as well – a point that I will return to shortly.

Critics have already noted the influence of Wilkes's travels on Melville's work, but have not gone so far as to observe the similarities between Wilkes's approach to cartographic mappings and the coordinated attacks that Ahab's boats pursue to capture

whales that, as this paper has already suggested, are subsequently rendered into cartographic representations. Ishmael narrates the hunt in "The First Lowering," relating that Starbuck reacts "in obedience to a sign from Ahab," and that at one point Ahab was "out of hearing of his officers" (183). Both examples invoke the military procedure of Wilkes's mission through their reference to "obedience," while being "out of hearing" can be attributed to the singular method that Wilkes implemented, using sight and sound to measure distance. Furthermore, Ahab positions the chase boats, which are dispatched from the *Pequod*, in a pattern poised for attack, issuing orders: "'Spread yourselves,' cried Ahab; 'give way, all four boats. Thou, Flask, pull more to leeward!'" (181). As Figure 1 illustrates, Wilkes's method of cartographic "attack" on islands in the South Pacific similarly deployed four coordinated boats from one commanding ship, their respective geometric positions painstakingly documented in order to consolidate the measurements taken by each. What I mean to demonstrate here is that the pursuit of whales in *Moby-Dick* invokes the unprecedented methods that Wilkes implemented to attain accurate cartographic representations.

The problem of measurement and accuracy as it was presented by the Wilkes expedition was publicly put on trial following his return in 1842, and on this point, Burnett selects a vignette from the courtroom concerning two conflicting maps "depicting the island of Upolu, the choicest landfall in the archipelago now known as Samoa," which, in their respective scaled representations, illustrated conflicting measurements between Upolu and a neighboring island by a difference of two and a half miles (186). As the story unfolds, Burnett explains that what was really on trial was not a question of inaccurate cartographic representation, but a problem of following

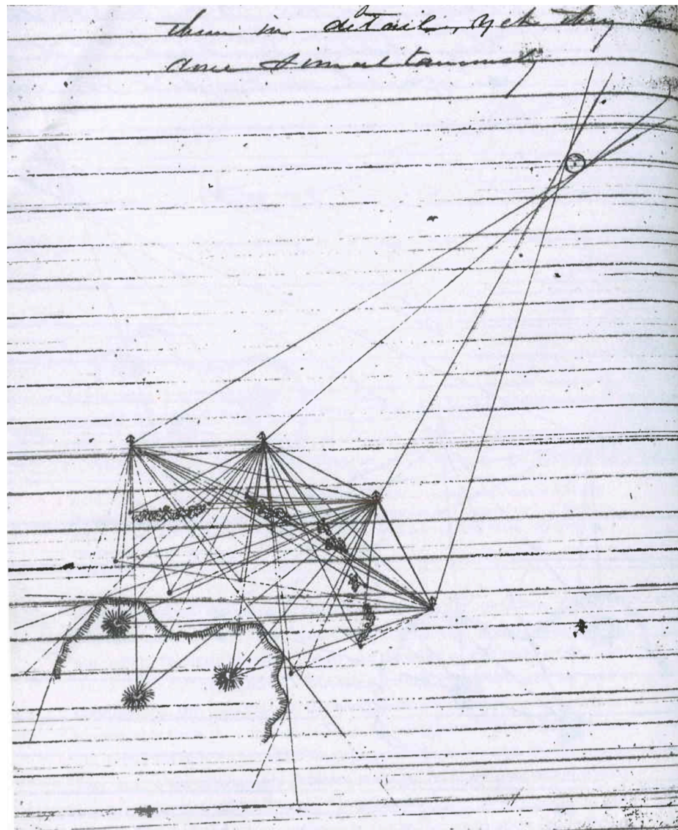

Figure 1. The Encircling Survey: boats work inside the reef; the ships raise anchor and begin to move. From Charles Wilkes's manuscript instruction pamphlet. Courtesy of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

orders. Because Lieutenant Robert F. Pinkney, the officer on trial, "had not followed [Wilkes's] orders, the chart was wrong. Where the land itself lay did not, from this perspective, even really matter … insubordination amounted to cartographic error" (253; 258). Burnett also acknowledges that the trial proceedings confronted a second issue, though one of lesser importance, in the maps produced by the Wilkes mission: the "strong suggestion that … the court-martial proceedings concerning the Samoa charts … reflected the messy realities of surveying, not negligence of duty" (251). Both of these problems – discipline and realistic imprecision of cartographic methods in the

nineteenth century – can be observed as crises that Ahab confronts while charting his path to Moby Dick.

When Ishmael measures the skeletal whale-temple in “A Bower in the Arsacides,” he addresses the problems of representation that surfaced in the trials from the Wilkes expedition, and especially the question of precision when he tattoos the whale’s measurements on his body: “But as I was crowded for space … I did not trouble myself with the odd inches; nor, indeed, should inches at all enter into a congenial admeasurement of the whale” (346-7). The Upolu maps at the center of the Wilkes trial were alternately scaled one mile to the inch, and two miles to the inch; and so, given the two and a half mile discrepancy at stake, the hearing was, quite literally, a spectacle concerning a question of inches. Although Ishmael refers to the whale’s skeleton in its entirety rather than a scaled representation, my argument rests on the assumption that whales in *Moby-Dick* represent landmasses. Therefore, the question of scale is always present when measurements of whales are being made, and the disregarded inches of the whale referentially point to a scaled representation of land.

From this perspective, we are better poised to understand Ishmael’s subtle critique of mappings and their projected exactitudes supporting imperial claims. Though scales are designed to mark the precise relationship of inscription to “reality” – to render “reality” itself as susceptible to precise and “objective” mapping – the selection of a point at which representation is supposedly accurate reflects the arbitrariness of such a procedure. This view is reflected in the Wilkes hearings as well. As Burnett recounts, when Lieutenant Perry was questioned regarding his work for Lieutenant Pinkney, he “explained that he had never been concerned by the two versions of Upolu:

‘I never measured the charts,’ he explained, ‘and to the eye the only difference appeared to be in the sketching … I considered them corresponding’” (250-51). Lieutenant Pinkney’s testimony resembles Ishmael’s leniency regarding exactitude: for both men, the disputed inches resulting from the measurement of whales and maps alike should not “enter into a congenial admeasurement” of a great landmass. Interrogating the limitations of geographic practices and maps, which can never perfectly represent their ever-changing subjects, only serves to expose the constructed and fragile assumptions upon which mapped representations are premised, but which are nonetheless upheld to better sustain the presumed authority of empire.

3.4 Mapping Inward: Ahab and His Crew

In the previous section, I argued that whaling in *Moby-Dick* mirrors efforts to attain geographic legibility exhibited by the Wilkes Expedition’s method of cartographic “attack,” and efforts to exert control and authority over the individuals who comprised the mission at large. This section extends the issue of the mapmaker’s authority and control by arguing that the mapmaking process, as described in the novel, is dialogic, meaning both the subject and mapmaker are continuously evolving. Thus, Ahab’s attempt to establish control and authority over his crew by imposing an oath to pursue Moby Dick, which I demonstrate resembles the processes of conducting a geographic survey, necessarily implicates the self who maps: in shaping the crew to his vision and demands, Ahab’s attempt to simultaneously map and define the *Pequod*’s commitment to a future-oriented task exposes the ongoing and dialogic processes of mapping. Melville, in other words, confronts the inevitable *mutability* of the subject and self through the prospect of future-oriented mappings.

Throughout *Moby-Dick*, Melville repeatedly invokes Wilkes's "attack" method of mapping whenever Ahab's crew lowers for a whale hunt; but a different kind of mapping – not an attack, but rather an attempt to delineate the boundaries of a unified entity – occurs when Ahab incites the men on the *Pequod* into a frenzy over the White Whale. This attempt, I suggest, mirrors what I described earlier in Melville's distinction between the "blanket" and the "counterpane," the former referring to that which must be processed and made familiar in order to be incorporated without the threat of foreignness. Of course, as Kaplan recognizes, the terms "foreign" and "domestic" present a false dichotomy; when Ishmael describes the invisible hand reaching out of the quilt in "The Counterpane" chapter, he emphasizes that which cannot be known despite the efforts to make an accumulated empire legible to itself. Likewise, when Ahab commits his men to pursue Moby Dick, we can read it as his attempt to establish a boundary around the ship and men that renders all visible, known, and committed to his singular task.

The oath committing the men to Ahab's mission resembles processes of geographic surveying in nineteenth-century America. In his impressive research on primers and instructional pamphlets detailing practices of geographic surveying that circulated in early America, Martin Brückner argues that the art of surveying land was taught as a fundamental of literacy in American schools, and was not subject to class distinctions. Above all, as British manuals like John Love's *Geodaesia; or, The Art of Surveying and Measuring Land, Made Easie* (1688) made clear, one of the more important implications of standardizing the *process* of surveying was to ensure the ability to retain control over one's subject. In his analysis of Love's preface, in which

the author criticizes the surveying methods of “Young men, in *America*,” Brückner concludes that Love ultimately addresses a “serious concern”: that “without the proper textbook the British surveyor could easily subvert the [British] empire’s mapping enterprise” (28, *The Geographic Revolution*). This, of course, implies that the process of surveying and contributing *properly* to the imperial mapping archive would result in mastery and dominance. As such, I suggest that it is of extraordinary consequence that the ceremonial oath that Ahab administers to his men mirrors the most basic fundamentals of surveying a plat of land.

Standing alongside his harpooners in “The Quarter-Deck” chapter, “the rest of the ship’s company formed a circle around the group” (141), placing Ahab at the center of that which he wishes to map, just as the surveyor is instructed to stand at the center of a field or piece of land he wishes to survey (Figure 3.2). Ahab then calls for “The measure! The measure!” (141), a pewter vessel of rum, which he demands his crew to “Drink and pass!” (141). Here, I contend that Ahab’s men comprise the various points of a field survey – points A, B, C, etc., as indicated by Figure 2 – and are each “measured” in their turn as they follow Ahab’s instructions: “The crew alone now drink. Round with it, round!” (141). As the “measure” is passed and consumed, each man – thus “measured” – comprises a point in the periphery of Ahab’s domain, and his men – thus mapped – are incorporated into his monomaniacal task: “Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!” (142). Importantly, by conflating the process of surveying with the purpose of the mapmaker, Ahab’s task is not one of mere description; rather, he shapes and imposes his task upon the men. The survey, in other words, does not describe the subject as it is, but as Ahab demands it to

CHAP. VI.

How to take the Plot of a Field at one Station in any place thereof, from whence you may ſee all the Angles by the Semicircle.

ADmit ABCDEF to be a Field, of which you are to take the Plot: Firſt ſet your Semicircle upon the Staff in any convenient place thereof, as at ⊙, and cauſe Marks to be ſet up in every Angle: Direct your Inſtrument, the *Flower de Luce* from you to any one Angle: As for Example, to A, and eſpying the Mark at A through the fixed Sights, there ſcrew faſt the Inſtrument; then turn the move-

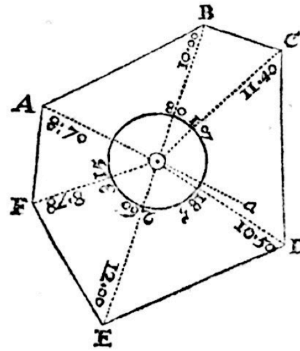

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Figure 2. "How to Take the Plot of a Field. …" From *Geodaesia: or, The Art of Surveying and Measuring Land, Made Easie*, by John Love. 1688.

become.

One hidden consequence of Ahab's failure to render all legible in his survey of the crew is his subsequent inability to eliminate subversion within his command. Just as Wilkes's cartographic expedition required uncompromising obedience, so too do the mapped perimeters of Ahab's mission depend upon the obedience of his men. If each man constitutes a perimeter point in the collective oath to pursue Moby Dick, then, as

Burnett suggests of the Wilkes mission, "insubordination amount[s] to cartographic error" (258). As Figure 3 illustrates, the precise placement of each surveying vessel as it moves around the perimeter of the island being mapped has implications for the final shape that is represented; if any boat fails to be in its exact, designated position, then the map produced will be distorted and inaccurate.

Thus, Starbuck's resistance to Ahab's mission symbolizes a root cause of inaccuracy within Ahab's survey. As Ahab prepares to measure his men in "The Quarter-Deck," he fails to note Starbuck's appeal for "God" to "keep me! – keep us all!" (140) – a "foreboding invocation" that "Ahab did not hear" (140). Even before he begins his survey, Ahab has already misread the collective resolve of his subject, and his survey does not expose the error. Starbuck later considers mutiny, and even murder, to escape the imposition of Ahab's oath, reasoning, "[Ahab] would have shot me once … yes, there's the very musket that he pointed at me" (387).[38] The logic of reciprocity exemplifies my own argument about the dialogical processes of mapmaking, in which the mutability of the mapped subject poses issues for the mapmaker. Starbuck here embodies the unknown reaching out of the map, or that which escapes becoming legible through methods of representation: the illegible part of an empire that "maps back." Standing outside of the berth where Ahab unsuspectingly sleeps, holding Ahab's musket, Starbuck articulates the motivation behind his mutinous impulse: "'Flat obedience to thy own flat commands, this is all thou breathest. Aye, and say'st the men

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[38] Notably, the severity of Ahab's actions recalls Wilkes in this respect as well, for he was court-martialed upon his return for mistreatment of his men. For more on the charges brought against Wilkes, see the court-martial case brought against him by the United States Navy, *The Following Defence of Lieut. Charles Wilkes: To the Charge to Which He Has Been Tried*. 1843.

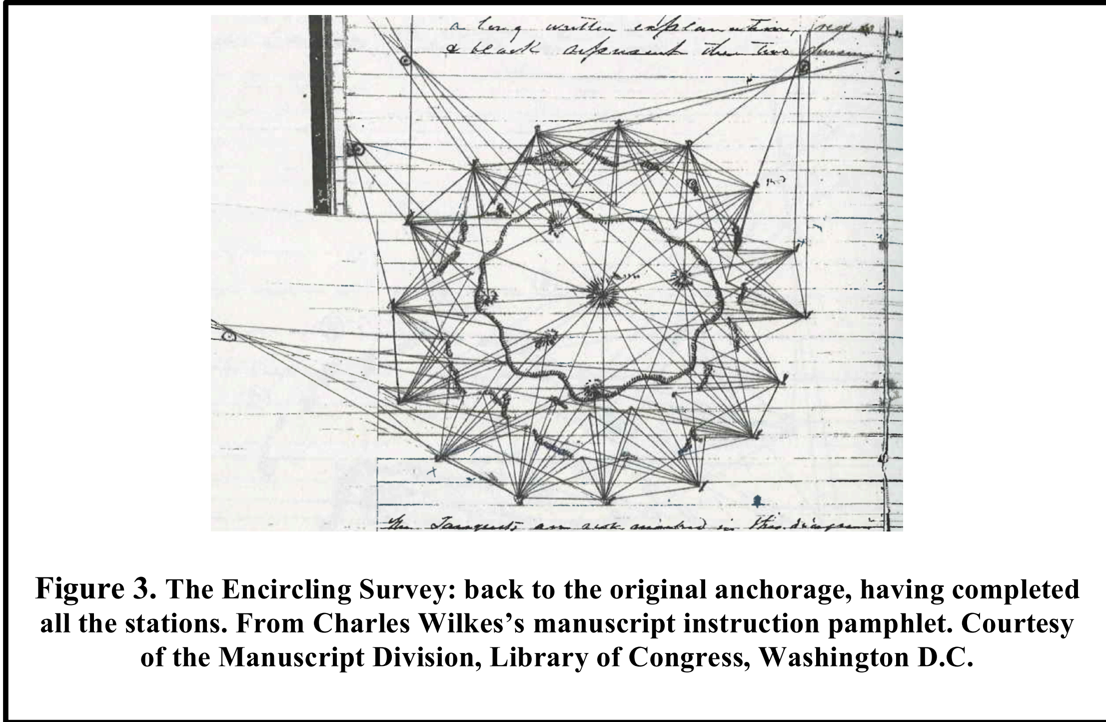

Figure 3. The Encircling Survey: back to the original anchorage, having completed all the stations. From Charles Wilkes's manuscript instruction pamphlet. Courtesy of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

have vow'd thy vow; say'st all of us are Ahabs. Great God forbid!" (387).[39] Ahab's survey, as mentioned, does not merely describe the perimeter that his men comprise, but rather defines how it *must become* according to his own design, in which "all" must

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[39] Starbuck's emphasis on the word "flat" emphasizes a minimized surface upon which Ahab has defined his men – a notion is reiterated by Latour, who, speaking on the way inscriptions can be controlled, says "there is nothing you can dominate as easily as a flat surface of a few square meters; there is nothing hidden or convoluted, no shadows, no 'double entendre'" (19). Thus, even in his issue of "flat commands" demanding "flat obedience" we can see Ahab's project of mapping his men as a method of control and overbearing domination, a map to determine the future. What is more, when Starbuck goes on to question, "But is there no other way? no lawful way? – Make him a prisoner to be taken home?" (387), he recalls a secondary mission to Wilkes's voyage, which was to demonstrate to natives throughout the South Pacific the United States's imperial power: "Where Wilkes … believed justice demanded arrest, deportation, and even kidnapping, they did not hesitate to use their ships and men for these purposes … One of these suspects, Vendovi, was made a prisoner aboard the *Vincennes* for more than two years, after Wilkes decided to bring him on trial in the United States. He died shortly after the Ex. Ex. returned to New York" (Burnett 202). Starbuck, unwilling to be imprisoned by Ahab's delineations for the crew, can only imagine justice, or personal autonomy, by imprisoning his captain; averse to this solution, however, Starbuck hesitates, a hidden dissident who renders Ahab's "map" to be imperceptibly flawed.

reflect the will of their captain/mapmaker by becoming “Ahabs.” Here, individual identity and autonomy is overwritten by the mapmaker’s imposition. Starbuck’s unwillingness to acquiesce, to fulfill the oath to “hunt Moby Dick to his death” (142), however, represents the inaccuracies born of subversion from within the imperial map.

Ahab’s cartographic aspirations are most explicitly born out in the chapter “The Chart,” where Ishmael explains to the reader, “Had you followed Captain Ahab down to his cabin . . . you would have seen him intently study the various lines and shadings which there met his eye; and with slow but steady pencil trace additional courses over spaces that before were blank” (166). As Howard P. Vincent argues, the chart that Ahab crafts was inspired by Wilkes’s own endeavors to map the migration patterns of whales (see Figure 4), which “supplied Melville authority for portraying Ahab, learned as he was in whaling lore, with the prescience to anticipate the migrations of Moby Dick, to follow the great fish to the feeding grounds” (184). As Ishmael continues, however, we see the reciprocal processes of mapping at work, for Ahab is mapped *upon* even as he maps his subject:

> While thus employed, the heavy pewter lamp suspended in chains over his head, continually rocked with the motion of the ship, and for ever threw shifting gleams and shadows of lines upon his wrinkled brow, till it almost seemed that while he himself was marking out lines and courses upon the wrinkled charts, some invisible pencil was also tracing lines and courses upon the deeply marked chart of his forehead. (167)

Baker interprets this scene as a moment in which Ahab’s mental process are unveiled insofar as the search for Moby Dick is visibly “marking his mind,” establishing a physical symmetry between Ahab and his nemesis, for “just as Moby Dick is known for his vast wrinkled brow, [Ahab’s] charts are ‘large’ and ‘wrinkled’” (193). But the whole scene also describes what I have interpreted as the dialogical processes of mapping:

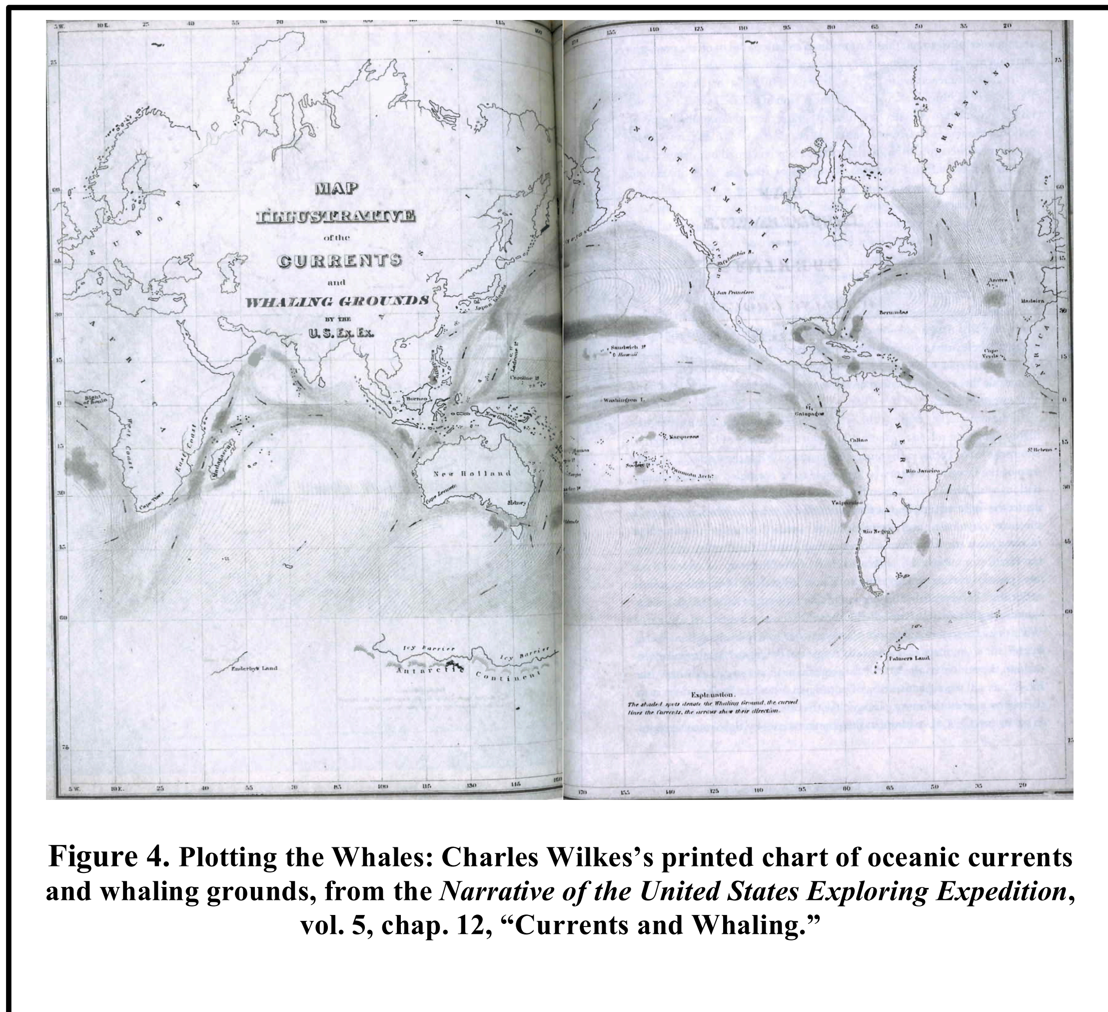

Figure 4. Plotting the Whales: Charles Wilkes's printed chart of oceanic currents and whaling grounds, from the *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, vol. 5, chap. 12, "Currents and Whaling."

because neither the mapmaker nor the subject is immutable, the mapmaking process is never complete. As such, "almost every night some pencil marks were effaced, and others were substituted" (167); the map fails to attain immutability because its subject is continuously changing. Moreover, like the invisible hand that reaches out of the counterpane, the invisible pencil marking Ahab reflects that which remains intractably illegible. Thus, Ishmael's portrait of Ahab suggests that the captain is marked by the whale because it refuses to be dominated, rendered, and reinterpreted according to the objectives of empire. Ahab, in other words, is mapped by the very subject he wishes to dominate.

Reading the whale's wrinkles as evidence of mind-mapping sheds new light upon the "invisible pencil . . . tracing lines and courses" on Ahab's forehead as well. Ahab succeeds in bending the *Pequod*'s crew to his will when he rallies them to join in his pursuit of Moby Dick, and his position as the ship's ruler reveals the markings on his forehead to be more than a mere reflection of the whale. Rather, they resemble the efforts of the crew, such as Ishmael—and perhaps the reader as well—to map the captain's mind, to anticipate his next move. As Eric Bulson explains, "The Chart" chapter is narratively unique, in that "Melville frames the entire episode in the conditional . . . pretending that readers are free to step outside the frame of the story and walk the decks without him" (53). This in turn establishes a relationship between reader and author, holding Melville accountable for "facts strong enough to convince his landsmen that Moby-Dick is not a collective phantasm" (53). At the same time, however, de-centering the narrative away from Melville's authoritative commentary represents the counterfactual mapping that is generated by Ishmael's text. Epistemologically, this process positions us alongside Ishmael; the invisible pencil charts inscriptions upon the captain's mind precisely at the moment that we're asked to imagine Ahab in his berth, to guess his intentions moving forward in the pursuit for Moby Dick. Beginning the chapter with conditional phrases, such as "Had you followed Captain Ahab, you would have seen" (166), Ishmael's storytelling becomes an "invisible pencil" attempting to write Ahab's most private moments, and as eavesdropping observers, we must record and alter our previous judgments regarding Ahab's character. In essence, we engage in a perpetual and revisionary process of mapping Ahab's mind, just as in his nightly routine the captain effaces new marks and

substitutes others on his sea charts (167). Our mapping of Ahab is another kind of counterfactual mapping; like the White Whale, which is perpetually blank, so too is the future a blank space which we try to anticipate.

Ultimately, however, it is the problem of mutability that I have outlined above that requires Ahab's mapmaking project to turn towards the future. As Ahab goes about amending his charts, theorizing the most probable locations to encounter Moby Dick, he is essentially mapping the whale's mind, anticipating his next move; this mapping upon the whale is reflected by the wrinkles on the whale's forehead. It is here that the *means* for mapping at Ahab's disposal prove to be inadequate, and where his relationship with the cartographic methods employed by mapmakers such as Wilkes breaks down. Baker suggests that "Ahab's gradual movement away from navigational practices based on numerical data as he draws closer to the white whale suggests science's shortcomings as a means of achieving Ahab's more daring goal," where ultimately "the quantifying gestures of the U.S. Exploring Expedition prove inadequate in Ahab's eyes" (192). Baker is right to draw attention to the significance of Ahab's withdrawal from the "quantifying gestures" of mapping, and locates "Ahab's devotion to 'that monomaniac thought of his soul'" as the impetus (192). But her analysis does not account for the fact that Ahab does not completely abandon his efforts to map and measure; rather, he merely reorients these efforts from an internal perspective, and directs them toward the future.

The quadrant is an instrument that determines navigational positions by viewing the sun through a ninety-degree arc, and here it becomes evident that Ahab's frustration emerges not only from "that monomaniacal thought of his soul," but his realization the

information gleaned from the quadrant is spatially and temporally restricted, and relies upon an external marker whose vision he cannot perfectly appropriate: "Thou sea-mark! thou high and mighty Pilot! thou tellest me truly where I *am* – but canst thou cast the least hint where I *shall* be? … Where is Moby Dick?" (378, emphasis in original). It is precisely at this moment that Ahab turns away from the mapping technology the quadrant offers: "'Curse thee, thou quadrant!' dashing it to the deck, 'no longer will I guide my earthly way by thee; the level ship's compass, and the level dead-reckoning, by log and by line; *these* shall conduct me, and show me my place on the sea" (378, emphasis in original).

3.5 First Inscriptions and Future Mappings: The Path to Moby Dick

The greatest difference between mapping with the compass and log and line versus the quadrant is that of perspective. With the quadrant, Ahab relies upon the external and aerial purview of the sun, the perspective most commonly adopted when representing maps on paper, but it cannot tell Ahab where he "*shall* be" (378), where Moby Dick *is*, or aid him in the undertaking of mapping the future. Turning to the compass and log and line,[40] on the other hand, emphasizes the process of projecting where the ship *will* be at a future time by measuring its speed and general direction. Because the ocean is "an everlasting terra incognita," the *Pequod*'s path through the ocean is perpetually a first inscription; it blazes a trail toward the great blank, unmapped surface of Moby Dick, just as the stagecoach routes noted by Nichol emerged from the

[40] The log and line measure the velocity of a ship by timing a log, thrown overboard and attached to a rope, in order to estimate speed and projected distances. When combined with the compass, the course travelled on the sea can continue to be roughly sketched, albeit with far less accuracy, and its future position predicted without the use of the quadrant.

traffic of Euro-American settlers moving west through the plains of Illinois toward an unmapped frontier. In other words, the inscription of the explorer/settler connects the land of origin – that which has been mapped – to land and spaces yet to be mapped and conquered.[41] Ahab does not eschew the science of mapping altogether, but merely utilizes technology to generate a projected path and destination that gestures toward the first inscriptions of exploration.

Ahab's methodological transformation as a cartographer who engages in surveys of an ever-changing geographic present to one who attempts to map the future path to Moby Dick reveals the novel's commentary on the nature and tenure of American empire. John O'Sullivan's famous 1839 publication declared the United States to be "*the great nation* of futurity" (426, emphasis in original), stating that the "far-reaching … boundless future will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles" (427).[42] As previously mentioned, Dimock argues that "America's claims to being the 'nation of futurity' had everything to do, apparently, with its geographical expanse" (14), and that "America would dispense space as a sort of temporal currency, buying its tenure in time with its extension in space" (15). I contend that it is *because* the ocean is an "everlasting terra incognita" – and that the legibility sought in cartographic representations will never be complete – that perpetual

[41] Melville acknowledges the connection between ships in the ocean and the frontier by writing about the ocean as the American Midwest, through which "the distant ship revealing only the tops of her masts, seems struggling forward, not through high rolling waves, but through the tall grass of a rolling prairie: as when the western emigrants' horses only show their erected ears, while their hidden bodies widely wade through the amazing verdure" (373).

[42] See "The Great Nation of Futurity." *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*. 11 (November 1839): 426-430.

extension into space and time, the perpetual first inscriptions of territorial expansion, is possible in Melville's sea. Even more, so long as Moby Dick – "a lipless, unfeatured blank" (418) – eludes capture, the impression that the *means* to fix the subjects of imperial mapping have not been mastered, and that blank surfaces therefore remain to be pursued and mapped, endures.

The novel's ending, however, reveals a conflicted stance regarding empire – one that might be seen as analogous to my argument that *Moby-Dick* presents two different conceptions of mapping: describing the world as it is and as it will be. The attempt to conquer and map Moby Dick, who represents the unconquered and the unmapped in imperial relations, is a self-destructive task, just as the attempt to map both the present and the future can only contradict itself. And this double and contradictory project is imaged in the novel itself. As Ahab turns inward to forge the *Pequod*'s singular and unmapped way to Moby Dick, he and the crew are mapped by the whale's circular paths around them, disappearing in a vortex to the bottom of the mutable and uninscribable ocean. In the wake of destruction, however, Ishmael emerges with a text that maps the past and presages the future: the long inscription for readers to continuously trace the path both to and of the White Whale.

CHAPTER FOUR | Narratives of Possibility and the Violence of Representation in Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*

One of the most difficult scenes to place in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) features an outlandish tale about a mysterious town in the Arctic, conveyed to the novel's unnamed female narrator by Littlepage, a former commercial sea captain. This Arctic town is populated by fog-like people who are "neither living nor dead" (21) – a supposed "waiting place between this world an' the next" (22) that can only be seen from afar, and whose outlines and inhabitants disappear upon approach. Littlepage reveals that he learned about this "waiting place" from a Scottish man named Gaffett, the only surviving crewman from an Arctic exploring expedition that happened upon a warm ocean current to an open polar sea beyond the Arctic ice. The alleged existence of this unlikely town, located "two degrees farther north than ships had ever been" (21), naturally invites reader skepticism, especially given the questionable reliability of the two men who ardently insist on its existence. Jewett's narrator casts doubt on Gaffett when she suggests that the story may be the result of hunger-induced hallucinations, while Mrs. Todd reveals that some people in Dunnet Landing believe that Littlepage's voracious reading during his seafaring days has "affected his head" (25). The most powerful critique of Littlepage's narrative, however, emerges from the conclusion of his reverie, where he confronts the authoritative image of the North American map with "his eyes … fixed upon the northernmost regions and their careful recent outlines with a look of bewilderment" on his face (23).

Jewett critics to date have not followed Littlepage's gaze to question what the "northernmost regions" of the Arctic on the North American map have to do with the novel as a whole, nor has Littlepage's "bewilderment" been considered as a topic worthy of serious inquiry. Many critics ignore the Littlepage sequence altogether, arguably because it is *itself* bewildering. When Littlepage's place in the novel has been acknowledged, he is often interpreted as Jewett's critique of male-dominated canonical literature or as a symbol of institutionalized knowledge and authority.[43] These feminist readings are important, but they do not do justice to the complexity of the Littlepage sequence, which I contend appears prominently in the narrative's early pages precisely because it foregrounds larger questions that the novel poses about the uneven characteristics of legibility across different scales of perception. Stated another way, this chapter identifies the Littlepage sequence highlights the novel's concern with constructing a cohesive narrative of U.S. national identity at the turn of the nineteenth century. This focus has been neglected since criticism about the novel has been more concerned with its treatment of gender and its more conspicuous engagement with questions regarding local and regional affiliations. Littlepage, I contend, grounds and explains *Country*'s bewildering relation to the United States's broadening imperial aspirations, and his fantastic story of Arctic exploration disrupts the seeming cohesion of national narratives and their corresponding geographic images, both of which provided a point of orientation for Americans trying to understand their relationship to the nation and its growing involvement in imperialism in the late-nineteenth century.

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[43] See Cynthia Goheen's "The Rebirth of the Seafarer: Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*."

In this chapter, I argue that Jewett addresses how different scales of representation unwittingly lead to disconnect between the parts of a whole when individuals attempt to view them more broadly or simultaneously. As the distance between small groups (such as individuals or local communities) expands to encompass larger imagined communities (such as the nation or empire), representations become increasingly incongruous. The generally narrow focus of the novel, which rarely strays beyond the immediate vicinity of Dunnet Landing, provides the opportunity for Jewett's narrator to illustrate how the affective bonds and personal stories bind characters within the pages of *Country* together. Littlepage highlights the conflict that arises when this scope of representation expands. The story of Arctic exploration that Littlepage learns from Gaffett is premised on a certain intimacy: it unfolds within the interior of a small hut, and in this way mirrors the interior dimensions of the emotive bond that emerges between the two men as they become "acquainted" with one another by sharing stories of their similar life experiences (20). When viewed from the small-scale perspective of the North American map,[44] however, Littlepage's story all but disappears; this continental vision is too vast, too profound to account for the details put forth by his strange tale of Arctic exploration. By juxtaposing these enormously different scales and genres of representation, Jewett draws attention to the difficulty of reconciling or mediating between them. The effect produced by the novel, I argue, is a cautionary

[44] The term "small-scale" may seem counterintuitive to those unfamiliar with geographic terminology, for it refers to representing large areas of land. This is "small-scale," because it shows a large area of land on a *small* space. Conversely, "large-scale" maps are more oriented to representing smaller areas of land, for the scale becomes *larger* when showing a small area of land in great detail.

skepticism regarding the United States's expanding sphere of geographic influence in the 1890's.

4.1 On Seeing the Violence of Representation: A Problem of Legibility

Most readers of *Country* are captivated by Jewett's intimate portrait of village life along coastal Maine, but I would like to suggest that the novel invites readers to consider the way that varying distances and scales inform ever-changing perceptions and representations of land and people, best exemplified by the parallel structure that emerges when comparing Gaffett's approach to the "waiting place" to the narrator's departure from Dunnet Landing. The strange Arctic town that Gaffett claims to have encountered, for example, is only visible when approached from afar, a perspective that reveals the location to be "thick with habitations" (21). Upon moving closer inshore, Gaffett and his companions "could see the shapes of folks," but "lost sight of [the town and its dwellings] altogether" (21). The distance that suspends these two perspectives exemplifies the issues of identity and representation that I contend Jewett engages in the novel. Whereas the vantage point emerging from close proximities demands recognition for the individual "folks" that inhabit a location, rendering larger representative bodies like the town imperceptible, greater distances cannot account for such detail: inevitably, individuals become homogenized within expanding scales that radiate outward to address the town and the region, nation and empire.

Littlepage's description of the exploring expedition's approach to the waiting place is reinforced in the reverse when Jewett's narrator departs from the Landing at the close of the novel, and her "backward view" yields perspectives that were not accessible while immersed within the community: "I caught a glimpse of Mrs Todd herself,

walking slowly in the footpath that led along, following the shore toward the Port. *At such a distance* one can feel the large, positive qualities that control a character" (101, emphasis mine). These "large, positive qualities" observed by the narrator, the novel suggests, require a less intimate scale to be accurately perceived. As the individual occupants of Dunnet Landing fade from view, the town itself becomes the center of focus, encompassing its inhabitants within a single entity that is ultimately absorbed by the surrounding region: "The little town, with the tall masts of its disabled schooners in the inner bay, stood high above the flat sea for a few minutes, then it sank back into the uniformity of the coast and became indistinguishable from the other towns" (101). Finally, at a greater distance still, "the islands and the headland … [ran] together and Dunnet Landing and all its coasts were lost to sight" (102). As the narrator retreats from Dunnet Landing, the increasing scope of her vision cannot help but replicate the small-scale perspective exemplified by the North American map hanging in Dunnet Landing's schoolhouse, which renders imperceptible local provinces, the individuals who live there, and – perhaps most importantly – the institutionally illegible experiences and features that unite them. For both the narrator and Littlepage, it is only through storytelling that the most meaningful interactions of daily life remain visible.

Ultimately, juxtaposing the "waiting place" and the "backward view" of Dunnet Landing emphasizes the impossibility of visually apprehending such a wide variety of scales simultaneously. To view Dunnet Landing in its entirety or to limn the contours of "the waiting place" requires a distance that effectively minimizes scales that would otherwise reveal their inhabitants. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, Jewett's incorporation of the Littlepage sequence asks readers to consider at what point

a view becomes so distanced, so disconnected from the individual, that its erasure poses damaging effects. A question therefore arises in this examination of scale and representation that ought to be of greater importance across numerous disciplines, including literature and geography: how can we better understand the inevitable simplification and subsequent erasures that make representation and knowledge production possible, whether in the form of narrative, scientific discourses, or national narratives, as related to systemic violence?

Like Rob Nixon's description of "slow violence" discussed in the previous chapter, systemic violence locates the unavoidable repercussions of simplification and erasure that accompany attempts at representation, and extends the explosive, literal qualities that the term "violence" alone connotes. Slavoj Žižek pursues this stratification of violence as a concept by urging readers to see beyond more conventional associations that arise from "subjective" violence, which he describes as "performed by a clearly identifiable agent" (1). A comprehensive understanding of violence, by contrast, requires the ability to recognize "the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems," which Žižek identifies as "systemic violence" (2). Systemic violence "cannot be perceived from the same standpoint" as subjective violence; it vibrates on a different metaphorical wavelength and is better characterized by its difficulty to locate. According to Žižek, systemic violence "is … something like the notorious 'dark matter' of physics, the counterpart to an all-too-visible subjective violence" (2), which is why he justifies an approach for analysis that does not "[confront] violence directly," but rather "casts … sideways glances" in its direction (2). Examining violence from an oblique vantage point, Žižek

suggests, allows for new interpretations and identifications of violence than have previously been allowed, and also explains why this explicit terminology is largely absent in critical approaches to the issues that accompany attempts at representation in fields like geography. By giving name and shape to the pervasive invisibility of systemic violence, which extends within and throughout governing institutions, Žižek offers a practical language for identifying the occluded interrelationships between various forms of power and the elusive violence they inflict.

Citing Hegel as a formative influence in his explanation of the relationship between language and violence (and here I would include other forms of legible representation), Žižek argues,

> there is something violent in the very symbolism of a thing, which equals its mortification. … Language simplifies the designated thing, reducing it to an original feature. It dismembers the thing, destroying its organic unity, treating its parts and properties as autonomous. It inserts the thing into a field of meaning which is ultimately external to it. (61)

It is difficult to read such a statement without some degree of exasperation. The idea that an utterance or inscription must encompass the "organic unity" of a subject – all of its scientific, symbolic, and emotive connotations and connections that extend beyond but remain intimately related to "the thing" – itself provides a condition that cannot help but situate the correlation between language and violence as absolute and unavoidable. Quoting Simone Weil, however, Žižek offers a helpful qualification that is of great use to examinations of the nation-state and empire by recognizing the violence of language (and so too inscriptions and attempts at representation) as associated with *desire*: "'Limited desires,' notes Weil, 'are in harmony with the world; desires that contain the infinite are not'" (63). Such a statement is evident in the widespread agreement among

scholars who tend to view the expansion of empire as connected to the seemingly infinite aspirations of liberal (and now neoliberal) capitalism and its unsustainable, inharmonious effects on the planet and most vulnerable populations.[45] A similar sentiment may also be traced within Latour's arguments regarding inscription, discussed in the previous chapter, which results in attempts to "flatten" and "master" the represented subject. In both of these scenarios, it is the infinite *desire* for resources or knowledge that in turn situate such reductive representations as part of what Žižek identifies as systemic violence.

Delineating the violence of language alongside varying degrees of desire presents an interesting turn, and one that might be said to produce fault lines within and throughout numerous genres. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I would like to pose a slight revision to Žižek's association between desire and the violence of language. When it comes to issues of representation, I argue that as depictions expand toward national (and imperial) scales, it is more accurate to say that violence emerges not solely from desire, but rather from its repercussions, as small-scale representations cannot help but define and impose *upon* individuals and local communities. Such impositions only reinforce the difficulty of moving between scales, as totalizing views are ultimately privileged over the local. As a consequence, such encompassing representations actively erase potential disruptions that may exist at individual and community levels. From this vantage point, it matters less whether or not "people" and "landscapes" are in fact "shape[d]" in a manner that supports the state's "techniques of

[45] Moreover, as Nixon argues, these same populations often remain invisible to the sensibilities of those in first-world nations, even as those in situations of relative prosperity rely on their exploitation.

observation," as James C. Scott argues in his examination of the demand for legibility in government (80); what matters is that such assertions made by the state are produced, replicated, and disseminated in legible materials, effectively erasing the potential for disruptive narratives that would otherwise challenge them. The North American map in the Dunnet Landing schoolhouse exemplifies this issue, for while the narrator documents the intimate stories and familial ties that bind the Dunnet Landing community and region together, the map imposes a different message: one that minimizes the local and region to the organizing principles of the nation-state, and which places little value on representing the stories of the lives of people it purportedly represents.

One central facet to this argument, then, is recognizing how Jewett draws upon a complex arrangement of geographic scales in *Country* to demonstrate the difficulty of negotiating issues of representation that emerge when moving between them. How, in other words, can an individual or the local Dunnet Landing community be reconciled with the expanding reach of the United States's imperial aspirations? Is it possible for individuals and communities to belong to a nation, or an empire, without experiencing systemic violence as a byproduct of small-scale representations? In posing and pursuing such questions, I follow in the footsteps of several Jewett scholars who have also recognized the essential purpose of scale and representation within *Country*. Hsuan L. Hsu, for example, challenges critics such as Richard H. Brodhead who view Jewett's *Country* as a product of regionalist fiction, and instead urges readers to acknowledge the way Jewett addresses the malleability of geographic scales. Minor alterations within local and national spheres, Hsu argues, do not occur in isolation, but evolve dialectically

in response to one another. In his sustained examination of *Country*, Hsu rightly contends that the novel demonstrates "how a community fused together by deeply 'rooted' feelings and daily interactions depends, both economically and emotionally, on commodities and experiences acquired abroad" (173), thereby acknowledging the national and international themes that other critics often overlook or subordinate. Our arguments diverge, however, where Littlepage is concerned. Hsu suggests that the "theme of prior cosmopolitanism" evident in Dunnet Landing's state of declension "is elegiacally maintained by Captain Littlepage … who bemoans that the decline of the shipping has rendered his neighbors less 'large-minded'" (168) – a statement that subtly reproduces the nostalgic pity toward the captain so common among critics of *Country*. What Hsu does not address is the way Littlepage simultaneously struggles to validate his stories and experiences within the context of an even *larger*-minded way of thinking symbolized by the North American map and the United States's expanding imperial reach. Indeed, despite the sustained attention Hsu devotes to the novel's incorporation of national and international scales, he makes no mention of the schoolhouse's North American map. Michael Hobbs is one of the only Jewett critics to ascribe great importance to the Littlepage sequence when he argues that it provides a scaled miniature of the novel's thematic structure. Hobbs's important intervention in the criticism on *Country*, however, needs to be further extended in order to fully apprehend the problems of systemic violence in representation that I have just described. This includes historicizing key references that signal the imperial dimensions of Arctic exploration for the United States in the late-nineteenth century that would have been readily apprehended by Jewett's contemporary readership.

Although *Country*'s attention to Arctic exploration poses a strong rationale for examining the novel's overall engagement with the advancement of U.S. imperialism at the turn of the century, establishing this historical precedent is only part of my focus in this chapter. More compelling, I believe, is the way *Country* leverages the history of Arctic exploration to question the very processes that drive knowledge production within and across different empires. In his seminal text *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas S. Kuhn explains the process of paradigm shifts within scientific disciplines as a change in perception, of *learning to see* aberrations or "novelties" that occur outside the governing rules and theories of a current paradigm. Even then, recognition of such "novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by [the operating paradigm's contrary] expectation," until, finally, the "awareness of anomaly" leads to an adjustment in "conceptual categories," and "the initially anomalous becomes the anticipated" (64). It is what occurs next, however, – what Kuhn observes about the way such paradigm shifts are absorbed into the *narratives* of professionalized fields – that is most relevant to my examination of Jewett's *Country*. In the aftermath of major scientific revolutions and discoveries, textbooks and other documents that anchor scientific fields must be rewritten, and, in the process, "inevitably disguise not only the role but the very existence of the revolutions that produced them" (137). The scientist, in other words, is often tempted to "rewrite history" in a manner that absorbs and erases former novelty and change within a cohesive narrative of cumulative, linear progression (138), obviating the messy realities that accompany processes of discovery.

Kuhn's observation of the revisionist histories that follow paradigm shifts in the sciences provides a useful inroad for examining the disruptive presence of Littlepage's narrative of Arctic exploration in *Country*, which stands in contradiction with representations of the United States and broader North American continent at large. More specifically, the Littlepage sequence recalls a peculiar era of scientific inquiry from the 1850's to the 1880's in which counterintuitive theories supporting the plausibility of a warm open polar sea surrounding the North Pole, beyond the Arctic ice, prevailed. In an apt characterization of just how astonishing this moment in history continues to be for modern scholars, Michael Robinson writes, "Looking backward, it is hard not to make judgments: the old, eminently logical idea of an icy Arctic has carried the day, marred only by a brief thirty-year period in the nineteenth century when explorers, poets, and scientists collectively lost their minds" (25, "Reconsidering the Theory"). It should be noted, however, that Robinson goes on to describe why the polar sea theory became so popular in its own time, reminding contemporary readers of the "rich … geographical speculation" that accompanies inquiries of areas unknown" (23), and the collective information that evolved from "clumsy back-and-forth between elite scientists, trusted explorers, popular writers, and geographical publishers" (25). Thus, although Robinson does not reference Kuhn in his own work, his conclusions nonetheless trace a similar argument regarding the tendency of scientific disciplines to minimize theories that have no clear contribution to narratives focused upon incremental progress and accumulated knowledge.

The theory of the open polar sea was debunked well before the publication of Jewett's *Country* in 1896, and this is perhaps one reason why critics to date have failed

to recognize that it is explicitly featured in Littlepage's story of Arctic discovery. By directly addressing and questioning its place in Jewett's novel, we are better equipped to apprehend how the Littlepage sequence disrupts the seeming cohesion of scientific and U.S. national/imperial narratives on two fronts: first, the credibility of his story up until the 1880's unsettles the newly-revised scientific paradigm, in which "scientific men … taken up with their own notions" suddenly have reason to deny the former plausibility that would have accompanied Littlepage's report of polar discovery (20); and second, this revised scientific paradigm minimizes the cultural relevance and national pride associated with formerly celebrated Arctic explorers who had allegedly "discovered" the open polar sea, and whose claims, along with Littlepage's story of discovery, are effectively erased, or "written out" of the North American map hanging in Dunnet Landing's schoolhouse. That Littlepage clings to the historical possibilities defining this former era renders him a ghost within these revisionary scientific and national narratives. This, however, is precisely the point: the ghostly, fog-like specters that appear in Jewett's Arctic symbolize the inevitable erasure that takes place in totalizing representations of knowledge, land, and people; the same "large-minded way of thinking" that Littlepage advocates in his encounter with Jewett's narrator is ironically reversed, and in the process calls into question the legitimacy of the story he tells. In this way, Jewett's *Country* emphasizes the difficulty of reconciling spheres of personal experience and intimate friendships with small-scale representations, as the former is more susceptible to erasure when juxtaposed with consolidated information and broader scales of perception propagated by professionalized institutions such as the "Ge'graphic Society."

4.2 Narrative Possibility: A Bridge Between "this world an' the next"

When Captain Littlepage describes the northern Arctic town encountered by Gaffett as a "waiting place between this world an' the next" (22), he articulates a fascinating displacement inhabited by narrative possibility, one which represents an imaginative space that separates what is unknown in the present moment from what may be discovered in the uncertain future, or "next" world to come. As this section goes on to demonstrate, the Arctic was an especially potent symbol for Jewett's predominantly American readership at a time when the internal mystique of the nation was fading. Published in 1896, the novel emerges in the midst of a crescendo in the nation's identity as an imperial power, and correlates with the perception that opportunities for expansion within the nation's borders were rapidly disappearing. In 1890, the United States census declared that the American frontier had vanished, a sentiment that Frederick Jackson Turner further cemented in his 1893 address, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." In terms of geographic identification, these claims suggested that the nation was grounded in a more settled, coherent internal organization. At the same time, however, the United States was actively looking outward, establishing and protecting its national interests abroad.[46]

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[46] In a prologue to the U.S.'s annexation of Hawaii, economic interests provoked American businessmen and entrepreneurs to stage a successful coup d'état against the island's monarch, Queen Lili'uokalani, in 1893. Though not condoned by the U.S. government, the coup was not reversed, and ultimately paved the way for territorial acquisition in 1898. Likewise, the United States's economic interests in the Caribbean were brought to the fore when the Cuban War of Independence erupted in February of 1895, and the island community sought to oust their Spanish colonizers. Paul T. McCartney goes so far as to argue that the United States's intervention in Cuba in 1898, which led to the Spanish-American War, marks a turning point that solidified the United States's status as an explicitly imperial nation.

For Jewett's contemporary readers, the Littlepage sequence would have provided a counterfactual scrutiny of recently debunked postulations about the Arctic and its mysteries. In other words, as I will discuss in greater detail, claims regarding what the Arctic *could be* were fading from the realm of possibility in the light of new geographic discoveries. Although theories of a "hollow earth" accessible by polar openings did not gain much traction in scientific circles,[47] the idea of a warm "open polar sea" north of the Arctic ice – a feature in Littlepage's description of the "waiting place" – was thought to be conceivable well into the 1880's. As such, some elements of Littlepage's story represent what I would like to call a narrative of possibility, as it articulates what *could* or *might* be. In the history of Arctic exploration, such possibilities could demand the respect of an untested scientific hypothesis, and were relegated to the realm of fiction or fantasy only upon being disproven. In *Country*, this is precisely the transformation that has taken place in the Littlepage sequence, as the narrative anchor to the possibilities within have been recently unmoored – a loss which not only had implications for the imperial symbolism of the Arctic, but similarly

[47] Though the concept of a hollow earth can be traced back to the seventeenth century, John Cleves Symmes was the first American to pursue the project of establishing a scientific precedent for the theory in 1818. Symmes himself never published on the topic, but his full theory was transcribed by James McBride, one of his supporters, who in 1826 circulated *Symmes's Theory of Concentric Spheres: Demonstrating That The Earth is Hollow, Habitable Within, and Widely Open About The Poles*. In distinct contrast to the positive reception proponents of the open polar sea theory enjoyed mere decades later, Symmes was, on the whole, widely ridiculed for his theory. Moreover, while he may have failed to establish a place for his hypothesis within the scientific community, Symmes can be credited for inspiring American literary responses to the theory of a hollow earth in novels like *Symzonia*, published in 1820 under the pseudonym Captain Adam Seaborn (likely authored by Symmes), and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838). For a more detailed history of Symmes's hollow earth theory, and its influence on American authors, see "Ultima Thule: Arthur Gordon Pym, the Polar Imaginary, and the Hollow Earth Theory" by Darryl Jones.

suggests lost possibilities for the evolving identity of the nation, and what it could or might become.

Despite its sustained presence in the Arctic in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the United States initially had little interest in exploring such far corners of the globe, preoccupied as it was with determining how to maintain a sense of national coherence in the face of new land acquisitions. The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 more than doubled the size of the young nation, and the government's knowledge about the land and resources contained therein was limited. It was not until 1838 that the U.S. attempted to establish much of a global presence through the Exploring Expedition, commanded by Charles Wilkes (1838-1842), but the stated objectives of this voyage were premised on the practical advantages that more precise geographic knowledge would yield in trade and commerce throughout the South Pacific and Antarctic regions. While some might argue that the effort exhibited by European nations to discover a Northwest Passage through the Arctic could be aligned with similar commercial and trade interests, most acknowledged that the passage, if one were found, would likely present too many hazards to ever become a viable commercial sea route (Robinson 18, "Reconsidering the Theory"). For England, the real value of success in the Arctic – whether realized by discovering the Northwest Passage, laying claim to the North Pole, or both – amounted to a performance of national pride and imperial identity. In 1847, John Barrow, second secretary of the Admiralty, "conceived of the Arctic as a new theater of war, one in which his ships battled icebergs and pack ice rather than French ships-of-the-line. In the Arctic, he observed, British officers could risk their lives for higher, more civilized ends than they did on the fields of Europe" (Robinson 18,

"Rediscovering the Theory"). For British at home, the men who set off to unveil the unknown in the Arctic "stood at the head of a long line of British exploring heroes; they became folk figures, larger than life, and their failings, flaws, and human frailties were ignored by the press and public, which saw in them everything grand and honorable" (Riffenburgh 16). These men, in other words, were heralded as the most exemplary specimens of British character, the rhetorical manifestations of an idealized national identity.

The motivations behind the United States's intervention in the Arctic with the Grinnell expedition in 1850 were very different. In 1848, three years after two ships outfitted with 129 men had left England's shores for the Arctic, it became apparent the British exploring expedition led by John Franklin, a Royal Navy officer, "had utterly disappeared into that strange, cold world of the north" (Riffenburgh 25). The U.S. Grinnell rescue expedition, as Robinson explains, was unlike previous nationalized exploring expeditions, for "[it] did not seek trade, science, or geographical discovery, though its advocates hoped for such benefits," and was catalyzed by external "contingent events" related to recovering survivors of the Franklin expedition or intelligence of its fate (28, *The Coldest Crucible*). While many Americans found the humanitarian objective of the expedition compelling, and debates regarding whether the United States had a moral obligation to extend its resources for help ensued, others questioned whether these imposed reasons outweighed the costs and inherent risks of venturing into the Arctic. Notably, proponents were quick to point out the praise that the nation would receive on a world stage should they be successful in rescuing a *British* exploring expedition – a scenario that afforded the United States an opportunity to

become the unlikely heroes of the esteemed Royal Navy (26). Despite the moral and humanitarian justifications that dominated the Grinnell Expedition narrative, the hope that success would elevate the nation and its reputation was a significant – if less emphasized – influence as well. Notwithstanding conspicuous voices of dissent in Congress, a resolution to back a national rescue mission was approved, and set sail in 1850 (28).

The Grinnell expedition was wholly unsuccessful in recovering living survivors of the Franklin expedition, but they did encounter a British rescue party in the Wellington Channel that had located the graves of three men from the party on Beechy Island. The whereabouts of Franklin and the remaining men from the mission remained a mystery, however (Robinson 35, *The Coldest Crucible*). Beyond these graves and some geographic surveys of unregistered islands, it is difficult to state what the Grinnell expedition actually accomplished. This, however, did not prevent Americans at home from deriving significance from the mission in two ways. First, despite its meager achievements, the press enthusiastically championed the party's successful return, "eager to dress this modest expedition in the full regalia of nationhood" (36). The high stakes of the national narrative justifying the initial Grinnell expedition made it easy to project meaning and significance upon the voyage, and awakened what would become the nation's long-term fascination with the Arctic. As Robinson explains, not only were "[few] … willing to publicly challenge [the Grinnell expedition's] value," but "the press soon hummed with talk about a second U.S. rescue expedition" (36). When Elisha Kent Kane, the senior medical officer on board, published observations from the expedition, Americans gained a focal point for their admiration of the United States's first intrepid

Arctic mission. Unwittingly, Kane became the face of the first Grinnell expedition, elevating his national reputation far above his military pedigree, and advancing his name as the proposed leader for a second expedition.

Before discussing the relationship between Kane's subsequent Arctic expeditions and Littlepage's account of Gaffett and "the waiting place," I want to ensure the connection between Kane's national relevance and Jewett's novel is not overlooked, especially in regards to the formation of imagined communities at both local and national levels. First, to say that Kane's Arctic career elevated him to the status of the "exploring heroes" or "folk figures" that Riffenburgh says were typical in the veneration of British explorers would be an understatement (16). When he passed away in 1857, Kane's popularity in the U.S. was so immense that the funeral procession "took three weeks and passed through six states," a public demonstration of mourning that was only rivaled in size by President Abraham Lincoln's funeral cortege eight years later (Robinson 31-32, *The Coldest Crucible*). The profound outpouring of public bereavement following Kane's death exposed the gravitational pull that his identity had on the American public at large, making visible the symbolic value of his heroism to the nation and its ability to unite the population through an imagined community of simultaneous mourners.

It is therefore notable that the narrator of *Country* observes the community that emerges in the funeral procession for Mrs. Begg, a revered Dunnet Landing citizen, from the schoolhouse window just before Littlepage enters and shares his story of Arctic exploration, thereby subtly interpolating the national unification that occurred in the wake of Kane's death. The narrator expresses regret at "hurrying away at the end of

[Mrs. Begg's funeral] services" instead of "walk[ing] with the rest," for her absence "made myself and my friends remember that I did not really belong to Dunnet Landing" (13). It is the narrator's lack of history with Mrs. Begg and the community at large that distinguishes her outsider status; she does not share the same experience of poignant loss evident in the rest of the community for the deceased. And yet, this demonstration of communal mourning is most visible from the narrator's removed vantage point. The procession itself is framed by the window of the schoolhouse, and as the narrator describes her view, she notes how "[the] bay-sheltered islands and the great sea beyond stretched away to the far horizon southward and eastward; the little procession in the foreground looked futile and helpless on the edge of the rocky shore" (13). Here, the narrator's distanced perspective produces a frame far removed from the community (in which she "[does] not really belong"); and indeed, perhaps when compared to the immense outpouring of respect and admiration for Kane, this humble procession may appear "futile and helpless" to such outsiders. To draw this conclusion, however, imposes an analytical vantage point akin to the totalizing perspective of the North American map that hangs in the room, reinforcing the very processes of minimization that the Littlepage sequence challenges.

It is *within* the funeral procession itself where the emotional ties – those that draw the community together – are most evident. The narrator, being most familiar with Mrs. Todd, focuses on her figure at the back of the procession: "Mrs Todd … held a handkerchief to her eyes, and I knew, with a pang of sympathy, that hers was not affected grief" (12). In this scene, it is through genuine emotion that community is established, and the narrator's "sympathy" for Mrs. Todd foreshadows the affective

networks that draw her into the orbit of Mrs. Todd's friendship in the pennyroyal grove (40), and enable her to "[come] near to feeling like a true Bowden" – an honorary member of the family – at the closing feast at the Bowden reunion (87). Affective ties are similarly situated as the basis for community in Mrs. Todd's description of Joanna's funeral, despite her hermitage on Shell-heap Island and physical absence from the Dunnet Landing community:

> "'Twas a pretty day, and there wa'n't hardly a boat on the coast within twenty miles that didn't head for Shell-heap cram-full o' folks, an' all real respectful, same's if she'd always stayed ashore and held her friends. Some went out o' mere curiosity, I don't doubt, – there's always such to every funeral; but most had real feelin', and went purpose to show it." (62)

While the majority of this regional procession is, according to Mrs. Todd, motivated by the desire to be part of a public demonstration of "real feelin'" for Joanna, she makes an important concession by noting the inevitability of some being attracted by "mere curiosity" rather than genuine affect. Such a statement may seem trivial upon first glance, but draws attention to the ancillary purposes that must have attracted some Americans to Kane's funeral procession. In addition, the distance that suspends "real feelin'" and "mere curiosity" can be mobilized to remind readers of the various competing motivations for the United States's early Arctic ventures, ambiguously divided as they were between humanitarian justifications to rescue the Franklin expedition, and the hoped-for benefits to scientific knowledge and national reputation that would accompany a successful voyage and extraction of survivors. What Jewett demonstrates in articulating the distinction between genuine empathy and "mere curiosity" is a varied iteration of what I have identified as Žižek's description of systemic violence: like the narrator's diagnostic view of Mrs. Begg's funeral procession

as a seemingly "futile and helpless" exercise (13), those motivated by "mere curiosity" cannot help but impose an analytical viewpoint that erodes the symbolic value of communities bound together by their collective experiences of grief and the stories that continue to honor the painful evolutions within imagined communities that are affected by loss.

When the narrator pays homage to Joanna's grave on Shell-heap Island, then, her path shares an elusive connection to what I have already described as one of the only modest successes of the first Grinnell expedition: the discovery of graves for three men from the Franklin expedition on Beechy Island. Neither the narrator nor Kane and his companions were present for the funerals that preceded these island burial sites, but the respective pilgrimages that lead to the discovery of Joanna's resting place and the graves on Beechy Island are similar insofar as they are propelled by the *stories* that precede them. The narrator is compelled to visit Joanna's resting place after hearing her story from Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick, while the Grinnell expedition materialized from news surrounding the mysterious disappearance of the Franklin expedition. An important distinction interrupts the two, however, for while Joanna's grave presents a sense of closure to the story of her life imparted to the narrator, the encampment and graves discovered on Beechy Island fuel the narrative of possibility focused on recovering survivors from the Franklin expedition. As Kane recounts in his notes from the first Grinnell expedition, the headstone for John Torrington, one of the three deceased, indicated he had "'[departed] this life *on board* the Terror, 1st January, 1846!' Franklin's ships, then, had not been wrecked when he occupied the encampment at Beechy!" (I: 163, emphasis in original). The closure of Joanna's story in juxtaposition

with the possibility evinced by the Beechy Island graves reinforces the symbolism I have argued this era of Arctic exploration represents in Jewett's novel, for the revisionary scientific and national narratives at the time of *Country*'s publication only serve to exemplify a nostalgic loss for the possibilities that prevailed in this bygone era. What is more, the perceived *possibility* of locating survivors influences the way the buried men from the Franklin expedition are construed. The closure of Joanna's story enables the narrator and other "pilgrims" to visit her resting place with "hearts full of remembrance" (65). Conversely, while it may be true that Kane and others in the Grinnell expedition had an emotional attachment to finding Franklin and his missing men, the fact that they conceived it still possible to locate survivors means that the stories of the men buried on Beechy Island are consumed by this larger narrative of possibility: the men who perished in this desolate place are not approached with "hearts full of remembrance," as the narrator does with Joanna's grave. Instead, the significance of these graves is subsumed within a larger narrative that overwrites the stories of these individual men. The burial ground is a part of a larger puzzle, one that subordinates its purpose to discovering clues that might yield information for a grander purpose in the search for the expedition at large.

It would be overly simplistic, however, to state that the Grinnell rescue expeditions were devoid of the affect and "real feelin'" (62) for Franklin and his missing men that Mrs. Todd attributes to the majority of Joanna's mourners, though some historians have pursued this line of argumentation. In his biological portrait of Kane, for example, Riffenburgh casts doubt upon Kane's "honest belief in the possibility of finding Franklin" in the second Grinnell expedition, positing that "[it] is

more likely that he had discovered that honorable motives were needed to obtain the financing to return to the Arctic" (40). Even if this conjecture were true, it does not necessarily suggest a lack of genuine affect toward the missing expedition and the sincere hope that living members might be recovered. In an expressive journal entry from the second Grinnell expedition, Kane reveals his own vacillations between despair and hope in their stated mission after a difficult winter on the ice:

> With all these resources, – coming to our relief so suddenly too, – how can my thoughts turn despairingly to poor Franklin and his crew?
>
> Can they have survived? No man can answer with certainty; but no man without presumption can answer in the negative.
>
> If, four months ago, – surrounded by darkness and bowed down by disease, – I had been asked the question, I would have turned down the black hills and the frozen sea, and responded in sympathy with them, 'No.' But with the return of light a savage people come down upon us, destitute of any but the rudest appliances of the chase, who were fattening on the most wholesome diet of the region, only forty miles from our anchorage, while I was denouncing its scarcity. (I: 243-4)

In these allusions to former "[despairing] thoughts" and "[sympathetic]" conversation regarding the lost expedition, Kane exposes an emotional investment in the *possibility* of recovering survivors that can only fare poorly in retrospective accounts of history. The conundrum posed by such disconnect, however, is precisely what I contend Jewett engages in *Country*. From his own account of the myriad scales beyond the local and region that appear throughout the novel, Hsu argues that Jewett employs a "motif of unbridgeable distance" between Dunnet Landing and Littlepage's intelligence of the Arctic's far-flung secrets, stating that "[throughout] the book, such uncomfortable distances foreground both the possibility and the difficulty of forming ties across cultural and geographic boundaries" (Hsu 169). As the face of the Grinnell expeditions, Kane embodies a similar contradiction – not only in the "cultural and geographic

boundaries" that suspend Dunnet Landing and the Arctic, or local and imperial scales of influence, but also in the variety of meanings and imagined communities that emerged from the expedition, divided as they were between empathetic concern for the individual survivors and the difficult conditions they would have experienced, and the symbolic meaning of the mission in both national and global arenas.[48]

Most astounding, however, is the way that imagined communities influenced the trajectory of scientific discourses in the wake of the Franklin expedition. Tenuous accounts of the open polar sea date all the way back to the fourteenth century, and while modest interest in the idea was sustained by small circles from the Renaissance onward, its rise in popularity as a viable scientific theory cannot be separated from the ongoing search for the Franklin expedition. When Kane began campaigning for a new expedition in 1852, there was widespread doubt that anyone from Franklin's party could survive in the Arctic for eight years, which was the earliest a new expedition could reasonably be assembled. Kane constructed a narrative based upon details of the abandoned Franklin camp and the three graves they had encountered on Beechy Island during the first Grinnell expedition, arguing that the party had apparently departed to the north quite suddenly. It was possible, Kane argued, that the pack ice had broken up, and Franklin

[48] The personal similarities between Jewett and Kane lend further evidence that the author may have felt an unlikely affinity to the United States's most notorious Arctic hero. From the time she was a child, Jewett suffered debilitating bouts of rheumatoid arthritis, and would have pursued medical training were it not for her poor health. Kane shared the same condition, and sustained damage to his heart as a teenager due to a severe rheumatoid arthritis attack (Robinson 34, *The Coldest Crucible*). Despite his "fragile health," Kane successfully completed medical training and was hired as the senior medical officer of the first Grinnell expedition (35). It is easy to imagine how Jewett could feel a likeness for a man with whom she had much in common – and who had nonetheless triumphed over his medical limitations and attained such heroic status among the American public in some of the most inhospitable conditions on the globe.

and his men had seized the opportunity, making their passage to the open polar sea while the opportunity had presented itself. If Franklin and his men had succeeded, Kane argued, they "may have been able to survive on the marine life of this [open polar] sea" despite their "already exhausted stores," and could simply be stranded (Robinson 38, *The Coldest Crucible*). Despite the numerous conditional circumstances that upheld Kane's hypothesis of how survivors from the Franklin expedition might still be recovered, the combined urgency of a humanitarian rescue mission and the concrete scientific objective of testing the open polar sea theory were especially alluring. What this goes to demonstrate, however, is the way that individuals, and the institutions that they reportedly represent, are powerfully influenced by their own assumptions and ideals. In his succinct distillation of Kuhn's argument regarding the structure of scientific revolutions, Thomas L. Haskell goes so far as to argue that "[intellectual] history has often taught that the systems of belief by which men live possess a tenacity so powerful that assumptions shape experience far more than they are shaped by it" (22). In this sense, the rise of the open polar sea theory can be accounted for as a phenomenon that supported various narratives of possibility, one of which was the hoped-for survival of Franklin and his men.

After Kane, it is important to recognize that the humanitarian justification for Arctic excursions began to deteriorate: the patrons of American explorers such as Hayes, Charles Hall, Adolphus Greely, and Robert Peary were persuaded by the vague contributions to science such missions might yield, though in the background the image of rugged American character triumphing over the extreme, inhospitable environments and exhibitions of national power were equally influential motives (if more difficult to

justify). As such, controlling the narratives of exploration that emerged from the Arctic was integral to maintaining their symbolic potential in relation to idealized images of national character. Just as I have argued that the beliefs and assumptions of men influenced the way that information was distilled to support the open polar sea theory, the symbolic dimensions of Arctic exploration exerted a similar pressure upon the way that information from such faraway regions was received in connection with assumptions and beliefs related to national identity.

The controversy that arose in Britain with the discovery of the Franklin expedition's fate serves as a productive example. When Dr. John Rae of the Hudson Bay Company claimed to have discovered remains of the last survivors from the Franklin expedition in 1854, along with evidence that the men had resorted to cannibalism, he ignited an intense backlash that rippled throughout the nation. Though he was unable to produce physical evidence of his claims, "Rae stated that, while surveying on Boothia Peninsula, he had received from a group of Eskimos what he considered incontestable evidence that the bodies of many white men – almost certainly members of the Franklin expedition – had been found along the shores of King William Island," and concluded "that Franklin's men had died of starvation and scurvy while heading south toward Back's Great Fish River," with evidence that some had resorted to cannibalism in order to subsist (Riffenburgh 30). As Riffenburgh explains, Rae endured rancorous personal attacks by those who sought to discredit claims that the gentlemen who embarked on the Franklin expedition could resort to such grotesque measures rather than dying gracefully, with honor (30). Some put forth alternative possibilities, suggesting that the Eskimos had themselves murdered Franklin and his men, while

Charles Dickens, a family friend of the Franklins, "became so involved in the issue that he joined with Wilkie Collins to produce a play, *The Frozen Deep*, which dramatized the nobility of British explorers faced with a plight similar to that of Franklin's men" (Riffenburgh 30).

Most notable in these responses to Dr. John Rae's revelations is the profound disbelief in the face of otherwise plausible intelligence – a response rooted within the heralded values of an idealized British national character. Indeed, it took nearly five years after Rae's initial report for his findings to be confirmed and finally accepted. In 1859, Francis Leopold McClintock and William Hobson conducted a search of King William Island that yielded

> relics, bodies, and a note in a cairn, which combined to confirm what had happened to the expedition: after being beset in the ice of Franklin Strait, Franklin had died on *Erebus* in 1847; under the command of Francis Crozier, the men had left the ships in April 1848; and they had died as they walked to the Canadian mainland, the last of them reaching Starvation Cove on Adelaide Peninsula. (Riffenburgh 31)

The absence of material evidence regarding the fate of Franklin and his men prior to this discovery left the window for imagined possibilities open – even if those possibilities, such as the murder of Franklin and his company at the hands of the Eskimos, made even less sense than the unpalatable conclusions drawn by Rae. The concrete nature of the artifacts discovered by McClintock constituted a kind of legibility powerful enough to displace this tenuous imaginative space, demonstrating in the process how difficult it is to reshape assumptions and value systems, some of which are upheld by invisible allegiances to the imperial demand for legibility (itself premised on racial and cultural supremacy), and which powerfully influence the way experiences are interpreted and the meaning subsequently derived from them. When Dickens and other

British citizens rejected the suggestion that men from the Franklin expedition would behave in a fashion so contrary to the manners lauded by British nationalism, these assumptions of national character were wielded to overpower the intelligence that Rae reported, lest they be shaped *by* it.

The same questions of national identity emerge in the pages of *Country*, though like Žižek's approach to analyzing violence, it could be argued that Jewett's own approach to the seemingly unbridgeable distances separating affect and curiosity, or intimately local and the far-flung corners of the earth, results in her "[casting] … sideways glances" when examining such large imagined communities in her novel rather than engaging questions of nationhood and U.S. imperialism directly. She broaches these subjects, though, by bringing the otherworldly Arctic just off shore from Dunnet Landing, describing a captive belonging to the former Indian inhabitants who was abandoned on Shell-heap Island. As Mrs. Todd recounts, "'I've heard say he walked the island after that, and sharp-sighted folks could see him an' lose him like one o' them citizens Cap'n Littlepage was acquainted with up to the north pole'" (51). Notably, however, this captive is a citizen without a community. It does not seem the analytical gaze of the "sharp-sighted folks" who view him grow into empathy, as there is no mention of any attempt to rescue him. If his appearance resembles the fog-like specters that Gaffett claims to have encountered in the Arctic, it is because his very being and story is being overwritten by the inaction and subsequent narratives constructed by an uncaring community that is within view, but affectively out of reach. Like the brief mention of local Indians in the novel, those who lack emotional connections to communities of any size are destined to haunt (rather than inhabit) the

stories and representations of the landscapes they occupy; and, conversely, communities that lack affective sentiments toward others cannot help but perpetuate the systemic violence and erasure that accompanies projects of representation.

4.3 Jewett's Arctic and the Subversive Legibility of Storytelling

Among the numerous spirited interactions that unfold at the Bowden family reunion, Almiry Todd pauses to remark on the sense of romantic possibility imbued in Captain Littlepage's stories. "'Yes,'" she says, "'you always catch yourself a-thinkin' what if they was all true, and he had the right of it'" (82). Jewett's detailed references to specific Arctic phenomena in these select chapters are enough to demonstrate that she is retracing conversations about Arctic exploration within her short novel, reproducing the drama of the lost Franklin expedition within its perplexing sequence in a manner that works against the dominant scientific and national narratives operating at the time of *Country*'s publication. Because theories of the open polar sea fell out of favor in the 1880's,[49] however, one must question what larger purpose the Littlepage sequence serves in the novel and broader conversations regarding U.S. national identity. Why, in other words, present a narrative that brings to life theories already defunct and disproven – a narrative that no longer holds the *possibility* of being true?

One answer, I suggest, has to do with the poignant theme of declension and loss that pervades the novel. As a former shipping hub, the lives and livelihoods of many

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[49] This unraveling began when the *Jeannette* expedition, launched in 1879, was disastrously crushed by pack ice drifting toward the North Pole in 1881. In meeting this fate, the *Jeannette* utterly failed to corroborate the dominant theory of a "thermometric gateway to the North Pole" and the open polar sea. The subsequent loss of life suffered by the crew trekking through Siberia, where they made passage by lifeboat, fueled growing criticism in the U.S. of the high financial and human costs exacted by Arctic exploration (Robinson 87, *The Coldest Crucible*).

Dunnet Landing residents have steadily eroded: the novel meditates on the loss of seafaring husbands, Joanna's removal from society, and the decline of value in remaining sea captains, who – like the pointed firs that "seemed to march seaward" (25) in the manner of the tall white pines that equipped "the navies and large merchant ships of the world" (Hsu 171)[50] – it seems would continue their march toward the sea if only the opportunity remained. The decline of the sea captain, in this regard, closely mirrors the decline of the Arctic explorer in American culture. Through the pursuit of symbolic Arctic victories, such as attaining the North Pole, continued into the twentieth century, it cannot be said that these explorers were valorized or regarded like their great predecessor Kane. The rise of yellow journalism exploited every possible scandal and opportunity to degrade this new generation of explorers, and the public increasingly questioned the value of Arctic ventures given the high human and financial costs of the expeditions. What Littlepage embodies for Jewett's readership, then, is a swansong for an era recently past – one that foretold the possibility of imperial expansion and presence into an Arctic upon which the Western world had projected its most intimate imperial fantasies.

Such fantasies arise from a mix of printed sources ranging from literary fiction, theology, and accounts of exploration that often carried some clout in scientific

[50] Hsu goes on to describe the oblique significance of the "pointed firs" in Jewett's title, which attained such visible status *because* "Maine's primary exports" at the height of Dunnet Landing's economic prowess "were the lumber of taller trees such as spruce and its prized white pines" (171). Though commodities were also produced and traded from balsam trees (or "pointed firs"), their value was far less by comparison. As Hsu states, "the treeline of 'pointed' firs that characterizes the Maine coast in Jewett's stories emerged only as a result of centuries of lumber production, because balsam firs generally grew in fir-spruce stands, and their characteristic 'pointed' tops became visible only after taller spruce and pine trees were cut down for timber" (172).

communities. A brief account of Arctic literary history helps to clarify the import of exhilarating possibilities the place once symbolized, and which were relegated to the realm of fiction after theories of the open polar sea (and less popular "hollow earth") were ultimately disproven. In an early novel inspired by John Cleves Symmes's theory of an inhabitable hollow earth accessible by the poles, *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* (1820) takes Symmes's theories to a most radical literary conclusion, detailing the abundant wildlife, resources, and stockpiled valuables to be found within the hollow earth, and their responsible management by a utopian society comprised of perfectly white citizens referred to as Symzonians. The unparalleled whiteness of the secluded and internal Symzonians, which is possible in part by their exposure to only indirect light within the hollow earth, renders designations of "whiteness" from the external world questionable by comparison. In the novel, whiteness serves to visually confirm purity and the absence of corruption, as evidenced from a story conveyed about a group of Symzonians who had been exiled from their society "to a land far distant to the north, the extreme limit of the world, where a part of the year the heat is intense" (72) – or, as Captain Seaborn determines, the North Pole. These citizens had been banished for "giving way to their carnal appetites and passions," a state from which "they degenerated into vice … [causing] them to lose their fairness of complexion and beauty of form and feature. They [became] dark coloured, ill favored, and mis-shapen men" (72-73). This outcast race is responsible for populating the outer world, and from this it becomes clear that even those of the "finest and whitest" complexion among the external population, such as protagonist Captain Seaborn, nonetheless betrays an inherent streak of depravity.

This theme of racial purity is revisited in the final pages of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), a work that draws upon theories of a hollow earth, though it concludes with a more haunting and ominous gesture toward the supposed secrets that may lie within the earth's interior. The narrator, who occupies a boat precipitously drifting on the edge of a polar opening in the Antarctic, describes encountering "a chasm [that] threw itself open to receive us. But there rose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of snow" (217). This last image of a "shrouded human figure" with "skin … the perfect whiteness of snow" poses some remarkable possibilities in a literary history of hollow earth encounters. Critics have already established that Poe was inspired by Symmes's hollow earth theory in *Pym*, and also in his short story "MS Found in a Bottle."[51] If *Symzonia* means to facilitate an imaginary world wherein the hollow earth exists but remains relatively unknown and undiscovered by – or secret to – imperial powers, then the ending of *Pym* extends this literary history by factoring in another encounter between ambassadors for these external and internal civilizations. Poe's "shrouded human figure" is an ominous gatekeeper to the interior of the hollow earth: one we might assume seeks to protect the interior from the contaminating presence of external inhabitants.

Perhaps no sources leading up to Jewett's *Country*, however, are more powerful than the false sightings of the open polar sea reported by Kane and Isaac Israel Hayes.

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[51] See "Ultima Thule: Arthur Gordon Pym, the Polar Imaginary, and the Hollow Earth" by Darryl Jones, and *Hollow Earth: The Long and Curious History of Imagining Strange Lands, Fantastical Creatures, Advanced Civilizations, and Marvelous Machines Below the Earth's Surface* by David Standish.

As Kuhn suggests in his research, such reporting errors can be explained by what these men *expected* to see given the current paradigm and its inseparable national and scientific narratives. William Morton, one of Kane's crewmen in the second Grinnell expedition, offered details that correspond with Gaffett in his alleged sighting of the open polar sea. Following orders from Kane, then ill, to attempt to confirm the geography of an iceless channel they had encountered, Morton and his Eskimo-companion Hans found themselves "startled by the growing weakness of the ice" upon which they tread, observing, like Gaffett, that "its surface became rotten, and the snow wet and pulpy. … Then for the first time the fact broke upon [Morton], that a long dark band seen to the north beyond a protruding cape – Cape Andrew Jackson – was water" (I: 301). Following this vision, Morton and Hans reportedly found the open water, large enough to produce waves crashing along the shore, along with numerous birdlife.

To make matters worse, Kane's reported confirmation of the open polar sea was falsely corroborated by Isaac Israel Hayes, which only prolonged the scientific community's inability to recognize their errors and dissolve theories of the polar sea. Hayes, who had served alongside Kane as the surgeon for the first Franklin Exploring Expedition, led his own Arctic expedition in 1860-61, and returned claiming that he too had witnessed the open waters of the Arctic. In his encounter, Hayes, like Morton (and Gaffett), finds himself upon "rotten" and "unsafe" ice before laying forth his account of the polar sea itself. Because Hayes' romanticized prose mirrors some of the more baffling elements of Littlepage's story to be addressed in this chapter, I quote at length:

> [The open polar sea] possessed a fascination for me … the thought that these ice-girdled waters might lash the shores of distant islands where dwell human beings of an unknown race, were circumstances calculated to invest the very air with mystery, to deepen curiosity, and to strengthen the resolution to persevere

> in my determination to sail upon this sea and explore its furthest limits; and as I recalled the struggles which had been made to reach this sea, – through the ice and across the ice, – by generations of brave men, it seemed as if the spirits of these Old Worthies came to encourage me, as their experience had already guided me; and I felt that I had within my grasp 'the great and notable thing' which had inspired the zeal of sturdy Frobrisher, and that I had achieved the hope of matchless Perry" (352).

Building on the limited observations of the open polar sea published by Kane, and what can only be described as a rather clichéd attempt to inspire awe within his readers, Hayes was able to take his own restricted view of the landscape for a predetermined conclusion. By his own account, Hayes describes the open sea from a distant vantage point, in which a nearby crack "expanded as the delta of some mighty river discharging into the ocean," while the "sea" was "a mottled sheet of white and dark patches, these latter being either soft decaying ice or places where the ice had wholly disappeared. These spots were heightened in intensity of shade and multiplied in size until they receded, until the belt of the water-sky blended them all together into one uniform color of dark blue" (349). From these meager visual descriptions, Hayes concludes, "Suffice it here to say that all the evidences showed that I stood upon the shores of the Polar Basin, and that the broad ocean lay at my feet. … and within a month, the whole sea would be as free from ice as I had seen the north water of Baffin Bay" (349-50). If Hayes was convinced, his evidence was not sufficient to persuade the scientific community that his account of the open polar sea provided definitive proof in its existence, nor could he interest the general public in his alleged findings. His return to the United States in 1863, one year earlier than planned, was coldly received, as the nation's attention turned to the Civil War and diminished former interest in Arctic

exploration. Robinson, after detailing the disastrous details of Hayes' mission,[52] notes that his "trek to the polar sea gave him the only success of his expedition" (63); as such, it is not surprising that he would invest so much faith in an idea that he so desperately required audiences to believe in order to redeem the dignity and asserted value of his mission.

Despite the doubt that Hayes faced within the scientific community, his musings about the open polar sea offered a powerful narrative of possibility that is replicated in the Littlepage sequence. In his account of Gaffett's misfortunes in the Arctic, Captain Littlepage identifies him as part of "one of those English exploring parties that found one end of the road to the north pole, but could never find the other" (21), explicitly linking him to the infamous Franklin exploring expedition for whom Kane searched, and who must have had some affect on Hayes' imagination.[53] Gaffett and his compatriots, Littlepage explains, encountered a "warm current, which seemed to come

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[52] Allegations surfaced that William Longfellow, Hayes' expedition surgeon, had "[stolen] … books and natural history specimens" in their encounter with Danish naturalists (61, *The Coldest Crucible*). This story haunted the expedition from its very beginnings, and Hayes' primary benefactor, Grinnell, took every measure at his disposal to insulate this information from the press. When August Sonntag, the ship's astronomer, died of hypothermia after falling through the ice within the first year, the expedition was unable to complete observations that had been promised to various scientific societies in exchange for support; there was simply nobody qualified to do the work. After a dismal attempt to raise funds with a lecture circuit upon his return, Hayes' final scandal culminated in his loss of scientific instruments from the Coast Survey, which he used as collateral – and ultimately lost – in order to cover the expenses of his crew's salaries. Thus, the eponymous title of Hayes' *The Open Polar Sea*, published after the war in 1867, sought to maximize the only redeemable claim to his otherwise failed expedition, but it too was received poorly – especially in comparison to his predecessor Kane's success in *Arctic Explorations* (63-65).

[53] Alison Easton supports this assertion in her notes to "The Waiting Place" in the 1995 Penguin Classics edition of *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories*. Of "English exploring parties," she writes: "Sir John Franklin died in 1845 within a few miles of having discovered the North West Passage; relief expeditions searched for him 1847-57 (giving us a rough date for Littlepage's story)" (259).

right from under the ice that they'd been pinched up in and had been crossing on foot for weeks," which they "followed due north, just the very way they had planned to go," "[taking] them out of sight of the ice, and into a great open sea" (21). Gaffet, in other words, ventures out to explore the very same "waters [that] might lash the shores of distant islands" described by Hayes, encountering the "distant islands" these waters of his imagination might contain, along with "human beings of an unknown race" (352). This very idea of encountering a foreign civilization beyond the harsh Arctic ice serves as the climax for Littlepage's referred story. When Gaffett and his companions "'struck a coast that wasn't laid down or charted'" (21), the possibility of a distant civilization materializes upon encountering "inhabitants'" in a seaside town (21), although they do not appear to be human; described as "fog-shaped men" who would "[flit] away" upon approach (22), it is uncertain whether they are "common ghosts" (23), or – as Hayes suggested – a "different race" altogether (352). Gaffett, through Littlepage, appeals to the capacities of scientific explanation to verify the *possibility* of his related findings, noting the opinion of the ship's surgeon, who believed "'that t'was some condition o' the light and the magnetic currents that let them see those folks'" (22). In all instances, Jewett's embedded narrative draws upon the projected imagination of one of the United States's most prominent explorers, playing his false findings out to a strange literary conclusion.

By building upon the literary tradition of myth and lore of the hollow earth and open polar sea, Jewett's *Country* honors the possibilities the Arctic once symbolized for the nation precisely at the same moment scientific and national entities would have been revising their narratives to seamlessly reflect the new paradigm of a north pole devoid

of enigmas, acknowledging it instead as a mostly harsh and barren land of ice. When considered within the framework of systemic violence described by Žižek, we can understand the erasure that occurs within this paradigm shift as a source of institutional violence against individual stories and experiences that may challenge them. Stated another way, it is the *power* endowed in statecraft to impose revisionist narratives and erase disruptions that is violent, even when the content of the stories erased is itself emblematic of violence and imperialism (as was the case for Arctic exploration). And so, when Mrs. Todd suggests "'what if [the stories] was all true, and [Littlepage] had the right of it'" (82), Jewett poses an uncomfortable reminder for this new contemporary moment, unsettling the smooth transition that new scientific narratives convey. This loss of narrative possibility, Jewett's novel suggests, is itself something to mourn. Like the narrator's visit to Joanna's grave, in Littlepage's account of Arctic exploration, *Country*'s readers retrace this narrative path; our immersion or exclusion from the previous paradigm, in which theories such as the open polar sea prevailed, however, determines whether as readers we encounter this story with "curiosity and dim foreboding" or "hearts full of remembrance" (65) for the vivid possibility that Littlepage's tale would have held just decades prior.

A rather uncomfortable question regarding national identity arises from Jewett's *Country* and the abrupt disillusionment that necessarily accompanied the transition away from the possibilities the Arctic once promised: with U.S. influence slowly expanding beyond its own tenuous borders, Jewett asks readers to consider how far beyond intimate geographies and circles of family and friendship can we care? How is an imperial nation to transcend the seemingly "unbridgeable distance[s]" both within

and between nations (Hsu 169)? In Jewett's *Country*, the answer is not to be found in the boundaries delineated by the North American map, telling a nation its shape and the geographic location of its citizens; rather, it comes from honoring the affective bonds and imagined communities generated by stories and experiences, even – or, perhaps *most importantly* – when they contradict prevailing paradigms in national and scientific narratives. Stated another way, even in our current paradigm of critical literary inquiry, we can read Jewett's storytelling as a subversive form of legibility capable of challenging and disrupting the systemic violence imposed by the most small-scale and generalizing of representations.

AFTERWORD | Legibility Across Space and Time: Looking Backward, Forward, and Around in Circles

In the 1888 novel *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, Edward Bellamy's nineteenth-century protagonist Julian West awakens to find himself in the year 2000, and subsequently attempts to explain the discontent of the working classes in the United States in the previous century:

> The working classes had quite suddenly and very generally become infected with a profound discontent with their condition, and an idea that it could greatly be bettered *if they only knew how to go about it* … Though they knew something of what they wanted, they knew nothing of how to accomplish it. (11, emphasis mine)

The novel goes on to detail the utopian social architecture that has manifested a mere century later, one in which the U.S. has achieved what these same working classes could only vaguely imagine. In reality, Bellamy's fiction inspired the organization of the Nationalist Party in the U.S., which advocated for the "nationalization of industry" that could pave the way for an exit from the "viciously competitive economic system" of capitalism (v-vi). As Walter James Miller argues, Bellamy imagined that such a path forward "could evolve into a cooperative society with more dignity and self-fulfillment for everyone" (v). The flurry of activism that this novel stimulated among Americans demonstrates one of the arguments I made in Chapter 3, where Herman Melville situates mapping in *Moby-Dick* as a contradictory endeavor to represent both the present and the future. *Looking Backward* confronts and engages a similar challenge, mapping the author's present literary imagination in hopes that making his vision legible to others will illuminate the path for a self-fulfilling prophecy. Bellamy's novel, that is,

strives to answer the question of "*how* to go about" achieving the better life that so many in his own time hoped for, to map the way for such possibilities to be realized.

My reference to Bellamy's *Looking Backward* may initially seem like a strange way to conclude this dissertation, which primarily focuses on how American authors have responded to geographic representations, the formation of the nation-state and national identity, and imperial expansion rather than utopian visions for the future. In this Afterword, then, I intend to demonstrate that temporality is a common, though less prominent, theme that runs throughout this dissertation. As I have argued, scholars like Hsuan Hsu and Martin Brückner have approached many of the same nineteenth-century authors and texts through questions driven by geographical representation and national identity; but their works situate temporality as an ancillary subject (when it is mentioned at all). Thus, one specific contribution this dissertation offers to geographic approaches to literature is an examination of how American authors have situated temporality as an issue that is inseparable from questions of national identity and geographic representation.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, Wai-chee Dimock puts forward a practical explanation of the relationship between space and time as it relates toU.S. empire and the emergence of Manifest Destiny. The imperative to expand in space, Dimock argues, reveals a profound anxiety among Americans in the nineteenth century regarding the durability of empire. As Dimock goes on to explain, in an effort to mitigate this concern, Americans believed that by "[expanding] not only continentally but eventually to include the entire hemisphere, America would dispense space as a sort of temporal currency, buying its tenure in time with its extension in space" (15, *Empire for Liberty*).

This statement provides an suitable entryway for examining the intersections between geography and temporality in literature that emerge in this dissertation and supports my own argument that nineteenth-century American authors approached questions of national representation as interwoven with questions about the nation's past and future. While this is not the direction that Dimock pursues,[54] I draw upon her compelling argument to provide a point of orientation – one that can help stitch together how the works in this dissertation address the problem of temporality in legibility across the nineteenth century.

In Chapter 1, I argued that Charles Brockden Brown complicates traditional conceptions of geography to better account for the passage of time. Geographic representations, Brown suggests, are not durable because geography is not merely a matter of describing surfaces, but rather a complex endeavor to describe the nation's ever-changing geopolitical state. As Brown argues in *A System of General Geography,* any "description of the surface of the earth" must account for both "[physical]" and "[*political*]" features (5, emphasis mine). On the one hand, this means that geographic representations that emerge from the project of "earth description" must change periodically due to new information; but equally, on the other hand, these pictures must also change because the ideas and composition of the people within the nation are evolving over time as well. Such transformations occur both at the level of the individual, as Brown demonstrates with Waldegrave's character in *Edgar Huntly*, and at the level of the nation – an imagined community that Brown attempts to "write" into

[54] Instead, Dimock puts forth an eloquent argument about Melville's internalization of the logic of imperialism, going on to demonstrate how this internal conflict manifests in attempts to negotiate the chasm between individual sovereignty and national/imperial imperatives for expansion in his literary works.

being through his ambitious array of written production. Of course, the endeavor to "write" the nation into being is, like Bellamy's vision of a utopian America in the future, a project of temporal projection, one that requires the ability to imagine what future possibilities may emerge through the project of making them legible.

Interestingly, Leonora Sansay's *Secret History: Or, The Horrors of St. Domingo*, the subject of Chapter 2, seems to challenge Dimock's interpretation of Manifest Destiny at first glance, for the novel chronicles the instability that results from imperial expansion through the demise of French rule in St. Domingo. A similar instability arises when we consider the paratext of the Burr Conspiracy, or Aaron Burr's challenge to Thomas Jefferson's "Empire for liberty," which I have argued can be read as a "secret history" that parallels the novel's commentary on corrupted European empires in the Caribbean. But these readings are only possible if we ignore Sansay's ceaseless criticism of poor leadership, exemplified by General Le Clerc and Napoléon Bonaparte in France and Thomas Jefferson in the U.S. Rather than putting forth a critique of imperialism itself, Sansay implies that expansion through an "Empire of liberty" is in fact desirable, but the ability for such an empire to manifest and endure is contingent on effective leadership. Thus, I contend that one of the unexamined "secret histories" embedded in Sansay's novel is an alternative reading of Burr himself and the "Empire for liberty" he had envisioned. In her attempt to re-author Burr and his reputation, Sansay pushes against prevailing narratives in her contemporary moment that tended to idealize Jefferson's leadership. Thus, the disruptive "secret history" of American politics that Sansay puts forward is not designed to critique imperial aspirations, but rather to challenge what an "Empire for liberty" would actually look

like if properly governed. In doing so, we can trace Sansay's attempt to redeem Burr's historical legacy by rejecting what she views as a deceitful account of history propagated by a corrupted governmental institution.

Herman Melville's *Moby Dick: Or, The Whale*, which I discuss in Chapter 3, confronts the intersection of temporality and geographic representation more explicitly than any other work discussed in this dissertation. The novel, I argue, puts forth the suggestion that permanence is a constructed concept – a fiction that some may believe in and strive toward, but, like the White Whale, can never be attained. The phantasm of permanence, the novel suggests, creates problems for any attempt at representation, but presents particular challenges for scientific disciplines. The imperative to "describe" the earth in geography, for example, requires the mapmaker to record the world not only as it is, but also as it will be. Thus, Melville offers a varied repetition of what I argued in Chapter 1: just as Brown's written production can be read as his attempt to "write" the nation into being in accordance with his vision for the future, Melville's novel presents legibility as an attempt to map the future itself. In Melville's characterization of this endeavor, the stabilization of a previously volatile world presents a promise of sanctuary from "all the horrors of the half known life" where mankind may attain an "insular Tahiti [of the soul], full of peace and joy" (225). Like the *Pequod* and its demise, however, the pursuit of permanence through legibility and the utopic refuge it seems to promise inevitably ends in destruction.

Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, the subject of Chapter 4, presents a timely counterpoint to Dimock's assertion that Americans sought to secure the longevity of empire through expansion into space. Published after assertions that the

American frontier had disappeared, Jewett's novel looks backward to Dunnet Landing's more prosperous past to consider the how the nation's expanding imperial identity, best represented by the hemispheric perspective of the North American map, contracts violently upon smaller communities and populations within the nation. This small-scale map, I contend, brings Captain Littlepage's advocacy for a "large-minded way of thinking" to its logical conclusion (18); but, ironically, this perspective also counters the beliefs Littlepage has nurtured through his personal experiences. The narratives of possibility that coincided with Dunnet Landing's past era of prosperity – such as theories of the open polar sea, which would have bolstered Littlepage's story of Arctic exploration just decades prior – are erased as they become absorbed in national and imperial narratives of progress. The final chapter in the novel, fittingly titled "The Backward View," reinforces the nostalgic loss that attends this account of imperial expansion. The narrator, who watches the geographic features of Dunnet Landing and the surrounding region fade from sight, leaves readers with a "backward view" that is focused on both the land *and* the recent past. The novel that Jewett's readers hold in their hands operates to recover stories (like Littlepage's) that are disruptive to national and imperial narratives. By offering no countervailing "forward" gaze, Jewett destabilizes her readers' expectations for the nation's future.

Tracing the way that American authors in the nineteenth century have approached issues of temporality that attend legibility offers a natural transition to the ideas that Bellamy confronts in his utopian novel. Though I was unable to perform an in-depth analysis of *Looking Backward* in this dissertation, Bellamy's novel serves as one example of the way legibility, as I have used the term, has the potential to intersect

with and expand upon critical approaches examining the influence of geography on American literature. *Looking Backward*, that is, does not engage questions of the nation's geographical boundaries, but instead takes up a the political dimensions that Brown viewed as essential to the project of "earth description" in his prospectus for *A System of General Geography*. Bellamy's strange project of mapping the future in *Looking Backward* compelled his contemporary audience to look *forward* to the nation's political potential, to understand a vision for the world that he had imagined and wanted to manifest by way of projection. Similar to my argument on Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in Chapter 4, new questions for the nation arose once its geographical contours appeared to stabilize. Whereas Jewett turned toward the Arctic beyond the nation's geographical boundaries to contemplate questions of national and imperial identity, Bellamy turned toward the future, beyond the temporal boundaries of the nation's present, to approach similar questions of uncertainty about what the nation was and what it could become.

A similar temporal displacement related to legibility occurs in Edward Everett Hale's short story "The Man Without A Country" (1863), another text I would have liked to address in this dissertation, which was published in the midst of the Civil War. In this story, Hale's protagonist, Philip Nolan, is exiled from the United States after participating in Aaron Burr's plot to seize land from New Spain. In his military trial, Nolan exclaims, " 'D—n the United States! I wish I may never hear of the United States again!' " (21). This wish is granted by the colonel of the court, and Nolan therefore spends the rest of his life at sea being passed around from ship to ship within the U.S. Navy. Each crew that meets Nolan is instructed to prevent their prisoner from learning

any news of the United States, though Nolan atones for and deeply repents the transgressions he committed against his beloved country. The nation, at least as it exists in Nolan's mind, is entirely arrested due to his removal and lack of knowledge, frozen in the same state he knew it as when he left its shores in 1807.

On his deathbed, Nolan shares with the narrator Danforth, a sailor in charge of his captivity, his antique impressions of the nation as he remembers it:

> 'Here, you see, I have a country!' And then he pointed to the foot of his bed, where I had not seen before a great map of the United States, as he had drawn it from memory, and which he had there to look upon as he lay. Quaint, queer old names were on it, in large letters: 'Indiana Territory,' 'Mississippi Territory,' and 'Louisiana Territory,' as I suppose our fathers learned such things … he had carried his western boundary all the way to the Pacific, but on that shore he had defined nothing. (35)

In the absence of the country itself, Nolan strives to manifest his beloved nation through inscription; but this act simultaneously reveals his incarceration to be as much temporal as it is geographic. Because he is prohibited from learning any new information about theU.S., Nolan's "country" is stillborn, devoid of life, and divorced from the dialogical interactions that this dissertation has argued occurs between attempts to make a nation legible to the people that purportedly comprise it. Although Nolan's conception of the nation attains some semblance of the permanence sought in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, it has the opposite effect: instead of finding a sanctuary from "all the horrors of the half known life" (225), Nolan is trapped within a nightmare of uncertainty regarding the nation's fate.

Nolan's stillborn country comes to life in the hour before his death, however, when Danforth grants the prisoner's dying wish to learn what has passed in his country since his exile. Looking backwards, Danforth walks the prisoner through a rough sketch

of the nation's transformation, issuing a frenzied history of events and speaking the names of states that had formed in the prisoner's absence. He helps the old man complete "his beautiful map" by "[drawing the new states] in as I best could with my pencil" (36), but determines not to "tell [Nolan] a word about this infernal Rebellion!" (37). Here, Hale implores his readers look both backward and forward: backward by identifying with Nolan's relief that Burr never dismantled the U.S.; but also forward, toward the nation's (then) uncertain future beyond the Civil War. By withholding information about the fractured state of the nation, Danforth projects a map that remains unified – one that his contemporary readers could "pencil in" alongside Nolan and strive to attain. Hale, that is, takes his readers through a temporal loop, revisiting the nation's divisions in the aftermath of the Burr Conspiracy to better project the undetermined path to reunion beyond the nation's current fractured state.

This analysis brings us back to a question regarding time that Bellamy poses in *Looking Backward*, for the novel references two possible trajectories for the nation. In the first, humanity's struggle toward attaining "civilization" is periodically frustrated by internal fissures and relapses into "chaos" (12). Early in the novel, Julian West describes this trajectory as one of the prevailing "extreme opinions" of men in the late-nineteenth century; namely, that

> Human history, like all great movements, was cyclical, and returned to the point of beginning. The idea of indefinite progress in a right line was a chimera of the imagination, with no analogue in nature. The parabola of a comet was perhaps a yet better illustration of the career of humanity. Tending upward and sunward from the aphelion of barbarism, the race attained the perihelion of civilization only to plunge downward once more to its nether goal in the regions of chaos. (12)

In this nihilistic interpretation of human history, the nation is destined to follow the same type of temporal loop that Hale produces in "The Man Without A Country," in which various conflicts threaten to rupture the nation's unity and forestall its progress toward "civilization." The second, optimistic trajectory for the nation is mapped by the novel itself, in which Bellamy puts forth his utopian vision in hopes of illuminating a path forward – one that might enable humanity to transcend its cyclic relapses into "chaos" (12).

While neither Hale nor Bellamy could predict the ultimate outcome of their literary projections, their works, along with those discussed throughout this dissertation, situate legibility as an attempt to bridge the gap between the imagination and its potential influence on future realities. What this dissertation has also demonstrated, however, is that inscription is only part of this equation. Like the aerial view of walkers described by Michel de Certeau in "Walking in the City," our "fiction of knowledge" (102) is ultimately brought to life (or proven incorrect) by the movements of humanity itself. That is, a city planner may desire to reroute the flow of foot traffic, but any changes in the city's design are ultimately meaningless if the people themselves do not change course. Similarly, though Bellamy's *Looking Backward* momentarily rerouted the political energy of his contemporary readers, it is less clear how the author himself would assess the changes that have since taken place if he could see the US as it was in 2000 and beyond.

Following Bellamy's gaze from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, I want to conclude with some observations of legibility as I see it operating in our contemporary moment. Legibility, as I explained in the introduction, can be compared

to a pendulum that represents the intersection of power and influence exerted by governing institutions, and the disruptions to political power that are posed by imagined communities who exert resistance by voicing their discontent and dissent. We can see this dynamic at work in the manifestation of movements such as Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter, where imagined communities coalesce to push back against policies and narratives that would otherwise minimize collective feelings of disenfranchisement. Through this resistance, imagined communities struggle to attain a degree of visibility prominent enough to influence conversations on institutional policy. For Occupy Wall Street, the results can be seen in national discussions concerning the chasm separating the minimum wage and living wages, the rising costs of college education, and the explosion of student debt. Similarly, Black Lives Matter has illuminated for many Americans the extent to which people of color continue to grapple with the consequences of institutional racism in the United States.[55]

The introduction to this dissertation began with Edward Snowden's disruptive revelation of practices employed by U.S. governmental institutions, which sought to make its own citizens and people of the world legible through the collection of metadata. As Rebecca Solnit describes in her open letter to Snowden, increasing reliance on digital mediums enables governments and companies to monitor a variety of preferences and behaviors; but technology and digital communication has simultaneously played a role in efforts to resist and push back against institutional

[55] Speaking of violence in both literal and symbolic terms, the Black Lives Matter website clarifies that their concern is with "broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state" and "deprived of our basic human rights and dignity." Thus, the website itself situates the movement's intent to disrupt the same institutional apparatuses I have described throughout this dissertation.

powers. The ubiquity of smartphone cameras and services like YouTube Live and Facebook Live Stream, for example, has offered citizens the opportunity to document encounters as they unfold between law enforcement officials and the people and communities they are sworn to protect,[56] thereby increasing the transparency of these interactions. Similarly, while there is no consensus to the extent that social media influenced movements like the 2011 "Arab Spring," scholars generally agree that it played an important role in making the movement visible to its participants and those watching the events unfold from across the globe. Hashtags (like #libya or #egypt) on platforms like Twitter, for example, provided a focal point for imagined communities to organize and voice their dissent (Bruns, et al).

In this dissertation I have approached a variety of texts, topics, and time periods, but many questions and possible avenues regarding the legibility of American empire remain unexamined. In this Afterword, however, I have argued that American authors in the nineteenth century approached problems of legibility, both in terms of geographical representation and narratives of national identity, alongside the problems and uncertainties that are posed by temporality. While any conclusion drawn from individual texts covered in this dissertation must be acknowledged as complex, it can generally be stated that the writings I have discussed by Brown and Melville present legibility as a means to map the future while texts by Sansay and Jewett mobilize legibility in an attempt to unsettle narratives of the past. Ultimately, however, all

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[56] Diamond Reynolds's use of Facebook Live Stream in July of 2016 is one good example of disruptive transparency toward governing institutions that attained widespread visibility through social media. She posted a graphic video stream that documented the death of her boyfriend, Philando Castile, a black man who had been shot by a police officer during a routine traffic stop (Domonoske and Chappell).

chapters in this dissertation support the idea of legibility as an imperfect technology that makes certain parts of an impermanent world visible, and which operates dialectically to influence the trajectory of imagined communities that comprise the nation and empire.

When Bellamy presents the conundrum of the working classes in *Looking Backward* as a problem of "how to go about" attaining a better future (11), he puts forth the idea of a nation that can be shaped by inspired vision made legible to the masses. This is similar to historical interpretations of "America" as "[a] place one longs to reach; an ultimate or idealized destination or aim; an (esp. newly identified) object of personal ambition or desire" (Oxford English Dictionary). As I have argued in this dissertation, Bellamy and the other authors I have discussed situate legibility as a means to realize this concept of America, shaping the past and projecting the future of a nation they long to reach.

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